Abstract

This article examines the hybrid nature of the exploration of South West Africa in the second half of the 19th century and in the early colonial period with the help of two case studies based on printed as well as archival source material. Both examples concentrate on the northern parts of what is today’s Namibia, since they eluded the mapping process and thus colonial control for a long time. The early exploration and mapping of the Cunene River in the 1850s and 1860s reveals different aspects of European and African spatial knowledge, miscommunication and contested resources. By the turn of the century, modes of travel writing changed in the course of scientific professionalization so that descriptions of transcultural encounters gave way to more academic topics. However, as Franz Seiner’s journey to the Caprivi Strip in the early years of the 20th century demonstrates, modes of mapping remained similar and still yielded insights into geographical knowledge-making as a process involving interaction between Africans and Europeans.

Making Africa visual in the 19th century

Until the second half of the 19th century, well over half of the African continent was a terra incognita for Europeans. The maps of that time showed large blanks, which geographers and scholars conceived of as deficiencies which had to be eliminated as rapidly as possible. From the middle of the 19th century, one of the most important centres of Africa cartography in Europe was the Thuringian town of Gotha, where the geographer and cartographer Dr. August Petermann (1822-1878) worked. Through his work the publishing house of Justus Perthes attained international renown. Petermann used connections made in London as a royal geographer and member of the Royal Geographical Society between 1847 and 1854 to pool the latest geographical findings.

2 The blank spots on early European maps may be traced back to the French cartographer Jean-Baptiste Bourgignon d’Anville (1697-1782). On his 1749 map of Africa he erased all information that he had considered to be ‘scientifically unsupported’ and thus ushered in a new era of cartographic visualisation.
3 Justus Perthes’ publishing house, founded in 1785, established itself as one of the leading publishers for atlases and wall maps in the course of the 19th century. In 2003 the Free State of Thuringia acquired the publishing house’s archival collections for the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha. Since then the collections have gradually been made accessible to the public.
by explorers in overseas territories. Under his aegis the latest travel accounts and maps were published in a monthly journal called *Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes’ Geographischer Anstalt über wichtige neue Erforschungen auf dem Gesamtbereiche der Geographie*. For this purpose the editors compiled first-hand travel accounts, as sent to the editorial office directly or via agents, and information published by other publication organs such as French or British geographical journals and mission bulletins and rendered them into articles. Therefore *PGM* publications must be read as multi-authored, highly edited and reader oriented texts.

In the early decades of European exploration of the African continent the focus was on hydrographical matters. Between the 1850s and the 1880s many explorers acquired renown due to their explorative travels along Africa’s main rivers: Barth travelled on the Niger; Livingstone on the Zambezi; Burton, Speke and Grant searched for the sources of the Nile; and Stanley explored the River Congo. Water courses offered the possibility to break into new markets and open up new territories by using them as transportation routes.

Especially in an arid region such as Southwestern Africa, access to water constituted one of the most important resources. Particularly two subjects of research in this region were of interest to geographers in the middle of the 19th century. On the one hand, they had heard of a huge lake inland, not far from the Kalahari Desert. On the other, a mighty river was supposed to flow in the North, close to the Portuguese settlements, rising in the interior and disemboguing into the sea. The European exploration of Lake Ngami, which had started to appear on maps of Africa in the 16th century and is located in what is today’s Botswana, started in 1849 with an expedition to its shores under the direction of the well-known Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873). However, the course of the Cunene River, along which the northern border of today’s Namibia was drawn, constituted a mystery until well into the 1860s. Its mouth as well as its lower course posed many riddles. The maps produced during that period thoroughly document the process of geographical exploration, its deficiencies and compromises.

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4 The journal has come to be known as *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* in professional circles since its renaming in 1938 in honour of its founder. We will therefore refer to it as *PGM* from hereafter.


Moreover they demonstrate that the process of knowledge production in and about Africa was by no means a straightforward endeavour. On the contrary, the blanks on the maps seemed to vanish very slowly. They conveyed the impression that travellers journeyed independently and without problems through an empty space without resistance; yet in reality, they travelled mostly through inhabited areas and had to adapt to the local circumstances at all times. The support and information given by African companions as well as local inhabitants was essential during these endeavours.

The maps produced during these transcultural exchanges served predominantly as supplements for travel accounts in academic (and popular scientific) journals, in specialist reports and in book publications. They added to the texts’ scientific character and were perceived as being visual translations of the authors’ accounts, underlining their main arguments. After all, maps were (and in many cases still are) considered to be depictions that represent the earth’s surface as realistically as possible. With the help of instruments as well as clearly defined methods and measuring systems, the data and information gathered in the field were compared with existing sources and then translated into certain sign systems, whose encodings were supposed to underlie universally readable conventions. However, different studies, especially in the field of critical cartography, have shown that map makers proceeded very selectively in the process of map making and information verification. It strikes the reader of early maps of inner Africa that the majority of them especially highlight (with a prominent colour, often red) the routes of the European travellers (e.g. Fig. 1). Thus, the maps suggested that the explorer was a trustworthy reporter because he had been an eyewitness. The map proved: ‘I was there!’ Such markings also visualised the presence and power of European influence in Africa as well as the advance of exploration.

However, an alternative way of reading maps and their accompanying texts involves interpreting cartographic silences as strong indicators of transcultural knowledge exchange and selective processes of the production of meaning. The texts reveal that especially the early exploration of water resources in Southwestern Africa was characterised by disappointments, failures and misconstruction. The famous elephant hunter

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Frederick T. Green (1829-1876), who had been the first European to reach the shores of the Cunene River, wrote to his longstanding business partner Charles John Andersson (1827-1867) on July 9th, 1865: “All the information that one gets from natives is so contradictory, at least regarding rivers, so that one is more confused after than before making the inquiries.” The sources disclose discrepancies particularly regarding distances, extension or size, tributaries and outlets, flow direction and the navigability of waters.

The reasons for such inconsistencies, as can be seen from Green’s account, are on the one hand to be found in the parameters of transcultural communication and on the other in the preformed inner images that Europeans had of Africa. Countless explorers idealised their travel accounts and heightened the value of their scientific findings deliberately in order to be granted a budget for new journeys and to pursue their careers in European centres of academic knowledge production. Through these narratives and accompanying visualisations certain images were filtered. They had a significant influence on later travellers’ imagination of the ‘Other’ as well as on the content and form of questions they posed in the field.

Exploring the Cunene River

In Europe hope was nourished that with the search for the long-heard-of Cunene River a new route into the interior of Africa would be found. Its shores were said to be fertile, abundantly populated by man and beast, and the river itself rich in mineral sources. After manifold enquiries among Africans on his way to Lake Ngami in 1853, the Swedish explorer Charles John Andersson even assumed that the Cunene held out the prospect of “almost uninterrupted navigation for several hundreds of miles”.

In 1824 the British Captain Isham Fleming Chapman († 1852) had come across the mouth of the Cunene (or Nourse) River when sailing along the coast from the Cape of Good Hope to Benguela. However, it was not until 30 years later that the outlet was rediscovered overland by a Portuguese expedition under the auspices of Fernando da Costa Leal. He demonstrated that the Cunene reached the Atlantic Ocean only periodically, when the river had the power to pass over the sand dunes on the coast only during water-rich years. Thus the riddle of the mouth of the river was solved in 1854.

13 PGM, 1867: 11 (author’s translation; orig.: “Alle Nachrichten, die man von den Eingeborenen erhält, sind so widersprechend, wenigstens in Bezug auf Flüsse, dass man dadurch mehr verwirrt wird, als man vor Einziehung der Erkundigungen war”).
15 PGM, 1855: 45.
16 Ibid. (author’s translation; orig.: “so existiert eine beinahe ununterbrochene Flussschiffahrt von mehreren hundert Meilen”).
17 PGM, 1856: 118 and PGM, 1858: 412.
The source region and headwaters, too, were known to Europeans to some extent. Just the lower course of the Cunene remained the subject of great speculation.

In 1851 the British explorer Francis Galton (1822-1911) and his Swedish companion Charles John Andersson had tried to reach the river from the South through Ovambo territory. They failed, like many travellers afterwards, on account of Nangolo, the residing chief at the time. In the following years the missionaries Carl Hugo Hahn (1818-1895) and Johannes Rath (1816-1903) of the Rhenish Missionary Society became the key actors in the process of collecting cartographic material about Ovambo land. Two major expeditions during the years 1857 and 1866 led them into the region north of their mission station in Otjiambinge. Subsequently two general maps (e.g. Fig. 2) and one large-scale map (1:3,000,000) illustrating the missionaries’ route more clearly (Fig. 1) were published in *PGM* – the leading scientific journal for geographical matters in Europe at the time. In 1866 Hahn had succeeded in reaching the shores of the Cunene River. Prior to this there had been a substantial shift in power among the Ondonga-Ovambo. Chief Shikongo sha Kalulu19 (who ruled 1859-1874) proved to be much more cooperative than his predecessor Nangolo dahAmutenya (ruled ca. 1820-1857) and pursued a strategy that was the complete opposite of that of Nangolo. While his predecessor asserted his economic supremacy among the different Ovambo peoples over trade with the Portuguese posts north of the Cunene by denying potential trade rivals coming from the South any kind of cooperation as well as by withholding information, Shikongo built upon the expansion of his military means.20 He was the first to introduce firearms in the region. Presumably Shikongo allowed Europeans to explore the Cunene region against the backdrop of his search for new allies who were in possession of superior weapons. The first Europeans to be supported by Shikongo were the elephant hunter Frederick Green and his companions Smuts and Pereira. In 1865, shortly before Hahn’s second attempt, they reached the Cunene from the South and collected information on the further course of the river, as well as on its relation to other water resources in the greater hydrographical system of Southwestern and Central Africa.21


19 The spelling varies depending on the source between Tjikongo, Shikongo, Chykongo, and Sikongo. We have opted for the version used in Frieda-Nela Williams, *Precolonial communities of Southwestern Africa. A history of Ovambo kingdoms 1600–1920*, Windhoek, National Archives of Namibia, 1991.


21 *PGM*, 1867: 8-12.
Maps and transcultural knowledge

Maps played a decisive role during all these travels. Travellers assured themselves in advance by looking at existing maps to ascertain where there were still unexplored regions in Africa, i.e. where there were still blank spaces to be filled with information. In the case of Southwestern Africa this meant the region south and north of the Cunene River, as Petermann’s 1858-map of South Africa, summarising the most recent discoveries, shows (Fig. 2). The maps made under Petermann’s auspices were regarded as the most up-to-date visualisations because the cartographer maintained close, sometimes exclusive contact to most explorer-travellers. Many of them were advised by him where to direct their interests and travel routes.22 Single map sheets were carried along during the journeys and were used as a means of communication, to whose content one might refer to during interlocutions with guides, informants and indigenous companions.23 In addition maps helped as mnemonic tools in documenting or literally pinning down orally transmitted geographical information. These sketches, mainly in the form of route maps, were sent with detailed textual reports to Europe. Experts in the scientific centres then transformed them into publishable maps which reflected the progress of European expansion.

At the same time, these maps illustrate the hybrid character of the formation of knowledge during an early stage of globalisation, in which different systems of knowledge collided in the context of exploration of non-European regions.24 In this context the map reader is struck foremost by numerous ethnonyms that dominate the space around the Cunene next to the often hypothetical sketches of water courses (Fig. 2). To locate people in space was of central interest to the missionaries in order envisage opening up new mission fields in the future.25 As elsewhere in Africa, missionaries played an essential role in mapping the North of what is today’s Namibia.26 Hence, early maps of Southwestern Africa reflect the conventions of missionary thinking as well as of the geographical profession. The journey of the missionaries Hahn and Rath in 1857 correlated with the wish to open up a new mission field. After 15 years of missionary endeavour among the Herero the results were still very meagre, so that the news

22 Demhardt, Erde: 28-29.
23 Adam Jones and Isabel Voigt, “‘Just a first sketchy makeshift’: German Travellers and their Cartographic Encounters in Africa”, unpublished manuscript, 2011.
25 Of course later on in the century such information was also crucial during the colonial expansion of European powers, e.g. for the negotiation of protection treaties.
26 There is still an immense research deficit concerning the history of mission cartography in general and the contribution of missionaries to the cartography of Africa. Published only recently see Jean-Michel Vasquez, La cartographie missionnaire en Afrique: Science, religion et conquête (1870-1930), Paris, Karthala, 2011.
concerning the Ovambo in the North as reported by Galton and Andersson raised new hopes.27

To Europeans cartographic positioning meant the exact indication of clearly separable phenomena in space, primarily in the depiction of borders: What or who is living where? Where does a certain territory start, where does it end? To whom does it belong? Which natural borders does it have? Petermann’s maps of southern Africa (Fig. 2) reflect markedly how the notion of ‘nation’, which had acquired new prominence in the early 19th century, connected inseparably to the concept of ‘territory’. With the help of dotted lines, the cartographer intended to assign to different ‘tribes’ (here: “Ovaherero or Damaras”, “Haukoïn and Namaqua”) certain areas which would help to demarcate them exactly. However, interactions between different southern African peoples and their mobility went largely disregarded. Looking at ethnographic maps made in this period, Noyes points out that there was a deep imbalance in the depiction of different levels of nomadism or sedentarism, while “Bushmen” needed special attention:

One such inadequacy which is particularly misleading is the way in which ‘Bushmen’ are assigned territory. The movements of the Khoisan nomads would best be described as an interpenetration, violation and cohabitation of the territories of other nations. However, cartographic practice almost always assigns them their own territory.28

Petermann was not able to draw such supposedly reliable lines except for the central Namibian region between 15° and 23° latitude, which was already fairly well-known in European circles. Although numerous ethonyms also penetrated the blank spaces of unknown lands in the North and East of what is today Namibia, the exact location of these peoples remained vague and boundless. The names only showed correlations with the still only hypothetically pinned down waterways.

It can be assumed that information on such maps was based on testimony by indigenous informants who either accompanied or encountered the explorers and missionaries during their travels. In fact an analysis of all articles on Namibia in PGM between 1855 and 1867 reveals that it was mainly ethnographical knowledge — apart from or in combination with hydrographical information — that played a dominant role in the context of cartographic encounters. Missionary Hahn’s reports indicate that on request such data were supplied in the form of oral itineraries in the majority of cases. Departing from a starting point (chiefly the contact person’s place of origin) the narrative usually followed the same scheme: ‘time needed to get from A to B, from B to C, and from C to D, etc.’, whereas A and B did not constitute concrete places but rather groups of people living in an area. The question ‘who lives where and who lives beyond’ was central, not ‘whose territory starts and ends where’. An example of one such narrative can be found in PGM referring to a compilation of similar testimonies of

27 Williams, Communities: 119.
“former slaves from the East and West coast, encountered in Cape Town” and published by Hahn in his renowned Herero Grammar of 1857:

The Rui (A'-rui) or Lui (A'-lui), whose country is called Kó-rui or Ká-lui, know a people whom they call Ngóla (Ma-ngóla) who live in the far interior, i.e. west of where they live themselves. But according to the Rui, these people must not be confused with the Ngola of the West coast. The Li-âmbe flows through Rui-land, in an easterly direction. To the east of them there are the Mbónda (A-mbónda).

– The ones taken to the West coast describe their travel route like this: First they get to the Ngóla, then into Ruvári- (Ka-ruvári-)land and from there into Rukási- (Ma-rukási-)land. For a long time (1 month?) they travel west from the Rukási through unknown lands, whereupon they pass through the Mbónda (Ki-mbónda). Again they have to traverse uninhabited bushland for quite some time, until they reach the Portuguese at Mbáxa (Mo-mbáxa) after altogether three months of supposedly very slow travelling.29

One of Hahn’s main informants was Tjizemba, an Ovambo living not far from Nangolo’s dwelling place. According to Hahn “it was his duty to accompany all travellers from the south”.30 He gave Hahn and Rath the names and relative positions of “over 30 peoples to the west, north and east” from Ondonga. With these records Hahn and Petermann filled their maps (Fig. 1) and added with prominent colour the European travellers’ routes. Additionally, they supplemented their cartographic visualisations with countless geographical data received from “bushmen” whom the missionaries had encountered along the way. For example, the information “Sandebene wenig Wasser” (sandy plain, sparse water), which can be seen stretching along 18° latitude, as well as the depiction of the confluence of two omiramba and their nearby sources (ca. 19° S. lat. and 19° E. long. from Greenwich) were derived from details supplied by a group of “bushmen” whom Hahn and Rath had hired at a watering place in Aurezaub in order to be led to Ondonga. Although the missionaries suspected their guides of withholding important information, even of deliberately misleading them, they were acutely aware of their dependence on the guides. During such contact situations, hunter-gatherers were valued for their rich knowledge of the vast geographical regions and were thus consulted on all journeys; on the other hand, they were feared for the power that accompanied this competence and were occasionally accused of treachery or manipulation of information. This discrepancy is illustrated best with Hahn’s description.


30 Hahn, Erkundungsreise: 29. (author’s translation; orig.: “Es war sein Amt, alle Reisenden von Süden zu begleiten.”); the spelling varies depending on the source between Tjizemba, Tjizunba and Tjizumba.
of all “Bushmen between the West coast and Lake Ngami”: “Because they are treated contemptuously by almost all nations surrounding them, they are very distrusting, secretive and fraudulent. To get something out of them is almost impossible.”\(^{31}\) Due to this attitude, the missionaries suspected their guides of intentionally sabotaging what had been planned by turning westwards instead of continuing farther northwards. However, after cross-interrogation with other Khoisan encountered later on, they found out that their guides had been right all along. They had claimed that the region in the north did not bear water at that time of the year. Thus, the information was held to be sufficiently proved and was laid down cartographically as the only available topographical statement about the region north of the travelling route.

European travellers closely related ethnonyms to the concept of power. But questions about the boundaries of a certain sovereign territory proved difficult. As the travel literature reveals, explorers departed from the idea that sovereign boundaries usually stretch along natural borders (e.g. mountain ranges and rivers).\(^{32}\) Recently a few isolated historical studies on Africa have shown to what extent Africans’ spatial perceptions differed from those of European travellers and colonial institutions. For example, by looking at Yoruba and Bini historiography, Speitkamp illustrates how rivers in what is now southern Nigeria did not function as demarcation lines but were rather integrated into a socio-cultural network as loose, open spaces for communication:

*The maps contained in African writings and historiographies of early colonial times usually did not imply any references to precise boundary lines when dealing with pre-colonial times. Borders or boundaries in a territorial sense were not recorded. Rather a network of places connected through rivers and roads was shown. […] Also in the written texts, space was portrayed as virtu-ally limitless […]*.\(^{33}\)

\(^{31}\) *PGM*, 1859: 299 (author’s translation; orig.: “Weil sie fast von allen sie umgebenden Nationen verächtlich behandelt werden, so sind sie sehr misstrauisch, verschlossen und lügenhaft. Von ihnen etwas zu erfragen, ist fast unmöglich”).

\(^{32}\) Assumptions like these are based on insights that were gained during the project “European & African Spatial Knowledge: Cartography of Africa, 1850-1914” conducted at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (Leipzig) and funded by the German Research Foundation. Since its launch in May 2009, 4,800 historical maps have been examined, next to 12,000 pages of printed material as well as 118 archival files and 62 travel diaries. An early fruit of this project is Kathrin Fritsch and Isabel Voigt, “‘Local knowledge is wonderfully good, but…’: African knowledge in European maps”, *Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of Cartography. Shifting Boundaries. Cartography in the 19th and 20th centuries*, International Cartographic Association, ICA Commission on the History of Cartography, Portsmouth, 10.-12.09.2008, 2008, n.n.

Wilks describes a similar situation in the Asante kingdom on the Gold Coast.\textsuperscript{34} Likewise the missionaries Hahn and Rath were surprised when their guides to Ondonga explained that the term ‘Ondonga country’ was only to be used for cultivated, inhabited land and was improper for adjacent pasturage. The missionaries had assumed that the territory of the Ondonga-Ovambo would begin at the shores of one of the omiramba which had already described, since the local population there called the watercourse ‘Omuramba u’ Ovambo’. This would have been a piece of information to be charted easily but thus eluded European possibilities of depiction.\textsuperscript{35}

Adding to Hahn’s confusion was the fact that though the people living at the source of the river called the watercourse ‘Ovambo River’, the Ovambo themselves called it ‘Omuramba ua’ Ndzira’ (see Fig. 1). Thus, the names of rivers constituted a similar problem or even added to the problem of locating clearly definable spaces. In her article on the origin and meaning of the name ‘Okavango’, Fisch elaborates on the great variety of indigenous names for rivers in pre-colonial times, which corresponded to the existing ethnic and cultural pluralism of the people inhabiting the shore regions.\textsuperscript{36}

Toponyms for the different river sections usually carried the semantic meaning ‘river’. In order to specify them more clearly, the name for the local inhabitants was generally added. This practice led to a multiplicity of names for one and the same river and often caused misunderstandings in a transcultural context. All in all, Europeans remained in the dark about the complicated hydrographical system of Southwestern Africa until well into the 20th century. For example, when Hahn consulted the Kwanyama Chief Mweshipandeka sha Shaningika (ruled 1862-1882) on his second expedition in 1866 about the great river in the North — the Cunene — he was told that it was called „Umlonga uahumbi or uakumbi, also uangumbi“, named after a people (the Nkumbi) on its northern shores.\textsuperscript{37}

The great variety of toponyms did not satisfy the Europeans’ demand for geographical unambiguity. Not only were toponyms meant to be chartable, they were also supposed to enable future travellers to orientate themselves successfully in space with the help of maps; and, especially during the colonial endeavour in the second half of the 19th century, cartographically recorded data were intended to help create territorial entities suitable for administration. Hahn conceded to his geographically interested audience that many of the mistakes on the maps should be attributed not to African informants but to the explorers themselves. In many cases deficient measuring instruments were


\textsuperscript{35} PGM, 1859: 300.


\textsuperscript{37} PGM, 1867: 291.
responsible for incorrect data along the routes travelled. In contrast, he wrote, information on directions given by Africans was always accurate, even on long distances. ³⁸

Hence, Hahn contradicted the then common practice of assigning less value to African knowledge than to data that was gathered by complicated measurement with the help of elaborate instruments. Hahn’s approach contrasted with that of David Livingstone, of whom Cunningham writes: “It was a tragedy of Livingstone’s last days that he put more faith in his, at this point faulty, observations than in the local guides, and became quite lost.”³⁹

To see or not to see

The exact depiction of wells, springs, lakes, and rivers in Southwestern Africa posed a considerable challenge to cartographers. In his commentary on the “Neue Karte vom Kapland, den Süd-Afrikanischen Freistaaten und dem Gebiet der Hottentotten und Kaffern / New map of the Cape Colony, the Boer Republics and the Hottentot and Kaffir region” ⁴⁰, which comprised all of South and Southwestern Africa, Petermann wrote:

The differentiation between permanent and only periodical or ephemeral streams, which we tried to determine as accurately as possible, was of utmost interest and importance for the region depicted. […] Likewise permanent and freshwater lakes have been distinguished in the map from periodical or saltwater lakes and pools. Also the single springs in the regions void of rivers have been marked with special indicators.⁴¹

The hydrographical system of Southwestern Africa proved to be highly complex. Even at the beginning of the Great War in 1914, when land surveying had long been introduced to German South West Africa, there were still vast regions whose water systems could not be charted without doubts about the exactness.

Looking at the case of Franz Seiner (see below), it becomes evident that the mapping of Southwest Africa shows clear continuities in the context of cartographic encounters until well in the 20th century. However, the modes of presentation of the results and courses of the journeys changed gradually during the process of professionalization of the regional sciences (like geography and ethnology) in Europe. While detailed descriptions of the daily travel routine and transcultural encounters dominated pre-colonial travel accounts, authors of the colonial period primarily drafted scientific expedition reports in which the former themes faded to the benefit of less personal impressions. Encounters

³⁸ *PGM*, 1867: 297.
⁴⁰ In: *Stieler’s Handatlas*, Gotha, Perthes, 1866.
⁴¹ *PGM*, 1867: 103 (author’s translation; orig.: “Von ganz besonderem Interesse und Wichtigkeit für das dargestellte Gebiet ist die Unterscheidung zwischen permanenten und bloss periodischen oder Regenflüssen, die wir möglichst scharf zu bestimmen suchten. […] Die permanenten und Süßwasser-See’n sind auf der Karte ebenfalls von den periodischen oder Salz-See’n und Lachen unterschieden, und in den flusslosen Gebieten sind die einzelnen Quellen mit besonderer Signatur angegeben”).
with the ‘Other’ only played a role when the European travellers felt ‘obstructed’ in their clearly defined research. Therefore, the historian of colonial times is faced with an increasing amount of difficulties in analysing the influence of Africans on the mapping of the continent. In contrast, the map image in a cartosemiotic sense changed only marginally so that similar conclusions can be drawn for specific elements marking unsupported knowledge or even non-knowledge as were possible for the pre-colonial period. The maps of Namibia still showed white spots (though shrunken), question marks and explanatory textual fragments in order to mark indigenous knowledge.

Mapping colonial South West Africa

The beginning of the colony German South West Africa was heralded when in April 1884 Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) declared the land acquired by the Bremen merchant Adolf Lüderitz (1834-1886) on the southwest African coast to be under the protection of the German Reich. The following years were characterised by the search for resources and the attempt to valorise the colony. However, hopes for gaining riches quickly through abundant deposits of natural resources or for waves of German settlers flooding into the new colony remained unfulfilled. Even in 1896 only 932 Germans and barely 2,000 Europeans in total, compared to 200,000 indigenous inhabitants lived on the territory comprising about 320,830 square miles.42

Most of German South West Africa was charted by the end of the 19th century as a result of early explorative travels and the work of the missionaries as described above. The cartographic development, too, was progressing faster than in other parts of Africa, mainly due to a climate conducive to healthy living for Europeans. Hence, the first missionaries were able to travel the widely, settle down and gain a basic knowledge of the country.

Theophilus Hahn’s map of 1879 was an important result of all those travels.43 Born in Namaqualand in South Africa, the son of Missionary Samuel Hahn grew up in different parts of South and Southwestern Africa. After finishing his studies in Germany, he returned to what is today’s Namibia and explored the country on extensive journeys. His 1879 map constituted the “only reliable and practicable map” of that region during the first ten years of German colonial rule.44 It covered about two-thirds of German South West Africa and contained much useful information for the first time and provided a rough idea of the whole country. Expeditions into the ‘unknown’, as were common in other parts of Africa, were almost impossible in Southwestern Africa by then.45 However,

42 Demhardt, Entschleierung: 192.
43 “Original Map of Great Namaqualand and DamaraLand, compiled from his own observations and surveys by Th. Hahn P.D.”, October 1879, scale 1:742 016, Cape Town.
45 Demhardt, Entschleierung: 195.
Despite the abundance of maps offering general topographic overviews there was still a dearth of more detailed, large-scaled maps. In the vast arid and desert-like regions of Southwestern Africa, the location of springs, their water quality and distance from each other were of utmost importance.46 Other topographical details were not at the top of the agenda. Therefore, exact calculations only played a minor role in comparison to methods in other colonies.47

After 1900 the behaviour and practices of German travellers changed. At least this seems to be the case following analysis of all articles on German South West Africa published in the journal Mittheilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten (MadDS).48 The periodical, launched in 1888 under the auspices of Alexander Freiherr von Danckelman (1855-1919), evolved into the leading publication organ among explorers to the colonies and gradually overtook PGM in the market for explorative travel accounts. Danckelman worked in the position of academic advisor and consultant for the Colonial Department (Kolonialabteilung) of the Foreign Office and, with its founding in 1907, the Imperial Colonial Office (Reichskolonialamt, RKA). He was responsible for all the incoming geographical, topographical and cartographical material which arrived on a daily basis from German settlers as well as from members of the colonial administrations and the colonial protection forces. On the one hand, edited versions of these scientific reports were made available to the public through MadDS, which had been founded specifically for that purpose. On the other, the geographical results were processed in the so-called Institute for Colonial Cartography Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen in Berlin (Kolonialkartographisches Institut) which was commissioned with almost all cartographic work by the colonial government. Thus in the 1880s, the cartography of colonial territories evolved from a multifarious international effort into a centralised national endeavour that was chiefly coordinated by a few German (governmental) institutions.49

Overview of articles on South West Africa in MadDS between 1891 and 1914

Until 1920 about 30 articles and 33 maps were published on South West Africa along with two supplemental volumes which focused on the results of an expedition. However, only about half of these reports belong to the category travel accounts. The other half had at its core climatic observations, border surveys or map commentaries. After the turn of the century in particular, a new tendency is perceptible. While explorative journeys, with the aim of gaining greater knowledge of the country and portraying it on

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46 The Germans became aware of the lack of such important cartographical data especially at the outbreak of the Herero War in 1904 when the knowledge of water resources gained strategic import.
47 Demhardt, Entschleierung: 197.
48 We will refer to it as MadDS from hereafter. The journal was renamed Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten in 1907. In 1929 it merged with a new journal, the Koloniale Rundschau.
49 Moser, Untersuchungen: 44-47.
maps, still dominated the 1890s, they were supplanted by scientific expeditions aiming at specific aspects of interest about the protectorate after 1900. The results of those investigations were published in the form of scientific reports in MadDS. The articles on German South West Africa as published up to the First World War in MadDS can be divided into four categories:

1) meteorological observations,
2) expeditions on behalf of (colonial) organisations,
3) expeditions on behalf of the government (e.g. military and border surveys), and
4) scientific expeditions.

Since reports of the first category do not disclose anything about transcultural encounters and travelling practices, they will not be taken into account in this context. In contrast, the other three categories are relevant in so far as they disclose continuities, at least to some extent, with earlier classical travel writing. Therefore, they constitute important sources for the geographical-cartographic exploration of Southwestern Africa and reflect the above mentioned tendency, namely that until the turn of the century accounts of military explorative trips predominated. Their objective was to extend knowledge of the territory and demonstrate colonial claims to power.50

The respective three accounts51 were authored by the Commanding Protection Force Officer (since 1889), Reich Commissioner and later on Governor of German South West Africa, Curt von François (1852-1931).52 They are kept short and present beside brief references to the military mission (e.g. exploration of Damara- and Ovamboland, designation of a proper border between territories claimed by Great Britain and Germany) geographical and ethnographical descriptions of the areas visited. Von François offered a complex image of the ‘value’ of regions visited for the colonial government by explaining the situation of natural resources, like conditions of soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife stock, next to their utilisation by man, demographic and infrastructural factors. The inhabitants of such regions were portrayed only in the light of such information. The author either never refers to transcultural interaction and communication or just en passant. Although he mentioned his local guides and companions (Führer, “guides”, Farbige, “coloured”) at the beginning of his reports, he only referred to their roles again when problems occurred for which he blamed them. He conceded the role of ethnographical object to the locals whose ways of life, garbs and weaponries could be described and collected. Only a few comments here and there remind the reader of oral testimonies as heard from local authorities. They show that various

50 On this topic also see Andreas Eckl, “Reports from ‘beyond the line’: The accumulation of knowledge of Kavango and its peoples by the German colonial administration 1891-1911”, Journal of Namibian Studies, 1, 2007: 7-37.
51 MadDS, 1891: 205-212; MadDS, 1892: 97-100; MadDS, 1893: 290-295.
individuals encountered during the expeditions were used as informants. Beyond that no extra references indicate contacts between traveller and locals.

This kind of travel writing was not only confined to accounts authored by military men. Civil travellers gave similar accounts of their experiences. For example, the Austrian geologist Eduard Fleck (1841-1917) does not mention his African companions at all in his account of his journey through the Kalahari Desert to Lake Ngami in 1890 until the point where they soaked almost his entire luggage when crossing a river. Although the cooperation with local authorities was crucial for the success of expeditions, it was usually only mentioned when difficulties arose. In Fleck’s case, differences with the Tswana Chief Moremi at Lake Ngami were addressed. The latter was neither willing to provide Fleck with a boat for the exploration of the lake nor did he grant the travelling party a long stay. Beside a few episodes like this, the reader does not get further detail on Fleck’s interaction with the people encountered and might be inclined to conclude that the author conducted his travels without the close cooperation of Africans. In contrast to earlier travel writing where such conflict situations or encounters were recounted in more detail, accounts like those of Fleck and other travel writers of the late 19th century devote very little attention to such day-to-day circumstances. In the rest of Fleck’s report, the explorer depicts himself as an independent agent who studies land and people as an objective observer. The description of his dependence on local realities took second place to broader scientific explanations.

Hence, Fleck’s and von François’ travel accounts constitute a kind of transition. Their form and content remind the reader of earlier travel writings. The authors described chronologically the courses of their journeys from beginning to end and provided details of multifarious observations they made, amongst others those of ethnographical, geographical, botanical and geological nature. Whereas it was usually the objective of earlier explorers to reach a certain place that had either not been seen by a European before or that had not been reached previously via the route taken, later travellers aimed at gaining specialised knowledge of the colony and described individual aspects of different fields of research in detail. This is also the case with von François who travelled at the behest of the government. For example, the goal of his expedition to the Kalahari Desert between February and April 1892 was to find an appropriate border between the territories under German and British protection.

After 1900 a similar number of accounts of expeditions at request of the government or of academic institutions were published. In addition, the results of three journeys made by members of private colonial societies were made available in MadDS. About half a dozen more articles, partly from military men, partly from private individuals whose official incentives remain unknown, underpinned the reports by experts already mentioned.

53 MadDS, 1893: 30.
54 MadDS, 1893: 30, 37.
55 MadDS, 1893: 290.
Exploration of the Caprivi Strip, maps and indigenous knowledge

Some of the richest and most extensive accounts on Southwestern Africa came from the Austrian journalist and editor Franz Seiner (1874-1929) who published the results of his research in MadDS in 1909, 1911 and 1913. He had shown a great interest in the continent since he first set foot on African soil during his voluntary service in the Boer War in 1899. His first stay in German South West Africa from December 1902 to May 1903 was originally meant to be a spa trip as Seiner suffered from a chronic respiratory infection. However, he was gained a general idea of the land when, subsequent to his recovery, he travelled from Windhoek to the foot of the Waterberg and through the Omaheke. In the following years (1905 to 1912) Seiner conducted research on six journeys which all lead into the northern parts of the protectorate.

On his first two journeys in 1905 and 1906 he travelled in the region between Kavango and Zambezi, also known as the Caprivi Strip. The account of this journey was published in MadDS in 1909. Only one and a quarter of a total of 106 written pages offer information on the context of Seiner’s trip. Here he also wrote about the difficulties encountered, most of which were due to the local population’s suspicions towards the traveller. According to Seiner’s opinion this was due to the “concentric advance of the whites” into the Kavango region. For example, he had been suspected by the Lozi of being a “prospector” and they had hindered him from proceeding with his travels. Nonetheless, Seiner achieved a substantial insights and results. During his 106 days of marching and ten days of travelling by boat, he documented an itinerary of a total length of roughly 1,500 miles. Those were rendered into a map which eventually illustrated the report in MadDS. Various findings on the geography, geology, ethnography, botany, and hydrology of the regions travelled added to the wealth of Seiner’s report.

Titled “Travel account” (Reisebericht), the author begins with a concise description of the expedition course and briefly touches on interactions with the local population. While his local guides were not mentioned, Seiner hints at difficulties due to the political situation which led to hostilities on the part of the people encountered. More detailed information on the traveller’s interactions with Africans can be found in the extensive

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56 According to Demhardt, Seiner’s 1909-account was the longest article on Landeskunde ever published in MadDS (Demhardt, Entschleierung: 214); for more information on Seiner’s life see Helga Kostka, (ed.), SeinerZeit 1874 bis 1929. Redakteur Franz Seiner und seine Zeit, Graz, Academic Publishers, 2007.
59 MadDS, 1909: 2 (author’s translation, orig.: “konzentrische Vordringen der Weißen”).
60 In the original: “Marutse”.
61 Ibid.
62 Demhardt, Entschleierung: 214-216.
On inspecting these documents, the reader is struck by the role of Seiner’s African servant Klaus who was responsible for the traveller’s personal demands but also functioned as translator and intermediary between Seiner and the locals. He did not only settle differences between the traveller and his caravan members, he also acted as Seiner’s emissary and was the first contact with local authorities. Thus, he contributed significantly to the success of the expedition.

There are five maps of the regions travelled that accompany Seiner’s texts in MadDS. His map showing the Caprivi Strip as well as the one depicting the Kungveld and the northern Sandveld, in particular, contain a wealth of indigenous geographical information. The map legend of the former offers a first insight in this context (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Map legend of Seiner’s 1909-map with indication to indigenous information

Source: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde Leipzig, Geographische Zentralbibliothek, MadDS, 1909, map 1, sign. I 95-22.1909, size 82 x 48 cm (ca. 32 x 19 inch)


Ibid.: 84-91.
The “Map of the Region between Okavango and Zambezi (Caprivi-Strip)”\textsuperscript{65} bears, next to a symbol for a “surveyed wagon track” (\textit{aufgenommene Wagenstraße}), which was depicted by the combination of a dashed and a continuous line, a dashed double line signifying “\textit{erkundete Wagenstraße}”. In German \textit{erkundet} can either mean ‘enquired after’ or ‘explored’. The question is whether the map makers meant by it routes that Seiner had travelled himself but not measured or mapped or, if the information came from other sources, for example, from indigenous informants who knew these paths well and who told the explorer what they knew. When the map and original writings are more closely examined, only the latter seems possible. Routes thus marked always pass through landscapes that have never been visited by Europeans before, according to the map. They often lead to far-away places or were tangential to the routes of European travellers, ran parallel, intersected or lead up to them. The western part of the map is a case in point. Here various routes meet at the town of Libebe. Beside Seiner’s route, the map reader can also see the one travelled by the German geographer Siegfried Passarge (1867-1958) who visited the settlement in 1898. Additionally an “\textit{erkundete Straße}” passes through the town and runs parallel to Seiner’s route. The Austrian journalist reported the following encounter to the \textit{Reichskolonialamt} in Berlin during his stay in Libebe:

[Chief] Libebe told me that I was the first white man to come here to the Okavango from Tueja and gave me the names of the surrounding villages while he delighted childishly in me repeating them later on in the right order and pronunciation\textsuperscript{[?]} by reading my notebook.\textsuperscript{66}

It can be assumed that the \textit{erkundete Wagenstraße} and the settlements along its course as shown on the map are derived from Chief Libebe’s statements; and furthermore, that afterwards Seiner might have verified the information by interrogating other locals, often guides, in order to gain what he thought was reliable geographical data which could be transformed into cartographic knowledge. More information obtained from indigenous sources, predominately about towns or villages can be found on the peripheries of any of the routes travelled by Europeans, i.e. in the otherwise white-marked areas on the map.

Another map which under closer scrutiny is seen to contain considerable indigenous geographical information originates from one of Seiner’s later journeys which led him into the Kalahari. The “Map of Seiner’s Surveys in the Kungveld and Northern Sandveld


\textsuperscript{66} Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), R 1001/1474: p. 93; (author’s translation, orig.: “Libebe [Häuptling von Libebe] teilte mir mit, ich sei der erste Weiße, der von Tueja hier an den Okawango gekommen sei, und gab mir die Namen der umliegenden Dörfer an, wobei er sich kindisch freute, als ich sie später in richtiger Reihenfolge und Benennung [?] in meinem Notizbuch herablas”).

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in the Year 1912" contains numerous text passages whose contents strongly indicate indigenous influence (Fig. 4). For example, place names, usually watering places, primarily reflect Khoisan origin. Many of them were additionally marked in the map by textual descriptions which convey information about the quality and quantity of the water. They refer to the sequence of seasons and its effects on the water system. Since Seiner had only been there in the first half of 1912, it is clear that he obtained the information from locals who were familiar with these phenomena. The well Gnaja is, the southern part of the map discloses, “dry immediately after rainy season”, Hauiana has “always water” while Nuisib does “not always have water”. The long creek beds that traverse large parts of the map beyond Seiner’s or other European travellers’ routes are another indication of indigenous geographical information. They are also underpinned by textual comments concerning hydrographical questions. At about 19°50’ S. lat. and 18°55’ E. long. the map shows a water basin encircled by a dashed line saying “water places not always filled with water” and a few miles farther East in the midst of a white-marked area the reader can find a ‘water hole’, which starts and ends nowhere, called Tosâm with the information “periodical water place, position unsettled”. Thus, the exploration of the hydrographical system of South West Africa seems to have occupied most of the communication on geographical topics.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the history of mapping the Caprivi Strip corresponds closely to that of Ovambo land. It surely is no coincidence that both of (German) South West Africa’s regions richest in water and human resources eluded the mapping process (esp. large-scale mapping) and hence colonial control for a long time. In these regions explorers and travellers depended in various ways on the cooperation of guides, local authorities (like Shikongo and Libebe) and the local population. The maps that were compiled during that time clearly reflect this dependency. On the one hand, it is represented on the maps by white spots or ‘cartographic silences’; and on the other hand, it expands knowledge of the land by filling gaps along and off the routes of European travellers with mainly hydrographical and ethnographical information. At the same time, these so-called ‘silences’ portray the difficulties associated with the transcultural communication of geographical knowledge. A lot of information that was asked for or that the explorers were provided with in the field seemed unfit for cartographic representation. As was shown, the allocation of certain ethnicities proved to be problematic to map, not only


due to the different degrees of nomadism and cross-regional migration practices of the various groups, which defied representation in the static depiction which maps offer, but also due to different transcultural understandings of ‘territory’ and ‘borders’. Europeans were often confused by the great amount of toponyms for what they would think of as one topological phenomenon and were looking for ‘natural’ boundaries to make clear-cut distinctions. However, they were to learn on a number of occasions that Africans did not communicate spatial knowledge along such lines. The numerous white spots, question marks and dashed lines on the maps for the demarcation of ‘scientifically unsupported’ features or ‘non-knowledge’ hint at that dilemma. Seen in that light, the historian is struck by the hybrid nature that seems to be part of all maps when re-reading the sources on Southwest Africa (and also large parts of the rest of the continent). Therefore, the cartosemiotic elements do not so much symbolise European ‘(lacks of) knowledge’ but rather tell a story of transcultural encounters and mis-communication, i.e. the story of a hybrid cartography.

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Fig. 2: Detail of the map of South Africa of 1858 showing great blanks in the northern and eastern parts of Southwest Africa. Source: Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, PGM, 1858, plate 7, sign. 57-3-71[4.]1858, size 44 x 53 cm (ca. 17 x 21 inch).

Fig. 3: Map legend of Seiner’s 1909-map with indication to indigenous information. Source: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde Leipzig, Geographische Zentralbibliothek, MadDS, 1909, map 1, sign. I 95-22.1909, size 82 x 48 cm (ca. 32 x 19 inch).

Fig. 4: Detail of Seiner’s 1913-map. Source: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde Leipzig, Geographische Zentralbibliothek, MadDS, 1913, map 8, sign. I 95-26.1913, size 43 x 49 cm (ca. 17 x 19 inch).

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