

# **A REVOLUTION BETRAYED**

**How Namibian class relations are played out in the work regimes in the retail sector of Oshakati**



**Ola Magnusson**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
The Master's Degree in Human Geography  
Department of Sociology and Human Geography  
University of Oslo, May 2008**

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## List of Abbreviations

- ANC African National Congress
- COSATU Congress of South African Trade Unions
- FDI Foreign Direct Investment
- EPZ Export Processing Zone
- IMF International Monetary Fund
- LAC The Labour Advisory Council
- LaRRI Labour Resource and Research Institute
- LN League of Nations
- NAFAU Namibia Food and Allied Workers' Union
- NUNW National Union of Namibian Workers
- NLO Northern Labour Organisation
- NWRWU Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union
- OPO Ovamboland People's Organisation
- PLAN People's Liberation Army of Namibia
- SLO Southern Labour Organisation
- SSC Social Security Commission
- SWANLA South West African Native Labour Agency
- SWAPO South West Africa People's Organisation
- TNC Transnational Corporation
- TUCNA Trade Union Congress of Namibia
- UN United Nations
- WTO World Trade Organisation

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Figure 1: Map of Namibia



Homelands
  Territories reserved for the white population

Source: Diener and Graefe 2001, page 13.



# 1. Introduction

Almost every day we read, hear or see in the media that there are labour conflicts. These conflicts are a global phenomenon. The one day it is from Norway, like the ongoing strike among University employees, and the other day it is from another part of the world. Even the anti-capitalist demonstrations we have seen on TV from around the world often concern the fundamental class relation between workers and capitalists. However, the perspective in the media covering these phenomena is biased, describing conflicts from the point of view of capital. This is *one* area of interest which motivated my choice of topic and how I approached it.

Another area of interest comes from the increasing focus on corporate codes of conduct in the recent years, especially working conditions and worker rights. There are many examples of inhuman working conditions being revealed within transnational corporations (TNC) or their sub-contractors in underdeveloped countries. Among these, the Ramatex story from Namibia stands out as one I particularly remember (LaRRI 2003). Ramatex is a Malaysian textile TNC which has production in a Namibian Export Processing Zone (EPZ). In Ramatex several labour legislations were violated such as the right to unionise. My interest for Namibia was further strengthened by my supervisor, Sylvi.

However, a majority like the above mentioned story are from factories which are not open to the public or the consumers of the product, like shops are. My interests in the retail sector grew and made me wonder if the working conditions in the retail sector are just as bad as in the case of Ramatex. At the outset I was especially sceptic towards TNCs and decided to study the working conditions in the retail sector of Oshakati. I also decided to compare the working conditions between different categories of shops and to study what determines working conditions.

Within development studies a lot of focus has been directed towards poverty, but not so much how labour is related to poverty. In recent years labour geography has gained momentum as a sub-discipline in Human Geography. Labour geography focuses on the agency of labour within capitalism and adds a scale and space dimension to traditional studies of labour relations and there is an increasing number of works within the area, for example Burawoy (1985), Kelly (2002), and Andrae and Beckman (1998). The concepts of *factory regime* and *labour regime* are used to describe both labour relations at workplaces and the

labour relations within society as a whole, which is something I will seek to clarify by using the concepts of *work regime* and *workplace work regime* instead.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The title of this thesis, *A Revolution Betrayed*, is inspired by one of Trotsky's (1936) works, *The Revolution Betrayed* in which he tries to show how the socialist revolution did not bring socialism in Russia:

If you remember that the task of socialism is to create a classless society based upon solidarity and the harmonious satisfaction of all needs, there is not yet, in this fundamental sense, a hint of socialism in the Soviet Union.

(Trotsky 1936:unnumbered)

In my opinion, the quote could have been about Namibia, and has thus inspired the title of this thesis. The class relations in Namibia are of great interest and importance in this study. The areas of interests form the basis for the research hypotheses of this study and they are as follows:

- i. *The historical struggle for independence has played a significant role in shaping the class struggle in Namibia.*

The first hypothesis relates to how the analysis of the historical struggle for independence gives us a better understanding of today's class relations and how this affects the power relations in the Namibian society.

- ii. *The struggle for hegemony affects the Namibian work regime and the workplace work regimes in the retail sector of Oshakati.*

The second hypothesis relates to how the power relations, through the struggle for hegemony, affect the Namibian labour regulation, and how it shapes labour relations at workplaces in the retail sector of Oshakati. 'Labour relations' refers in this thesis to the relation between the employers/manager and employees when it comes to labour issues. These relations affect working conditions, which in this thesis were operationalised as, among others, the length of the working day, wages and other benefits (see interview guide in Appendix 2). Labour regulation is understood as the legislations formed by the relations between labour, capital and the state. The concept of hegemony is here used in the Gramscian (1929-1935) sense, while retail is defined as a place (a shop) which sells commodities, for example food, clothes or building materials. Work regime is understood as labour regulations and the power relations between state, capital and labour at the national level. Workplace work regime is



defined as the relation between employers and employees and the working conditions at workplaces.

### **Outline of the Contents**

The structure of the thesis is as follows: In chapter two I describe my positioning and my ontological and epistemological starting point, while chapter three concerns my methodological approach and data collection. Chapter four provides the theoretical framework or my analysis in chapter five and six. In chapter seven I present my contribution to the theoretical debates and provide some concluding remarks revisiting the hypotheses and discussing to what extent they were substantiated by the data in this study.



## 2. Philosophy of Science

Within the social sciences there are frequently discussions about which ontology and epistemology researchers have as a starting point and what kind of methodology researchers choose. Laying the ontological and epistemological presuppositions bare and making informed methodological choices on this basis are thus important.

*Critical realism* is a philosophy of science which argues that there is more to reality than we can sense. *Critical theory*, or critical research, is guided by an emancipatory interest in knowledge, and is characterised by scepticism towards a neutral and objective social science. I have *critical realism* and *critical theory* as points of departure when I make my scientific and methodological choices.

### Critical realism

Critical realism is philosophy of science which has an explicit ontological point of departure. The ontological question in critical realism is a retroductive one; how must reality be like in order for science to be possible (Bhaskar and Lawson 1998)?

Critical realism is geared towards finding the most fundamental in science; to find the inherent mechanisms which generate events. Those inherent mechanisms, also called *casual powers* or *generative mechanisms*, exist everywhere in reality even if they at any given point in time do not generate an event (Danermark et al. 2002).

In critical realism reality is differentiated. To a critical realist the *deep domain/level/domain of the real*<sup>1</sup> is the fundamental level. It is at the *deep level* that the structures and mechanisms exist, and if these mechanisms generate an event, this occurs at the *factual level*. If then this event is sensed (and becomes empirical) it belongs to the *empirical level*. To acknowledge sense data only and thus reduce reality to the empirical, like the empiricists do, is to critical realists a *flat ontology*, ontology without any depth (Sayer 2000, Smith 2003).

Sayer (2000) also points out that reality is stratified (*stratified ontology*) to critical realists. In these different strata new mechanisms, *emergent powers*, are produced and each stratum is a composition of powers and mechanisms from other strata. At the same time, each stratum is generating its own qualitatively different powers and mechanisms, which do not

---

<sup>1</sup> Sayer (2000) uses *deep/factual/empirical domain*, while Smith (2003) uses *deep/factual/empirical level* and Bhaskar (1998) uses *domain of the real/actual/empirical* about the same concepts. In this thesis I will use the concepts of *deep/factual/empirical level* from now on.

exist at other strata. Thus, a phenomenon at the social stratum has some own powers and mechanisms and cannot be explained by sole reference to biological or psychological mechanism (Sayer 1992).

Sayer (1992) argues that from a critical realist perspective social events are products of *generative mechanisms* and *emergent powers*. A multitude of *generative mechanisms* operate simultaneously in a complex system, which makes abstraction an important methodological tool in social science. Abstraction means, in this context, to isolate (like in the laboratory experiment) specific mechanisms through thought operations in order to achieve knowledge. According to Sayer it is, in addition to abstraction, also common with *reduction*, because we study social phenomenon through the actions of individuals. Reduction means, in this context, that we divide a complex phenomenon into smaller parts. However, the properties of the separate parts cannot by themselves explain the phenomenon: “Explanation of the actions of individuals often therefore requires not a micro (reductionist) regress to their inner constitution... but a ‘macro regress’ to the social structures in which they are located” (Sayer 1992:119). This is contrary to the methodological individualism of positivists, where the totality is seen as the sum of components (Smith 2003); society can be explained by the sum total of individual actions (e.g. “the invisible hand”).

Critical realists also argue for the existence of a reality independent of our knowledge of it. This reality is called the *intransitive dimension* (Sayer 2000). The *intransitive dimension* is the research objective in social science. Furthermore, Sayer argues that our knowledge about reality, through our theories and assumptions, constitutes the *transitive dimension*. Social scientists study societies which consist of conscious and reflecting individuals who in turn can change social reality. The fact that social scientists have to interpret other individuals’ interpretations of societies and individual actions is called double hermeneutics (Sayer 2000).

### **Social structures and agents**

How is it possible to carry out research on social phenomena and processes in such a complex and compounded society as the one we live in? One important aspect is to distinguish between social structures and individual actions, while at the same time considering their intertwining. Social structures are abstract and consist of objects which have necessary and internal relationships with each other, which the concrete objects are contingent (Sayer 1992, Collier 1994, Archer 1995, Smith 2003). An example of this is that in order for capitalism to exist, the capitalist and the wage worker have a necessary relation to each other, but who the

capitalist and the wage worker is is, however, contingent. The same goes for marriage – you are not a husband unless you have a wife, but who you are married to is contingent. Different social structures can also be related to each other (Archer 1995), for example a trade union and Chamber of Commerce, or another organisation that support the side of the employers.

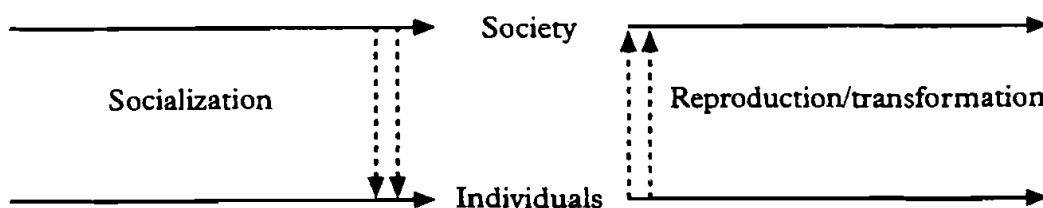
Agents are usually individuals or groups. When analysing agents the focus is often on intentions and actions, while when analysing social structures the focus is on relations (Archer 1995). This can be linked to the above; social structures exist independently of those actually filling the positions. The position ‘capitalist’ is filled now by different individuals than 100 years ago, but they still perform the same function.

[T]he problem of the relationship between individual and society was the central sociological problem from the beginning. The vexatious task of understanding the link between ‘structure and agency’ will always retain this centrality because it derives from what society intrinsically is.

(Archer 1995:1)

Critical realists try to avoid the duality of agents and structure from the earlier reification- and voluntarist paradigms. Critical realists claim that agents and structures are two different phenomena, and not two sides of the same coin as in structuralism. At the same time, however, agents and structures are regarded as two intertwining phenomena. People do not create society out of nothing, the social structures are already there as a foundation. Agents transform and reproduce the structures in a way that makes the structures not merely products of the actions of agents, but instead the structures exist through these actions. All actions presuppose the existence of social structures (Sayer 1992, Collier 1994). This argument is the basis for Bhaskar’s *Transformational model of social activity*.

Figure 2. Transformational Model of Social Activity (Archer 1995:155).

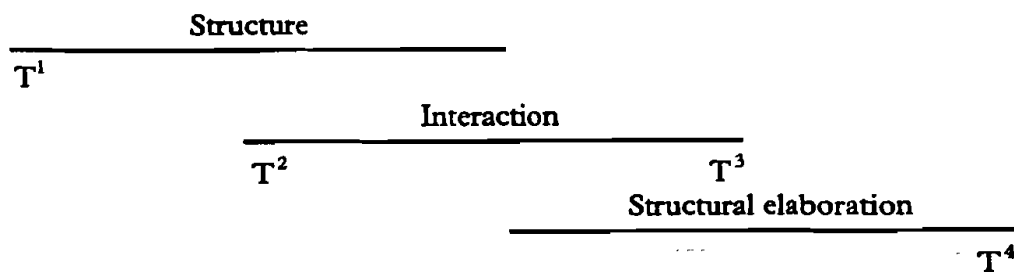


In Bhaskar’s model he emphasises that social structures are always the context of social interaction. At the same time social interaction represents “the place” where the structures are transformed and reproduced (Archer 1995). Structures, for example capitalism, constitute

both possibilities and constraints to agents. Possibilities in the sense that the capitalist can be precisely a capitalist and accumulate capital, while the constraints forces the capitalist to reinvest parts of the profit in order to keep on being a capitalist.

Archer (1995) emphasises that structures and agents are different strata, and thus have different *emergent powers* which influence each other. Archer also points out the importance of studying the interplay between structures and agents, and not be content with one or the other. The interplay between structures and agents develops over time, and hence the emergence is a process.

Figure 3. The Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer 1995:76).



## Critical Theory

Critical realists are ontological realists and epistemological relativists, and believe in rational judgement. Rational judgement implies that the epistemological relativism is not a complete relativism. Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2005) argues that the intransitive dimension or just reality constitutes a parameter to judge the plausibility of a statement: “...all knowledge is fallible, but not equally fallible” (Yeung 1997:54).

Another criterion for valid knowledge is to start out from emancipatory solidarity. Agents transform or reproduce structures, researchers are agents within their field of study. Thus, researchers have a transformative potential. Yeung (1997) points out that critical realism has an emancipatory approach to science.

Instead of a neutral and objective researcher, critical theorists emphasise a socially and politically interested researcher. The researcher should be independent (not on a contract from companies or the Government) and critical. Guidelines for research should be an emancipatory interest in knowledge, and also that research and social science should be at an emancipatory disposal (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 1994). Critical theorists argue in favour of research on constraints and irrationalities within capitalist societies. To do this, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (1994:206, my translation) argues that the researcher should “ask questions which the elite does not want to be answered although it is important to the marginalised”.

A critical social scientist should differentiate between what is fixed and what is socially changeable (Alvesson and Sköldberg 1994). Critical research should thus focus on the socially changeable, and question common sense, that is, what is taken for granted as natural and obvious by the mainstream. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg, critical theorists want researchers to reflect critically on the political aspects of social phenomena and “natural” realities. In order to provide a contrast to the neutral and objective descriptions critical theorists shift the focus away from descriptive empirical material to its *interpretation*. This is complemented with interpretations of the context in which the phenomenon takes place. Hence, the researcher assumes a wider focus than simply the empirical, which in turn makes the theoretical framework more important. The theoretical framework is indeed important if we want to make valid interpretations, both concerning what the informants mean and how the context affects the informants’ opinions and lifestyle. Alvesson and Sköldberg argues that empiricism is neither the only nor the best way to gain knowledge and give three reasons for shifting the focus away from the empirical: First, social phenomena should be illustrated by a combination of totality and subjectivity. Second, “facts” are never isolated in social science, but are always “products” of a social context. Third, the empirical is often seen as natural and neutral, and not as a condition in the historical development.

A major aspect in conducting a critical interpretation is to think in a dialectic way. From a dialectic social outlook, social phenomena are not understood as “natural” but instead as relatively limited and changeable phenomena. Thus, reality is a process which has to be understood in order to understand the phenomenon (Engels 1886). Social phenomena have developed through a dialectic development of society (Alvesson and Sköldberg 1994). A researcher participates in developing social phenomena by reaching conclusions that will either confirm or challenge existing social institutions. Like critical realism, critical theorists argue for emancipatory research. Through questioning the existing and “natural” the researcher can better see alternatives. Thus a researcher participates in reproducing the status quo or challenging the existing society.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994) describe critical research as a kind of *triple hermeneutic*. The first hermeneutic stage is about individual’s interpretation of themselves and their subjective reality. The second hermeneutic stage concerns the researcher’s interpretation of the interpreting individuals. The third hermeneutic stage involves the critical interpretation of the underlying social structures which affect both the informants’ way of interpreting their situation and the researcher’s. As in critical realism, critical theory does not distinctly separate social structures and agents, nor do any of them give structures or agents

the priority. Society is a social construction (structures) which constrains agents but at the same time endows them with a potential for critical reflection and free action.

### **Critical Realism and Critical Theory in Practice**

There are several reasons behind my choice of including critical realism and critical theory in this thesis. To start with, I wish to communicate to the reader how I understand reality and science, and also to describe my positioning. My positioning is decisive for many of the choices I made during the research process. My choice of topic, my choice of theories and my understanding of concepts are all determined by my positioning. The choice of studying work regimes and working conditions in the retail sector of Oshakati in Namibia, from the standpoint of the workers, was determined by my positioning within critical theory: I want to contribute to social development. Without this positioning my starting point could be different. For example, my focus could have been to analyse how to attain higher profits through Human Resources Management measures in the retail sector of Oshakati. The same goes for the choice of theories. I have not chosen theories which dominate the economic and political discourses. Theories that are marginal in our society and theories that focus on explaining why and how people are marginalised in our society have been chosen. The explanatory power of a theory is the most important factor when choosing. Furthermore, it has been important that theories emphasise structural premisses for actions, and that the theories focus on identifying generative mechanisms and emergent powers. My understanding of concepts is also influenced by my positioning. The class concept is interpreted and understood as relational and thus structurally determined. Thus, class is related to positions in society, that is in relation to the mode of production, and not to extrapolated, contingent characteristics, like income or identity. I will now move on to how these points of departure affected my methodology, and discuss how my data was collected and generated.



### 3. Methodology

There are no formal rules, only guidelines, when choosing methods. Critical realism does not exclude any methods *a priori*. When choosing methods this should be based on what we want to know and what we are able to find out when using different methods. The central aspect is therefore that we discuss the specific strengths and weaknesses of the methods chosen. To make the best judgement, researchers should base their arguments on their ontological and epistemological point of view. Sometimes this leads us to combine several different methods (Danermark et al. 2002). When employing methods the researcher should also try to achieve as high level of validity and reliability as possible. Finally, the choice of methods should be based on what kind of approach is best suited to answer the research questions.

Critical realists often employ qualitative methods based on the argument that phenomena are best understood through in-depth studies of properties, and not through extensive studies of characteristics. Seen from a critical realistic point of view, an understanding of concepts is therefore most important in social science (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005).

As a result of my critical realist point of departure and the nature of my hypothesis, I have chosen a qualitative case study. I am not interested in the generality of the working conditions identified, but rather what determines them.

The discussion of *validity and reliability, case studies, generalisation and scientific inference* that follows does not claim to be the only possible way of defining and using the concepts, nor does it claim to be the only way to describe them. It is, however, a presentation of how I understand and interpret the concepts and their relationship to each other. I will in what follows provide a description of my preconceptions, a detailed description of the collection of data, a detailed description about the selection of informants, and a detailed description of the analytic work.

#### **Validity and Reliability**

The concepts of validity and reliability originates in quantitative methodology, but have in recent years been discussed in relation to qualitative methodology, albeit under different guises (Thagaard 2003). Yin (2003) argues that in qualitative research the researcher continuously work with the validity and reliability during the whole process. Hence, validity and reliability is an integral part of both the collection of data and the following analysis.

Validity refers to the relevance of the data collected while reliability refers to the trustworthiness of the data. A low degree of reliability results in a low degree of validity, thus a high degree of validity presupposes a high degree of reliability. A high degree of reliability does not, on the other hand, guarantee a high degree of validity (Thagaard 2003, Yin 2003).

### **Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Methodology**

Validity and reliability are attained in a somewhat different way in qualitative methodology compared with quantitative methodology. In qualitative studies it is not possible to decide, by numbers, the degree of validity and reliability, but it is rather all describing how you collected and interpreted the data in a systematic and transparent way. Furthermore, the researcher should also describe the preconditions of the project and how the conclusions have developed throughout the process, or, in other words, the researcher should always show his/her point of departure for the interpretation of data (Thagaard 2003). Additionally, in order to give the reader a chance to judge the validity researchers could also provide a *thick description* of the context and the empirical findings (Geertz in Lincoln and Guba 2000). In identifying different workplace work regimes in the analysis I will therefore give a thick empirical description of the working conditions.

In qualitative methodology Yin (2003) divides validity and reliability into different aspects which have to be assessed in order to judge if the data are valid and reliable.

1. *Construct validity* concerns whether the researcher is studying what he/she sets out to study. One way of increasing the construct validity is to ask the relevant people the relevant questions. Furthermore, it is also important to ensure that the operational definitions are reflecting the concepts. The possibility for informants to correct misunderstandings and misinterpretations and/or to make clarifications can also strengthen the construct validity. The researcher can also increase the construct validity by using several different sources of data, but aimed at corroborating the same phenomenon. This can, for example, be done through observation, interviews and secondary literature. This is usually called *data triangulation*. Another way of increasing the construct validity is through abduction as: “*the dialogical relationship between data and theory helps check the relation between the research questions and what is actually investigated*” (Bergene 2005:29). I have tried to strengthen my construct validity by using different sources of information, including secondary literature and different groups of informants that could shed light on the phenomenon

from different angles. I have also used both semi-structured and open ended interviews, which as widen my understanding of the topic.

2. *Internal validity* (credibility) refers to the plausibility and the logic of the inferences. By laying the inferences bare, the reader can judge the internal validity of the researcher's conclusions. In this way internal validity refers to the degree to which inferences can legitimately be drawn from the operationalisations to the theoretical constructs on which those operationalisations were based (Trochim 2001). However, despite being a valid logical inference, like *modus tollens* and *modus ponens*, the premisses can be false which shows how internal validity must go hand in hand with construct validity. This is the case in the children's book *The Bear that Wasn't* (Tashlin 1946). In this book a bear is in a logically valid way accused of not being a bear because bears are either in zoo or at a circus which this bear is not, which are false premisses. I will argue in favour of a strong internal validity in this thesis, and by communicating how the research process has developed, I also give the reader a chance to judge this.
3. *External validity* (transferability) concerns generalisation, the degree to which the conclusions in the research would hold for other persons in other places and at other times, i.e. other cases. The possibilities for generalising in qualitative studies depend on what kind of generalisation the researcher wants to make. The possibilities for making an analytic generalisation are related to the external validity. In analytic generalisation the researcher abstracts the transfactual conditions, which are constituent for the social phenomenon. These transfactual conditions can be more or less general. Hence, external validity is related to analytic generalisation and involves generalising through abstracting and conceptualising phenomena. In the search for these transfactual conditions (or generative mechanisms) I have interpreted the data in the light of theory in a dialectic way. This means that the findings in this study have relevance for other similar studies but in other contexts. In the conclusion of this thesis I will draw parallels to Lier's (2005) study to show how my study have relevance for his study or how his study have relevance for my study.
4. *Reliability* (dependability) refers to the question of whether the data collection and the data interpretation are reliable. Yin suggests two ways of strengthening the reliability of the research. The first way is to save the research material and the second way is to create a chain of evidence. The first way of strengthening the reliability is quite easy, and I have thus saved all my interviews, transcriptions, notes from my fieldwork and

all the literature used in my thesis. The second way of strengthening the reliability is achieved, in my opinion, by having several different data sources that enabled me to find misleading information. In this context I would like to add another important aspect. The reliability of the interpretation is also dependent on the quality of the researcher. This in turn is made up by the researcher's preconceptions, the researcher's ability to make good observations and interviews, the researcher's ability to adjust towards data, and the quality of the researcher's supervisor. In order to strengthen my trustworthiness I have attached the interview guides and created a list of informants. Due to ethical considerations I have anonymised informants at their request. I have, however, anonymised all the shops since the informants are facing the risk of being punished for talking about labour issues with me. This can reduce the replicability, while at the same time strengthening my trustworthiness; by keeping my word.

Objectivity is often associated with validity, but is also tied to the researcher's ability to stay neutral and not let the preconceptions form the data. In this thesis I do not claim neutrality or objectivity because I do not believe that it is possible. I do claim consistency, which strengthens the internal validity, and that I am honest, which strengthens the reliability in my research. By positioning myself I am critical both in my interpretation of data and in my point of view. Furthermore, my critical theorist approach to theory and empirical data leads to a thesis which is narrative in its presentation. This is thus one out of several possible narratives about retail in Namibia. In an effort to strengthen the validity of this research I will in the conclusion explicitly sum up the premisses on which my conclusions rest.

## **Case Study**

A case study is a common way of doing qualitative research. Case studies do not rely on any blueprints for analysing. For some this means that it is less systematic and formalised, but case study research demands consistency without saying how. Yin (2003) argues that in a case study the procedure, when collecting data, is often characterised by being close to the informants and the activities.

Instead of asking what my case is, it is better to ask; what is it a case of? As mentioned introductorily, my thesis consists of two cases, which, through discussing the hypotheses, I will argue are interconnected. The first case is a case of class relations in a post-colonial society and how these shape the class struggle and the ensuing work regimes. The second case is of work regimes and working conditions in the retail sector of Oshakati in Namibia.

The choice of Namibia as the case for the analysis of class relations in a post-colonial society is not a coincidence. My first thought was South Africa, because of the history of the African National Congress (ANC) and its relation to trade unions, but then my supervisor suggested Namibia as a possible case. Namibia has a similar history to South Africa with a historical alliance between the ruling party and trade unions in the fight for independence/justice, which makes it interesting from a theoretical point of view. Namibia is also an interesting case in itself. What I mean by this is that Namibia is a young nation and the development from a traditional/colonial society to an independent capitalist society is happening *now*. Concerning the second case, working conditions and work regimes are results of relations which are played out at concrete places. Thus, it is not possible to be in Namibia in general and interview workers. This has to be done somewhere, i.e. at a specific place. Choosing Oshakati was again influenced by my supervisors' suggestion, and after a closer look I agreed that Oshakati was a good place for conducting my interviews. Oshakati is the second largest city in Namibia, and the prospects of finding a diverse range of retail shops were good. Furthermore, Oshakati is the "heart" of Ovamboland and have thus been an important place during the Apartheid era and for the opposition to it. This is something I will come back to in chapter five. Another part, which played a role in the process of deciding the case, was valuable secondary literature available at Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) concerning the topic, both qualitative and quantitative. The decisive factor was, at the end, the personal contacts my supervisor had in the area which saved me valuable time and unwanted frustration.

### **What is a Case?**

In social science, case studies are one of the most used research strategies. Case studies are used when focusing on people, groups and/or organisations. It is also used when the research attention is directed towards social, political and/or economic conditions (Yin 2003). Furthermore, Yin argues that case studies are a preferable research strategy when the researcher wishes to answer "how?" and "why?" questions and when the attention is focused on the whole understanding of a phenomenon.

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

(Yin 2003:13)

Thus, my emphasis on abstractions as opposed to extrapolation informed my choice of a case study approach. The context is a crucial part of a case study and is thus a central part of the research. A case study also includes different techniques for data collection and specific ways of analysing data. These aspects make case studies a kind of research design. Add the fact that a case study is based on theoretical groundings, and the case study is a research strategy.

Stake (2005) points out different types of case studies. Among them he mentions intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study is a study where the main objective is to increase the understanding of the particular case. The case is interesting in itself and not necessarily because it represents other cases or a specific issue. An instrumental case study is a study where the case is used as a “tool” for improving the understanding of a phenomenon, or an issue, independently of the case study. One of the research objectives is thus to be able to identify the generative mechanisms and emergent powers of the phenomenon, and from this make an analytic generalisation. Based on Stakes classification of case studies, my cases are closer to instrumental case studies even though, as I mentioned earlier, they are interesting cases in themselves.

No matter what kind of case study a researcher undertake, he/she should always remember: “Place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on” (Stake 2005: 449). In other words, the study should be based on reflections from the researcher. When it comes to “testing” the results of a case study, this is done differently from in quantitative studies. There are no identical cases and it is thus impossible to make identical procedures for getting identical results. This is because data is generated rather than gathered. If other researchers are to evaluate the quality of a case study, it has to involve a thick description, which mentioned earlier. Stake argues that the case report should preferably include a description of the interplay between the phenomenon, activities and the context.

A common critique of case study research is the inability to make generalisations. The findings in a case study are not generalisable in the same way as statistical data. Some critics go on to argue that without being able to generalise, science is about the specific and individual (Yin 2003). And what is the value of knowing the unique? Generalisation is thus for many researchers the be-all and end-all, i.e. the most important thing. Some case studies manage to avoid the generalisation issue because of its intrinsic value. In my view, the word case is a term which refers to a case of something, thus case is a term which refers to an abstract generality. Most case study researchers are thus appealing to a general relevance.

## Generalisation and scientific inference

The overall purpose of social science is to explain social circumstances, phenomena and processes. Critical realism does not present a new methodology for social science, but it provides us with some guidelines. Generalisation can be done in two ways:

While both forms of induction tend to reach general and abstract truths concerning particular and concrete data, enumerative induction abstracts by generalization, whereas analytic induction generalizes by abstracting. The former looks in many cases for characters that are similar and abstracts them conceptually because of their generality, presuming that they must be essential to each particular case; the latter abstracts from the given concrete case characters that are essential to it and generalizes them, presuming that insofar as essential, they must be similar in many cases.

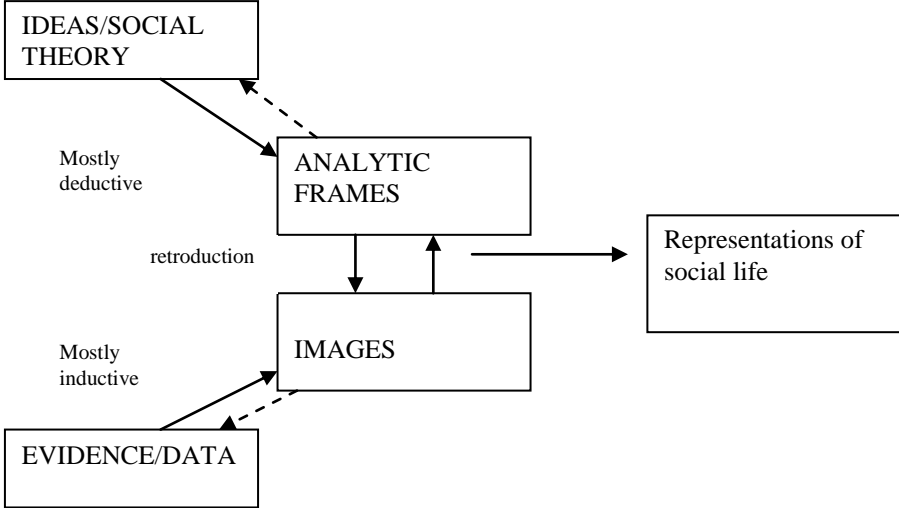
(Znaniecki in Mitchell 2000:178)

As the quotation above points out, generality has basically two different meanings: empirical and analytic. It could either refer to a regularly experienced empirical phenomenon or it could refer to fundamental structures and mechanisms (Danermark et al. 2002). The first aspect of generalisation means that the validity of the generalisation increases with the amount of empirical backing. The other aspect of generalisation implies that reality is structured. There exist underlying structures, transfactual conditions, which are constituent for social actions, social interaction and social institutions. These structures are the “quality” which constitutes the conditions for something to be what it is and not something else. By using abstraction and recontextualisation the researcher can identify structures that he/she is unable to see through empirical observations. With abstraction I mean *“thought operations[...] which helps us to develop systematic insight about the fundamental relations in the world”* (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005:62 (own translation)). Recontextualisation employs this abstract insight in other contexts. By using theories and concepts, I abstract the transfactual conditions of the phenomena studied. Recontextualisation is connected to external validity and I will try to strengthen this in the conclusion by pointing towards a similar at another case displaying the same transfactual conditions. Science, making inference from something to something else, is more than logical inference and empirical generalisations. It also includes abstractions and recontextualisations. Inference is different ways of reasoning. Danermark et al. argues that to be able to discover meanings, relations and connections, and to be able to gain knowledge about social structures and transfactual conditions, the researcher needs abduction and retroduction. Scientific progress would hardly be possible without abduction and retroduction, because it is through these inferences the researcher are challenging the common way of thinking, which is in line with critical theory.

The difference between the two meanings of generality is connected to the different ways of making scientific inference and the two different methodologies, quantitative and qualitative (Danermark et al. 2002). Generalisation is often understood as empirical, inductive generalisations. This interpretation limits the understanding of society, because generality does not only concern empirical regularities. Danermark et al. point out that the researcher must also find the general, the structures. To gain knowledge about those structures, the researcher needs to use transfactual arguments, or what is also known as retrodution. Retrodution is here understood as an inference next to deduction, induction and abduction.

These different inferences represent different ways of relating the specific to the general (Danermark et al. 2002). Through deduction the researcher seek knowledge about a specific phenomenon through general laws, in other words, arriving at logical conclusions from given premisses which are then tested. Through induction, on the other hand, empirical generalisations are made on the basis of observations. Danermark et al. argue that retrodution as a form of inference tries to find the constituent elements of the structures. Through retrodution the researcher abstract the necessary from accidental in order to find the general. In other words, retrodution is about how the researcher finds the constituent elements which must exist in an empirical phenomenon, for the phenomenon to be possible, or to be what it is. In this thesis a retroductive approach was seen, for instance, in the ontological question: How must the reality be constituted in order for science to be possible? Abduction refers to the reciprocal influence theory and empirical data has on the interpretation of the phenomenon and how this results in new insight (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005). Abduction is illustrated in the model below. Note that Ragin uses retrodution in same way I use abduction.

Figure 2. The process of abduction in social research (Ragin 1994:57).





My theoretical point of departure, or ideas, influenced how I interpreted the empirical data in my analysis which in turn influenced the images I had of my data. This resulted in a dialogue between my analytic frames derived from theory and need to find new theory that could shed light on new insights. In some instances the existing theory (that I knew of) did not have sufficient explanatory power which led me to further develop some of the theories or concepts, providing new representations through creating ideal types of workplace work regimes and refining the concept already pertaining to the field. By ideal type I mean an isolation, or abstraction, of certain properties of a given phenomenon.

To summarise, in quantitative research, generalisation means empirical extrapolation. In qualitative research analytic generalisation is common. In analytic generalisation the researcher abstract the underlying structures, the transfactual conditions, which are thought to be general since they are necessary and essential. Thus, abstraction is another way of saying analytic generalisation, and perhaps a better term since the word generalisation has a quantitative connotation. Furthermore, since retrodution is an inference it refers to the way the researcher abstract the transfactual conditions. Using the abstracted transfactual conditions gained through the process of retrodution in another context is recontextualisation. Abduction is then the dialectic process, between theory and the empirical phenomenon, which seeks theoretical refinement.

## **Fieldwork**

I have chosen to collect data through interviews, observation and secondary literature. By using data collected from several different sources I have undertaken data triangulation. This strengthens the validity and gives the research a wider spectrum of information, both qualitative and quantitative (Thagaard 2003, Kvale 1997). At the same time it can shed light on important problems that is difficult to get to the bottom of. Despite some limitations of the fieldwork, like a tight economic budget and restricted time, my overall experience was above all expectations due to some luck and a helping hand from my supervisor. This includes, among other things, being introduced to Herbert Jauch who let me use LaRRI's library, which is a national research centre for labour market analyses and labour issues.

## **Interviews**

In qualitative studies the researcher has an objective of understanding individual actions and interpretations of social phenomena. Since conversation is a good way of getting to know how a person thinks (and reflects on his/her situation), interviewing is one of the most used

qualitative methods. Interviewing is characterised by the researcher's direct contact with the source of data and by the subject-subject relationship between the researcher and the informant. Both Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Thagaard (2003) argue that interviews can be *structured*, *semi-structured* and *unstructured*. To base the interview on a questionnaire is an example of a *structured* interview, as the questions come in predefined order. *Unstructured* interviews let the conversation "flow" and the questions are more open for reflection. It is easier to be introduced to new aspects of a phenomenon when the interview is open-ended, but at the same time there is a risk of forgetting main questions, thus losing important data. The interviewer only prepares the main issues for the interview and formulates the questions as they go along. *Semi-structured* interviews are a kind of halfway house between structured and unstructured interviews; it is a combination of dialogue and questionnaire. In this way the researcher secures data on the most central issues, but is also flexible in the questions asked. Thagaard (2003) argues that a less structured interview strengthens the reliability, while the validity is strengthened through a higher degree of structure. This is because in less structured interviews the informant talks more freely while in the more structured interviews the researcher minimises the risk of forgetting issues. Which kind of interview a researcher chooses should be determined by his/her personal qualities, the research questions and what kind of information the researcher is looking for.

For this master thesis I have carried out semi-structured interviews. Interviews with workers mainly involved me asking questions about working conditions and the involvement of trade unions. Interviews with workers who had been working in the same shop during and after Apartheid had a more unstructured form at the end when they talked about the working conditions during Apartheid and when they compared it to the working conditions today. The interviews with officials had a more unstructured form, but can still be regarded as semi-structured. Choosing different forms of interviewing is only about what is most suitable for the information needed. The interview guides were prepared before leaving for Namibia and were improved, in an operationalised sense, in Namibia together with my supervisor. Already during my first interview I saw the need to further improve the interview guide. I conducted twenty-eight interviews altogether, nineteen of them were with workers in shops. The remaining interviews were conducted with four people from trade unions, four other officials (Chamber of Commerce, Labour Commissioner, Labour Inspector and Social Security Commission (SSC)), and one manager. The interviews varied in time, between twenty minutes and one hour and thirty minutes.

At the beginning of each interview I pointed out that the interview was confidential, voluntary and that the informant could terminate the interview whenever he/she felt like it. I also gave some general information about the interview and the thesis before each interview. The interpreter was also introduced and her purpose explained before each interview, even though most of the informants had met her when they set up the meeting. On two occasions the informant got to see the interview guide in advance at the informant's request. I did not want the informants to see the interview guide beforehand to prevent getting answers which was too thought through or, in the worst case manipulated to describe the situation more positive or negative than it really is. I believe that keeping the interview guide to myself gave me more frank information simply because the informants did not have the time to prepare the answers.

To avoid losing valuable information I chose to record the interviews. This gave me the opportunity to listen carefully and do the transcribing afterwards *in vivo*. The purpose of recording the interview was explained, and the recording was only done if the informant gave his/her consent. For recording I used an mp3-player, which is a small electronic device without an extra microphone. The mp3-player was placed upside down, which made it less intimidating in order to minimise the impact, on the relation between me and the informant. I used the mp3-player in all but two interviews. The Namibia Food and Allied Workers' Union (NAFAU) representative in Windhoek did not want the interview to be recorded, and before the interview with a worker at Alpha I ran out of battery. I did not experience recording as an obstacle, although I do realise that this could be the case despite my impressions. Most of the interviews were carried out in restaurants/cafés but some were conducted at the informant's home. A few of the interviews in the restaurants/cafés had potential listeners, but I did not notice any difference from other interviews regarding the informant's openness. Using an interpreter gave me time to reflect during the interviews which in turn strengthened my probing questions. Using an mp3-player gave me time to take some notes on the informant's body language and other visual impressions. When transcribing the interviews afterwards these notes were important because the real meaning of an utterance can be quite different from what it looks like in writing, for instance sarcasm. The majority of the interviews were carried out with one informant at a time, but on two occasions I had two informants at the same time at their wish. Both of these interviews were successful in my opinion. Finally, I will mention the risk of asking leading questions. Sometimes informants may find it hard to understand the question and the interviewer might give examples in order to explain what he/she means. Those examples can easily become leading to the answer. This is something I

was aware of during the interviews. However, on some occasions I (or the interpreter) had to use examples for the informant to understand. On these occasions I was extra careful when interpreting the data.

### **Transcribing**

Transcribing is a process where I first decontextualised the statements before recontextualising them as quotes in the analysis. Recording the interviews is the first step in the decontextualisation since I lose all visible information. The second step in decontextualisation is transcription. Although I transcribed all the interviews *in vivo*, which means that I tried to capture as much as possible of the real conversation, including hesitations and rhetorical pauses, this process means that I lose all other sounds that can give information, such as sarcasm. After transcribing I coded the interviews. This further decontextualised the data as I took quotations out of their setting and placed them into categories. The next step was to find the quotations which elucidated theories, and include them in the text as an effort to recontextualise them. Upon doing that I chose to correct the informant's language when this could be done without changing the meaning so as to avoid giving the impression that they were ineloquent. At the same time that I was working with the data I was constantly reflecting on theories that could explain surprising findings. By doing this I have actively practised abduction.

### **Informants**

In light of my research questions I have chosen to interview people from trade unions, Ministry of Labour, and workers from different shops within the retail sector. Retail workers and representatives from trade unions and Ministry of Labour are all relevant people for the issues studied, which strengthens the construct validity. I also tried to interview managers from some of the shops, but I quickly realised that this attempt was futile. I did interview the manager of Mercury, and he answered my questions in a professional way. From there I went on to Chinese owners/managers, but in my three attempts I got three different replies: the first owner/manager just said "me no English" and threw me out of the shop. The second owner/manager did not say anything; he just stood quiet and stared at me until I felt uncomfortable and left. The third owner/manager answered my interview request in Chinese and then left the shop, and did not come back. My next task was to talk to an owner/manager in the Small Local category. However, after two attempts where both managers said they did not have the time or the interest, I simply gave up this category as well. After that I tried

Rhino, in the Big National category, and was able to set up an interview with the manager. In the recruitment for this interview I changed strategy and did not tell him exactly what I was going to talk about, as I had done earlier. When I started the interview he called one of his employees and told me to interview him instead, clearly showing that he was not interested in talking with me about issues concerning labour relations. From the trade unions I interviewed representatives for NAFAU and Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU) in Oshakati and in Windhoek. The Labour Commissioner and a Labour Inspector in Oshakati were also interviewed, as well as officials in the Chamber of Commerce and the SSC in Oshakati. Choosing these categories of informants gave me a wider perspective on the issues under study. For me it was important to interview persons with a great deal of knowledge about my topic, and not only workers. The intention was to strengthen my chances of finding interesting information that could help me understand a complex phenomenon. However, my main focus when trying to identify working conditions was workers and getting their perspective, and their information therefore represents the basis on which this thesis rests.

Before recruiting workers as informants I made a list of preferences. One criterion was that the informants should, to the highest possible degree, reflect the workforce in the retail sector of Oshakati. At the same time, as a kind of second criterion, I wanted different people with different stories, which could in turn highlight the complexities and nuances, and give me saturation of meaning. The first criteria resulted in a higher number of women than men. It also resulted in more younger workers than older ones. Other results were that a majority of the informants were recently employed as opposed to long-term employees, and a majority were union members. As I got both men and women, young and old, trade union members and non-unionised employees, I felt I reached a saturation of meaning.

I divided the shops into categories which I regarded important to the purpose of my study. The working conditions in these categories are thickly described, and provide the basis for the ideal types of workplace work regimes. I chose to divide the shops into four different categories: large international/South African chain stores, Big National stores, Small Local shops and small local Chinese-owned shops. In this thesis the Chinese-owned shops represent a category of their own, despite Chinese-owned shops in Namibia being a kind of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) or international ownership. In my view the Chinese-owned shops are different from the international/South African due to economic strength and different market segments. Within the international/South African category I also distinguish the chain stores in relation to their period of time in the country. The interview guides were different for the different categories, and the number of interviews needed to reach saturation of meaning in

each category varied. Saturation of meaning is reached when the researcher feels that he/she has heard the information before and conducting more interviews is not regarded necessary.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Shops</b>	<b>Number of Informants</b>
International/South African	Venus	1
	Mars	1
	Saturn	2
	Jupiter	1
	Mercury	1
Big National Companies	Rhino	2
	Hippo	1
	Zebra	1
	Lion	1
Small Local Businesses	Alpha	1
	Beta	1
	Gamma	2
	Delta	1
	Sigma	1
Chinese Retailers	Xià	1
	Chūn	1
	Dōng	1

In the process of recruiting informants confidentiality and voluntariness were of great importance. Ensuring that the informant felt safe and at ease was also important, and the informants could choose where, when and how (within some limits) the interview would take place. As seen, when anonymising, I have given the International/South African shops names after the planets, the Big Nationals after African animals, the Small Locals using the Greek alphabet and the Chinese Retailers after seasons (in Chinese) in an effort to protect my informants.

### **Interpreter**

The majority of the interviews were carried out using an interpreter either because of a lack of English skills or because some informants did not want to speak English. By using an interpreter both I and the interpreter were facing a succession of challenges. I reflected upon

these challenges before choosing the interpreter, and the conclusion was that the interpreter needed some important qualities. The qualities I looked for was the interpreters ability to create confidence and security with the informants, and also that the interpreter had charisma. The interpreter also needed to have a humble attitude and the ability to identify with the informants. I also wanted an interpreter with the right attitude, and someone I got along with. In order to reduce the risk of the informants getting the impression of that we had a “higher status”, I preferred a woman without any higher education, since most workers in the shops were precisely women without any higher education. Wrong impressions can result in misleading information if, for example, the informant feels the need to understate a troubled situation. Hence, I wanted the interpreter and the informants to “bond” better (something I believe gave me more reliable information). At the same time I wanted the interpreter to have some knowledge of working conditions, even though the interview guide was carefully explained before the interviews. I also wanted the interpreter to be familiar with the area without knowing everyone in Oshakati. In this way the interpreter knows the local culture and codes but without having personal relations with the informants.

In the end I chose a female interpreter who was originally from Oshakati but was now living in Windhoek. She was intelligent, reflected, pleased and happy, and she had a confidence-inspiring appearance and charisma. She did not have any higher education, but she had working experience.

Both before and during the interviews I reflected upon the use of an interpreter. Using an interpreter makes an interview with an informant who does not speak the same language as me possible. But it also gave me more time to think about the answers, as well as time to prepare the next question and/or probing questions. At the same time it also complicates the interview. When the researcher, in this case me, asks a question it is the researcher himself/herself who designs the question bearing in mind the expressions and intonation. When the interpreter asks the question the interpreter may change the expressions and intonations, which may in turn lead to a change in how the informant interprets the question. The hermeneutic stages were addressed in chapter two. On the other hand, forcing the informant to speak English could have produced shorter and less nuanced answers simply because of the limited English skills. Still, an answer from the informant in his/her native tongue has to be translated by the interpreter. The answer is then first interpreted by the interpreter before it is given in English. Furthermore, the translated answer is then interpreted by me. Hence, the information is interpreted two times instead of just one which is the case without an interpreter. Another important issue is the risk of information getting lost in

translation, even though we were always aiming for a literal translation. Furthermore, the interpreter should not make interpretations of his/her own accord. This was something we discussed before conducting the interviews, and I emphasised the importance of a literal translation.

Another complication that may arise when involving an interpreter is our charisma and how we dress. How we dress as researchers and how we appear ought to be reflected upon when meeting informants. Even though the researcher can try to influence the interpreter's clothes and how he/she appears it is in the end largely out of the researchers reach. How we dress and appear influences the interview one way or another.

I considered both positive and problematic aspects of using interpreter and the possibility of finding informants being comfortable with and fluent in English, before I made my choice.

### **Other Sources**

Besides collecting data through interviews I have also collected information by direct observation in the shops and by informal conversation with people who worked in shops. Last, but certainly not least, is the amount of secondary literature collected at LaRRI. This data contains both qualitative and quantitative work, thus giving me the opportunity to triangulate data and strengthen the validity of this study. My analytic work with this data was done in the same manner as with the interview data, in the sense that I was constantly reflecting on theories that could explain surprising findings. I was also looking for data that could shed light on the theoretical framework.



## 4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents and discusses the theoretical framework of this thesis. The theories presented in this chapter have the purpose explaining my findings. The theories can thus be used as analytic tools in the abduction process leading to the conclusion. I will begin with a note on capitalism and the class concept, which is followed by the concepts of hegemony and social partnership. The generative mechanisms of capitalism are then discussed before ending this chapter with the hidden abode of production with theories on labour/work regimes.

### Capital and The Capitalist Mode of Production

Almost all societies in the world today are incorporated into the capitalist world economy. But what is capitalism? Capitalism should be defined as a *mode of production* based on private ownership of the means of production, and exploitation of the labour force (Mandel 1973). By abstracting the agents' relation to the means of production, we are able to identify one of the necessary relations of capitalism. Marx (1847) argues that the producer (worker) does not own the product he<sup>2</sup> has produced or the means of producing it, which is instead owned by the capitalist (capital owner). In contrast to slavery, the workers are “free” in capitalism and thus not owned by one specific capitalist, but rather bound to the capitalists as a class (Marx 1867). Furthermore, in the capitalist mode of production the capitalist appropriates the economic surplus, which is created by the producers. Thus, capitalism is also characterised by an internal and necessary relation between capital and labour. It is through this relation that money and commodities become *capital* (Marx 1847). Hence, the social relation between capitalists and workers is the true meaning of *capital*. However, if we restrict our understanding of capital to the social relation between capitalists and workers other conceptions like *accumulation of capital* and *capitalist* do not make sense. How is it possible to accumulate the social relation between capitalists and workers? How is it possible for someone to own the social relation between capitalists and workers? In order to make sense of the concept it must also include money and commodities used with the objective of creating surplus-value (Marx 1867, Laclau 1971). It is only in the relation between capitalists and workers that money and commodities can create surplus-value. Thus, capital is both a social relation and value in motion. Furthermore, capital is also used in a meaning of the capitalist

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<sup>2</sup> Marx uses *he* and not *she* for both capitlist and worker. I will do the same even though I realise that a large number of workers and capitalists are women.

class and its common interest (Callinicos 2003). In other words has capital (at least) three meanings and from abstract to concrete these are: a) the social relation between capitalists and workers, b) The capitalist class and its interests, and c) Money and commodities used as input in the production of surplus-value.

### **The Class Concept**

The abstract concept of class is not determined by a person's income which is contingent, just as *who* these people are is. It is rather determined by a person's relation to the means of production (Mandel 1973). Mandel claims that the capitalist class is composed of private people who own the means of production. The means of production include factories, land, real estate and other forms of capital which is needed as input in production. Capitalists live off other people's labour. Hence, they do not need to sell their labour power since their profit provides sufficient income to live comfortably, although some capitalists may actually have lower incomes than some wage workers due to the contingency of concrete situations. Mandel furthermore points out that capitalists may choose to work; it is an option for them. However, the important thing is that they do not need to work for a living.

According to Mandel (1973), the working class is comprised of people dependent upon a wage. The working class also includes dependent children and spouses (because they are indirectly dependent upon wages), retired workers, students (who will start waged work after graduation), workers receiving a disability allowance or any kind of welfare or wage supplement, and unemployed. The important thing is that they must work for a living, i.e. they must sell their labour-power to live. They do not own the means of production or enough capital to be able to live on the income generated from that (Mandel 1973).

The two classes form a necessary relation in the structure of capitalism, and is thus a defining feature of it. The class division is then an intrinsic part of capitalism and, as I will point out in the analysis, the Marxist class concept has become useful when analysing the Namibian society after independence.

Moving from abstract conceptions of the capitalist mode of production to concrete manifestations, i.e. social formations, we find people who own the means of production and through this can appropriate the surplus-value created by wage workers. In this sense they are capitalists. However, for some the profit is not enough to live on and he is thus forced to work to secure the income. What is he then? It is also a common feature in the world today that people are self-employed but without any employees. He does not exploit workers and does not appropriate surplus-value from their work, but he owns the means of production and the

dividends provide sufficient income to live on. What is he then? Furthermore, it is not unusual that wage workers today own shares in one or many companies. Stockholders often get returns each year. This profit comes from the realisation of surplus-value, which is created by wage workers. If this return is sufficient to live on, what is he then? Finally, what about a manager who works for a wage, but whose work is to represent the interest of the owner (of the means of production)? Does he belong to the capitalist class or the working class?

Marx (1867) operated with more than the two fundamental classes. He also mentioned peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the lumpenproletariat. But since capitalist society has changed so much I will not use these class concepts. It is important to point this class concept out because I discuss and refer to the class concept both as an abstract concept and as a concrete phenomenon in a social formation. In Gramsci's theory of hegemony, for instance, class is not always understood in the abstract sense, but rather as a mix of classes and other groups in the society, for instance "ruling class". Gramsci used hegemony when analysing the Italian society, and thus he had therefore a concrete manifestation in mind. When I refer to the capitalist class or the working class, I do so in an abstract sense. When the class concept is shaped by the social formation I use class/group. Furthermore, both *economic elite* and *bourgeoisie* has a different meaning from *capitalist class*. In the analysis I have chosen to use manager/owner when I am not certain of which one it is.

## **Class Struggle and Hegemony**

This section shows how the power relations in a society are formed by class struggle and the struggle for hegemony. In the analysis I will apply these concepts of hegemony and social partnership to explain Namibia's power relations.

Antonio Gramsci's contribution to the development of Marxist theory mainly concerns his thoughts on civil society and his development of the concept of hegemony. As a Marxist he divided society into different classes/groups and his theory on hegemony mainly sets out to explain how the ruling class/group could continue to hold on to their power in a democratic Western Europe. Gramsci claimed that the ruling class/group not only ruled through the repressive apparatus (military, police etc.), but also through convincing people to share the elite's opinions and their conception of the world. Gramsci's thought is different from traditional Marxists' thoughts, not only because he emphasises ideology and culture (the Superstructure) as opposed to the conditions of production (the Base), but also because he regards human activity and its emancipatory potential important in relation to economic structures (Sassoon 1980).

## **Base and Superstructure**

Simon (1991) argues that Gramsci's starting point was Marx' analytic distinction between *base* and *superstructure*. In Marxist theory, base (also known as *structure*) refers to the material factors in society, for example productive forces and natural resources. The superstructure consists of non-material phenomena produced by humans, for example politics and culture. The superstructure reacts upon the base, but between the base and the superstructure there is continuous dialectic. According to Forgacs (1988), Gramsci refined Marx's conception of superstructure by dividing the superstructure into *the state* and *the civil society*. The state rests on repressive means of domination, while civil society, in an ideological way, rears the masses to "obey" the ruling class. If a class/group has gained control over both the state and civil society it is hegemonic.

## **Civil Society**

According to Simon (1991), Gramsci understood capitalist societies as ingenious networks of relations between classes and other social forces, which are dominated by the struggle between the two fundamental classes; capital and labour. *Civil society* is comprised of numerous organisations and institutions, such as the church, political parties, media, cultural organisations, and trade unions, which are distinct from the state apparatus. Institutions which have the monopoly over coercion belong to the apparatus of the state and are thus separated from civil society. Capitalist societies are composed of three sets of relations; the relations of production, the relations of the state, and the social relations making up civil society. The sphere of the state, the sphere of civil society, and the sphere of production can, however, interfere with each other, as is the case with education.

Simon (1991) argues that Gramsci interprets civil society as the sphere of class/group struggles and popular-democratic struggles. Civil society comprises an arena for domination, but is also an arena where counter-hegemonic projects are constructed. In other words, civil society is the sphere in which the dominant class/group organises consent and hegemony. It is also the sphere in which the marginalised classes/groups organise their opposition in order to create counter-hegemony. Since Gramsci was interested in civil society as an arena in which a socialist alternative could develop, he focused on the strategies. In this context Gramsci studied the intrinsic power relations and its forms of organisation. There is no principal conflict between state and civil society, like two opponents; instead the state can strengthen its power in the arena of civil society. The power relations are also central within civil societies

which are characterised by conflicts and contradictions. Civil society can thus both reproduce an existing hegemony and produce resistance to the existing hegemony (Simon 1991).

### **Hegemony**

Originally hegemony referred to the power and influence that a stronger military state in the antique Greece had over other states. Hegemony was then the dominance that a state had over other states. The state could achieve this dominance with or without threats or use of force. In either way, the state had hegemony if it could dictate conditions to its own advantage. Gramsci's concept of hegemony was, however, based on Lenin's use of the concept, which he in turn based on earlier usage by the Russian working class movement (Simon 1991). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Russian Marxists used the concept of hegemony to point to the need for an alliance between the working class and the peasantry in overthrowing Tsarism. The working class was supposed to lead a national alliance and fight for freedom on behalf of all repressed classes and groups. To Lenin this meant that the Russian working class, in alliance with the peasantry, should act as the hegemonic force in the democratic revolution against the Tsarist autocracy. In this way, the working class, which formed a relatively small part of the population at that time, would be able to acquire support from the majority of the people, i.e. peasants (Simon 1991).

The concept of hegemony is considered one of Gramsci's most important contributions to Marxism, and it is thus central to analyses of society and its transformative processes (Sassoon 1980). To Lenin, hegemony was a strategy of revolution, a strategy the working class (and the allied forces) should make use of to win support from the majority of the people. According to both Sassoon (1980) and Simon (1991), Gramsci adds a new dimension to hegemony when he includes the acts of the capitalist class and their allies. Thus, hegemony includes both the overtaking of state power and how to maintain it. The concept then refers to how a particular group in society can maintain its power and domination without revolts from subordinate groups. More directly, Gramsci develops the concept of hegemony into an analysis seeking to explain why the "inevitable" socialist revolution predicted by orthodox Marxism had not occurred by the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Sassoon (1980) and Simon (1991) observe that Gramsci argues that when a class/group dominates the material resources and succeeds to institutionalise its ideology, it has then attained hegemony. Hegemony means in this sense that the ruling class/group does not need to use violence to control the subordinated classes/groups because they consent to the existing social order. This approval is a main part of hegemony. The subordinated classes/groups accept the hegemonic

ideology which in turn becomes a kind of common sense. The hegemonic ideology in most of the world today is neoliberalism, and capitalism is seen as “natural” and has become common sense to most people. In this thesis, as a critical theorist, I question what is taken for granted as “natural” by focusing on the socially changeable. Hegemony creates constraints to what kind of ideas and outlooks are regarded as plausible and desirable. Hegemony is then an expression of dominance, but the concept means more, in that hegemony conceals the dominance and makes it invisible (Morton 2000). Hence, hegemony involves both an ideological dominance and the ensuring of control. This means that Gramsci changes the meaning of hegemony from being a strategy (Lenin’s use) to becoming a conceptual tool - in line with other Marxist concepts such as classes, state, productive forces and the relations of production - to understand society with the aim of changing it.

According to Gramsci (1929-1935), the state and civil society are closely intertwined in the sense that formal institutions, for example the Government, military or political parties which embody the power of the state, can exercise dominance over informal institutions and organisations in civil society, such as the church or the media. The relationship between state and civil society varies from nation to nation. Gramsci argues that the bourgeoisie in countries which are less developed cannot offer their citizens a high standard of living, nor can they rule through representative parliamentarianism. In these states, the bourgeoisie’s power rests upon a strong state which can quell any widespread dissatisfaction among the population. However, in the more developed societies, like Western Europe, the bourgeoisie can “buy” the consent of the subordinated classes/groups by providing them with a relatively good standard of living and by letting them vote in general elections. Societies in which the bourgeoisie rules with the consent of civil society are stronger than states where the bourgeoisie rules by coercion. Sassoon (1980) notices that hegemony is often described in developed industrial countries as a complex structure of power which includes cultural, political and economic dimensions. These dimensions work together to maintain the prevailing order. The social forces which maintain the existing hegemony are not composed of a singular dominating class, but instead of a composite constellation of powers. Sassoon (1980) claims that Gramsci called such a constellation a *historic bloc*. In Lenin’s usage of the concept of hegemony an alliance was mainly between classes or parts of classes (Simon 1991). Simon holds that Gramsci adds another dimension to alliances with his notion of *national-popular*: a class cannot acquire the national leadership and become hegemonic if the class restricts itself to class interests. The class should thus also engage in national-popular struggles and interests, which is not directly

derived from the relations of production. Hence, hegemony includes a national-popular dimension in addition to the class dimension.

### **Historic Bloc**

The concept of *historic bloc* is closely linked to the concept of hegemony. A class/group which aspires to achieve hegemony must also acquire leadership in the sphere of production in addition to civil society. In this way, *Base* constrains *Superstructure* but it is not determining. State power is therefore not enough to secure hegemony. A hegemonic class/group also needs control over production and civil society. The capitalists' control over production has never been complete; it has always been challenged by wage workers; they and their unions have fought over the working conditions and implementation of new machinery. The base and superstructure metaphor is therefore unsatisfactory and it is misleading to think of a sharp line between the sphere of economics and the sphere of politics. On the contrary, these two spheres are connected. Even though Gramsci often mentions base and superstructure, he disagrees with economic determinism and, as mentioned earlier, puts more emphasis on the superstructure (Sassoon 1980). He uses the concept of historic bloc to show how a hegemonic class/group combines the management of its bloc of social powers within civil society with the management within the sphere of production (Simon 1991). Historic bloc thus explains the relations between superstructure and base. Sassoon (1980) argues that Gramsci defines historic bloc as a kind of world order during a fixed period of time. Historic bloc is a combination of the material and the ideological. Historic bloc consists of a special articulation of existing ideas and material assets, and refers to how these are institutionalised and connected to specific agents. The creation of a historic bloc is one of the main tasks of the intellectuals which I will return to later.

According to Morton (2000), a historic bloc includes political, economic and cultural aspects, which together create a dominating ideology. Hence, Simon defines historic bloc as alliances on which hegemony is based: "*When a hegemonic class succeeds in constructing a bloc of social forces capable of enduring for an entire historical period, Gramsci calls it a historic bloc*" (Simon 1991:33). This constellation of power can be interpreted as a complex set of relations covering several groups in a society, including subordinated groups. The working class can only become a hegemonic class/group if it takes into consideration the interests of other classes and forces of society, and combines them with their own interests. When a class/group goes beyond sectional struggles and engages in compromises in order to become the national representative of a broad bloc of social forces, Gramsci terms it an

*economic-corporate* struggle (Simon 1991). The relationship between the two fundamental classes, capital and labour, does not only consist of the antagonism between them. It is a complex relationship which also includes other classes and social forces. Simon argues that both sides are trying to strengthen their alliances and at the same time undermine each other's alliances in an attempt to tip the balance of power in their direction. According to Gramsci (1929-1935), Lenin's mobilisation of the Russian peasantry in support of the proletariat during the Russian revolution was also in the interest of the peasants. As already mentioned, the ruling class/group rarely use coercion to defend their positions and in maintaining the historic bloc; instead they depend on creating and maintaining consent among the subordinated groups:

The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

(Gramsci 1929-1935:306-307)

As I mentioned earlier, Gramsci emphasises the importance of economic structures which he argues enforces constraints to the existing order (both the social and state order), but these are not seen as determining like in classical Marxism. Hegemony is created and recreated through ongoing struggles in which ruling classes/groups try to maintain the existing order as something natural and obvious. Through those struggles, a comprehensive consent about the social order is established. This consent has the character of what Gramsci (1929-1935) calls *common sense*; a fundamental, dominating and all-embracing conception of the world. However, common sense involves inner contradictions and will thus change form and substance in accordance with the constantly ongoing hegemonic struggle. This is in turn dependent on the power relations between the different constellations. Sassoon (1980) and Simon (1991) argue that the struggle to define common sense is what Gramsci labels a *war of position*. The more physical struggle involving a direct take over of the state apparatus, like the Russian revolution, Gramsci labels a *war of manoeuvre* (also known as war of movement which both Sassoon and Simon use).

### **War of Position and War of Movement**

I have earlier mentioned the central position of culture and ideology in Gramsci's understanding of society and social processes. Gramsci puts war of position against war of movement, the latter involving the take over of administrative and political institutions



(Sassoon 1980, Simon 1991). Because power and domination are so closely linked to culture and ideology, the war of movement can never be sufficient to change an existing hegemony or construct a new historic bloc. It is not enough for subordinated classes/groups to overthrow the state through, for example, a military coup. Hence, culture and ideology must also be conquered. Simon argues that the overthrow of the state must be succeeded by the so-called war of position which is a long-term project to win hegemony. It is through the war of position that a class/group dominates civil society, and it is thus not enough to acquire power over certain political institutions.

In the analysis of the war of position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Gramsci (1929-1935) differs between the strategy of the bourgeoisie and the strategy of the proletariat. The strategy of the bourgeoisie has a peculiarity which he calls *passive revolution*. According to Gramsci, the strategy of passive revolution is the bourgeois reaction when their hegemony is threatened, or if they have to reorganise to maintain their hegemony. A passive revolution is being carried out when relatively large changes in social and economic structures are undertaken. In this connection Simon (1991) argues that demands for social reforms on the part of the dominated groups can be met, although in a way that disorganises these forces. The bourgeoisie thus engages in passive revolution by going beyond its immediate economic interests and allowing the forms of its hegemony to change. A concrete way of doing this is by *transformism* (Gramsci 1929-1935). Gramsci's concept of transformism is an important aspect in understanding the maintenance of hegemony. He used the term to refer to the co-optation of alternative ideas until there ceased to be any substantive difference between them. Transformism is the process through which opposition and resistance to hegemony is absorbed into the dominant ideology, resulting in the 'decapitation' and 'annihilation' of the opposition (Gramsci 1929-1935). Gramsci points out that central to this transformation is the coercive arm of the state, as well as the institutions of civil society that develop ideological support for the ruling class/group. Cox and Sinclair (1996) define the process as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition. Thus, as an assertion, we can argue that the global promulgation of private codes of corporate conduct and "soft" legal discipline are illustrations of transformism. They are promoted as an efficient and rational means for giving globalisation a 'human face', but this conceals their function as safety valves for capital.

Hence, the suitable strategy of the subordinated classes/groups is an anti-passive revolution which is based on a constant extension of class/group and popular-democratic struggles. This revolution is a long-term process to extend the counter-hegemony of the

subordinated classes/groups and to create a new historic bloc. The transition to socialism<sup>3</sup> consists of a change in the social relations of civil society, towards working class hegemony, and of the transformation of the state apparatuses and institutions/organisations of civil society, towards a socialist state (Simon 1991).

In order to challenge the existing hegemony, classes/groups have to engage in this war of position by, for example, establishing and spreading alternative knowledge and ideology (Chin and Mittelman 2000), in other words, creating a counter-hegemony which can challenge and change the existing hegemony. To create a successful counter-hegemony it is necessary that the groups enter into alliances and form their own historic bloc. In this cultural war of position the *intellectuals* play a central role. Like critical theorists, Gramsci emphasises the role of intellectuals to challenge the “natural” existing order. According to Simon (1991), Gramsci divides the intellectuals into two groups, organic and traditional intellectuals. Organic intellectuals are linked to the existing mode of production. Traditional intellectuals are those that were the organic intellectuals of a former mode of production or a mode of production in the course of being superseded. Both traditional and organic intellectuals can be connected to the marginalised classes, but if a majority of them are connected to the marginalised classes, and not the dominating class, it is a sign of an upcoming revolution. The starting point for critical theorists is as we have seen to understand the society in order to change it to the better for the marginalised classes. Gramsci defines intellectuals widely, but in this context it mainly refers to teachers, researchers, artists, journalists, and organisers: “*All men are intellectuals [...] but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals*” (Gramsci 1929-1935:304). The task of the intellectuals is to construct “narratives” which either legitimate the existing order or persuade people to mobilise against it. In line with critical theory, as a researcher I saw the choices of either legitimating or mobilising against the existing order. One of the most important characteristics of any rising class/group is its struggle to conquer ideologically the traditional intellectuals and to “create” their own organic intellectuals.

### **Counter-Hegemony**

To Gramsci hegemony is never absolute; instead there will always be forces of counter-hegemony as a consequence of the intrinsic oppositions (Morton 2000). In a way hegemony

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<sup>3</sup> Socialism is a qualitative different mode of production from capitalism. Contrary to capitalism, in socialism the means of production are not in the hands of private people, but instead state owned and controlled. Hence, the laws of motion are different as well as the relation between different groups/classes.

stimulates counter-hegemonic forces at the same time as it absorbs the same forces. The arena for this hegemonic struggle is mainly civil society. Hence, counter-hegemonic forces are always established in relation to the existing hegemony, and thus hegemony can never be complete. Discussions concerning hegemonic power are closely related to discussions of resistance. The purpose of a counter-hegemonic force is to develop an organisational potential for establishing a rival historic bloc vis-à-vis the ruling historic bloc through a war of position. The counter-hegemonic forces must also develop alliances to be able to formulate political alternatives (Morton 2000).

### **Social Partnership**

Closely related to hegemony, historic bloc, war of position and passive revolution is the concept of social partnership. While hegemony refers to how a particular class/group in society can maintain its power and domination without revolts from subordinate classes/groups, social partnership can be understood as the way capital dominates in industrial relations in light of hegemony. The post-war class compromise called corporatism originated as the dominating classes/groups felt threatened by a strong trade union movement and the so-called socialist countries (Bergene 2007). By giving up the socialist project the labour movement gained better wages and working conditions. However, Bergene argues that increased capital mobility and the absence of new regulations put competitive pressure on immobile factors like labour. This has enabled TNC to escape the earlier compromise. Today's social partnership is facilitated by the widespread consent that globalisation is the only alternative and is further sustained due to the weakness of its alternatives (Bergene 2007). Both labour and the Government are entering regulatory undercutting in a "race to the bottom" to become attracting markets for TNCs and overseas investors. Along with other incentives, labour costs and industrial peace are important for the competitiveness of localities. This results in trade unions agreeing on wage restraints and prompt workers to sacrifice benefits for the sake of national interests.

Trade unions enter social partnership with expectations of influencing the decision-making, while capital enters social partnership with quite different objectives (Bergene 2007). Contrary to these expectations, Bergene claims that trade unions are not involved in decision-making and defining goals, but are instead called upon afterwards to give their consent and spread it to members. There has been a shift from negotiations towards consultation, she concludes. The success in consultation depends on the trade unions' expertise and resources, which many do not have. This results in an acceptance of managerial proposals, which in turn

is seen as a trade union weakness. Union demands are rarely heard, and social partnership often leads to cheap labour and no-strike agreements. Thus, trade unions resemble puppets giving their consent, weakening the labour movement (Bergene 2007). Social partnership furthermore weakens the role of independent trade unions. Trade unions which oppose social partnership are marginalised compared to trade unions that are willing to accept social partnership because the state and capitalists back the former (Bergene 2007).

### **The Bear that Wasn't**

*Segmentation theory* focus on analyses of the labour market. The segmentation of production processes is a crucial element for capitalists to control workplaces (Andræ and Beckman 1998). Segmentation theory explain how the working class is divided in the labour market, and can help me explain why workers accept differing working conditions and why they do not always unite in order to achieve common objectives (Peck 1996). Several aspects prevent wage workers from regarding themselves as a class. Examples of divisions are employees vs. unemployed, superiors vs. subordinates, women vs. men, “black” vs. “white”,<sup>4</sup> or divisions between workers with different degrees of qualifications (technical division of labour). These differences are both internal and external to capitalism. Internal differences complicate the solidarity between workers. This may explain why there are not constant struggles between workers and capitalists (Peck 1996, Castree et al. 2004). Furthermore, both Peck and Castree et al. claim that the segmentation of workers is a combined effect of three things: *Segmentation of labour demand*; when capitalists are looking for workers they are usually looking for not just any worker. The division of labour in the production process has lead to specific qualifications for each task. *Segmentation at the workplace*; after acquiring a job the worker is categorised, and may find it difficult to change career or move up the ranks. This does not, of course, apply to all workplaces, but it does for many. *Segmentation of labour supply*; Potential workers values and objectives are influenced by their family, education and friends. In this way, the already existing segmentation of workers is reinforced.

Peck (1996) divides the segmented labour market into three main sectors; primary-, secondary-, and tertiary labour markets. The primary market includes relatively stable full-time work, which is well-paid and demands higher education. The secondary market includes relatively stable full-time work, with medium to low pay without the same demands for education. The tertiary market involves unstable and temporary work, which is poorly paid

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I use black as opposed to caucasian which I refer to as white.

and does not demand any specific education or knowledge. The point is that segmentation of the labour market creates barriers between workers, and thus structures peoples' working life (Peck 1996).

A consequence of a segmented labour market, is that it is not easy for workers to unite and act on their interests in an united movement. The labour movement is not homogeneous. As I just mentioned, differences and distinctions are maintained by social learning, people assume different roles with attached identities. Differentiation between functions in the capitalist system creates groups with different status, which in turn obstructs the formation of alliances between workers in different places. Worth mentioning is that these obstructions are reinforced by workers also being neighbours, family members, consumers and friends (Castree et al. 2004).

Despite the differences between workers, we still talk about a labour movement when wage workers cooperate in order to improve their living conditions. Among the activists within the labour movement, it has always been important to emphasise the commonality of interest among workers in preventing competition. It has at the same time been necessary to play down other identities and emphasise their identity as workers (Castree et al. 2004). Opposing groups/classes have emphasised workers' differences.

The class struggle is basically workers' defence against capitalists who control their labour and appropriate the surplus-value (Peck 1996). There are numerous methods to counteract excessive control and discipline from capitalists in order for workers to increase their control and to satisfy their self-respect as autonomous individuals. Peck argues that these actions are carried out everyday at workplaces, and are the basis of the class struggle. In this way, the class struggle is also about continuously ongoing struggles at workplaces, which in most cases are invisible for outsiders.

However, the workplace struggle is not enough to secure a collective labour resistance on a national scale, since a majority of the conflicts are between a small number of people (Burawoy 1985). Instead, Burawoy argues, the national labour movement is being created and strengthened by their subordinated and discriminated role in society at large. It is from their position in society that workers realise their common identity as workers. The workplace struggles do, however, show workers their power to oppose the existing conditions. From this view, working conditions are determined by both labour relations at workplaces and labour regulations, which are influenced by wider power relations in society.

## **Generative Mechanisms of Capitalism**

In this part of the theoretical framework I will shed some light on why agents within capitalism behaves as they do. It is in this regard important to understand and to identify the generative mechanisms of capitalism in order to analyse it as a structure constraining and enabling agents.

### **Laws of motion**

The working class is paid to produce goods and services, which are later sold by the capitalists for a profit. The profit is appropriated by the capitalist class because they sell what the workers have produced for more than the workers are paid on the labour market. In this sense, Mandel (1973) argues, the working class is exploited by the capitalist class. The capitalists live off the profits they obtain from exploiting the working class whilst reinvesting some of their profits for the further accumulation of wealth. As pointed out earlier in the chapter 2, the capitalists have to reinvest the profit in order to stay capitalist because this is a necessary and internal relation in capitalism. Thus a capitalist is dependent upon making a profit. The profit dependency among capitalists leads to a quest for increased accumulation of capital through competition among capitalists. This process is called *laws of motion* and is the driving force of capitalism. It is the asymmetric relation between the classes (capitalists and workers) that enable profit from production. As already mentioned, it is in this relation money and commodities are used as inputs in order to create a surplus-value, and hence money and commodities become capital in this process (Marx 1847). The relation between capital and labour is, however, paradoxical to Marx, because at the same time as labour is necessary for creating profit, capitalists try to cut down on labour which in the end will decrease the rate of profit.

### **Immiseration**

The growth in the number of capitalists results in increasing competition (Marx 1847). In this competition productivity has to be increased, resulting in lower costs of production. Marx argues that a productivity increase is mainly achieved through a greater use of machinery and an increase in the division of labour. At the same rate as the division of labour increases, the work tasks are simplified. The growing use of machinery forces the same consequences upon

workers as the division of labour, but in a larger proportion (Marx 1847).<sup>5</sup> Although the retail sector does not see the same extent of skilled labour being replaced by machines, that this process goes on in other sectors will increase the pool of unemployed (Marx 1847). According to Marx, this pool of unemployed, living in uncertainty and/or destitution, is advantageous for capitalists because the price of labour-power is depressed due to over-supply. The capitalist can then really exploit workers. If the working class is divided between the employed and the unemployed (often termed the reserve army), the employed workers must succumb to wages below the value of labour and to worsening working conditions, because they are afraid of losing their job to someone from the pool of unemployed. The increasing division of labour and greater use of machinery results in increasing competition between workers, due to the fact that *one* worker can do the same work as many workers did before the tasks were simplified by machines. Additionally, the work becomes tasks that anyone can perform, which in turn lowers the costs of production, since it requires less training (Marx 1847). In the end this results in a decrease in wages as the price of a commodity is determined by its costs of production. However, when capital increases, the competition among workers increases more than among capitalists, because of the reasons stated above. Crises and depressions will strengthen this development even more because of even lower wages and more unemployed as a result of falling rates of profit (Marx 1847). It is important to note that immiseration is not an empirical question in the sense that it claims that workers will be worse off, as many critics have interpreted it. Therefore, wages are unlikely to fall in an absolute sense, but rather in a relative sense. Wages has increased since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but the economic gap between the rich and the poor has increased. Increased immiseration means increased polarisation. This will in the end turn the working class against the capitalist mode of production (Marx 1847). As a measure to prevent a falling rate of profit capitalism spreads to new areas, non-capitalist societies, in similar ways to how it first appeared in England.

### **Primitive Accumulation**

Since surplus-value is made through capital and more capital is made from surplus-value, the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value and surplus-value presupposes capitalist production. Capitalist production presupposes the relation between the owners of the means of

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<sup>5</sup> Schumpeter (1994) calls the replacement of human labour by machines for the “gale of innovation”, i.e. the displacement of human labour is the best alternative of the individual capitalist but it reduces the rate of profit for the capitalist class.

production and the “free” workers. Primitive accumulation is thus “*the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production*” (Marx 1867:875).

Private ownership of the means of production is an intrinsic part of capitalism. I will start with a brief summary of the *enclosure* process. This process can be claimed to have started the European privatisation and is thus the origin of capitalism, despite some traces of capitalist production going back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century (Marx 1867). The enclosure process started in England when feudal landlords privatised land, resulting in peasants losing their means of subsistence. At the same time the aristocracy regulated the right to make use of common land by the Mars Laws of 1671. According to Marx, the law restricted peasants’ use of the common land in favour of the land owners. Being faced with a situation with no access to neither arable land nor common land, the peasants had to sell their labour in exchange for wages to buy food and other basic commodities in order to survive. From this moment the means of production and the workers were separated, and the capitalist mode of production was established. The accumulation of capital resulted in new markets to be reinvested in, such as the industrial sector (Marx 1867). The latter sector had factories with “modern” machinery, high productivity and low piece costs (Wallerstein 1985). Due to the high number of landless peasants, there were plenty of people who could run the machinery for a minimum wage. Thus, Wallerstein argues, a new type of production occurred: mass-production for a mass-market in other areas than agriculture. From England capitalism spread to other parts of Europe and replaced the pre-capitalist mode of production (Marx 1867). Capitalism tends to spread from country to country, or region to region, in a search for new markets and/or cheap labour and raw materials.<sup>6</sup> There have been processes of primitive accumulation in Africa.

At the time of colonisation, the native population of Africa were largely devoted to livestock rearing and agriculture. This way of living was characterised by an unlimited access to arable land and outfields, and there was no starvation on the continent, even though the harvests were low due to a primitive form of agriculture. The standard of living was relatively low, but there were few incentives for the population to labour under the white man. So if the colonial powers did not change the socio-economic system in Africa, that is through privatisation and creating a need for money and thus waged work, the establishment of the capitalist mode of production would not have been possible. Hence, the colonial powers transformed a major part of the common land in the colonies into property owned by either the colonial state or private companies of the colonial state. The native people were placed in

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<sup>6</sup> There has been some discussion of whether capitalism spreads due to under consumption (Luxemburg) or from a falling rate of profit (Lenin).



reserves, which were too small to be able to feed them. Furthermore, the colonial powers introduced a tax system for each individual, even though the primitive agriculture did not yield monetary incomes. Through these different measures the colonial powers created a dependence among Africans on waged work. Through this process of primitive accumulation, capitalism was introduced into the African continent, although not all sectors/societies were incorporated into capitalism. Theorists, like Amin (1976), refer to this capitalism as *peripheral capitalism*.

### **Peripheral Capitalism**

Peripheral capitalism is a distorted form of capitalism which is common to underdeveloped countries due to the fact that capitalism was introduced from outside by the colonial states and did not developed from an internal logic of increased productivity (Amin 1976). Rather, capitalism was forced upon them by colonial powers, with the objective of preventing a *falling rate of profit* in the home country.<sup>6</sup> This was done through exporting cheap raw materials and commodities (with high profit), from the colonies, based on suppressing the value and price of the labour force. The result is a distorted capitalism compared to the capitalism in developed countries. Peripheral capitalism is characterised by extraversion, tertiary activities and labour-intensive industry, causing accumulation in centre countries in a cumulative process through unequal exchange. This partial transformation from pre-capitalism to peripheral capitalism results in a *disarticulated* society. According to Roberts and Hite (2000), de Janvry and Garramón characterise societies as disarticulated when they:

[S]erve as sources of cheap goods and labour for wealthier areas and at the same time are not able to generate a significant internal market that might foster local development. This is because the labour force does not earn enough to buy locally produced goods.  
(Robert and Hite 2000:179)

A disarticulated society is made possible by dualism (de Janvry and Garramón 1977). de Janvry and Garramón argue that through functional dualism, where the working class is semi-proletarianised, surplus-value is maximised:

[B]y collapsing the price of agricultural labour by an amount equal to the production of use-values by the worker's family in the subsistence plot. In this way, subsistence agriculture supplies cheap labour to commercial agriculture which, in turn, supplies cheap food to the urban sector where it sustains low wages.  
(de Janvry and Garramón 1977:179)

This means that capitalists can pay labour less than what they would need in order to be reproduced if they were fully proletarianised, because family members still live on the subsistence plot of land.

While peripheral capitalism originates in the primitive accumulation during colonialism, today it is largely shaped by economic globalisation and the accumulation by dispossession involved in neoliberal policies.

### **Economic Globalisation**

The concept of globalisation has been widely discussed over the past decades. Globalisation is a highly contested and controversial political concept. Some conceptualise globalisation as the process of an integrated world economy (Ohmae 2001), while others interpret it as an intensification of internationalisation (Hirst and Thompson 1999), and still others claim it to be a highly developed and sophisticated form of imperialism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Economic globalisation has up until now implied a large increases in TNCs, FDI as well as monetary transactions, and thus Gills (2000) characterises economic globalisation as a neoliberal policy. He argues that neoliberal economic globalisation is characterised by a global expanding and defending of capitalist interests as well as the support and protection of neoliberal states (also transforming non-neoliberal states into neoliberal) through supranational organisations resulting in securing the global increase of capital. Prominent features of economic globalisation are thus the growth and spread of TNCs, FDI and neoliberal policies. The international/South African chain stores in Oshakati are examples of TNCs since their corporate strategies are not linked to specific local or national markets as is the case with, for instance, the Chinese-owned shops.

### **Internal Contradictions**

With capitalism an efficient way of organising production was found which raised the standard of living. However, capitalism has internal contradictions making it an unstable system.

A wage is the price of a specific commodity (here the labour-power), which in turn is determined by the exchange-value of the commodity (Marx 1847). Marx argues that competition, on the one hand among buyers, and on the other hand among sellers, and finally between buyers and sellers, determine the price of a commodity. Supply and demand are regulated by commodity prices in relation to the costs of production. Thus, the result is: The

price and exchange-value of a commodity are determined by the costs of production.<sup>7</sup> The costs of production for labour consist of the costs of the worker's means of subsistence and reproduction. The cost(s) of (re)producing labour is the price of labour, which in turn is the minimum wage. Capital presupposes waged work just as waged work presupposes capital. Their relation is necessary; it is an intrinsic part of capitalism. Since capital and labour presuppose each other, do they also share the same interests? The interests of the capitalists and the workers are the opposite. Not only in relation to wealth, but also because capitalists need to increase the exploitation of workers in order to expand their profit (Marx 1847).

Marx (1867) and Castree et al. (2004) argue that labour power is a "pseudo"-commodity due to it being embodied in a living and reflecting being; man. The consequence is that labour is only a temporary commodity, i.e. when the worker is at work. Furthermore, humans also have desires and a will which in turn influence how work is performed and under what circumstances work is accepted. It is the relation between capitalists and workers that defines the labour market, where supply and demand for labour meet (Castree et al. 2004).

Since capitalism is characterised by an internal and necessary relation between capitalists and workers, it gives them both a potential power in negotiations. Neither capitalists nor workers have any chance of getting all their desires fulfilled. Without regulation capitalists and workers would make unreasonable demands to each other as individuals, although not as classes due their mutual dependence. As an example, capitalists would advocate long workdays and low wages (if any at all), while workers would advocate short workdays and high wages. Castree et al. (2004) argue that if workers and capitalist are going to have a tolerable relation to each other we need social regulation and labour regulation.

### **Social Regulation**

Theories of regulation explain the economic structures of capitalism and how these change over time, and reject the market equilibrium as an organisational force of capitalism. This rather emphasises social reproduction as the central necessity within the capitalistic dynamic (Peck 1996, Peck and Tickell 1994). *Social reproduction* is here understood as:

The short-and long-term process whereby people undertake the non-biological and non-physiological practices necessary to sustain themselves. The process involves socialization, leisure, education, training, friendships, family relations and a raft of

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<sup>7</sup> Periods of prices below and above the costs of production will over time compensate each other (Marx 1847).

institutions, especially outside the workplace. Social reproduction involves the formation of identities, cultural norms, and mores among individuals and groups.

(Castree et al. 2004:263)

Peck and Tickell (1994) further claim that social reproduction can be reached through different modes of regulation. A mode of regulation consists of an articulation of standards, institutions (both private and governmental), habits and everyday activities (which in turn makes individuals act) with the objective of achieving economic stability. Capital is dependent on stability and predictability, through formalisation and regulation, in order to make profitable investments (Lukács 1923). Historic periods of economic expansion and stability are called *regimes of accumulation*. Regimes of accumulation culminate in crisis, stagnation or instability, when social reproduction is not longer ensured within the existing mode of regulation. Establishing a new mode of regulation and a new regime of accumulation will take place (Peck 1996, Peck and Tickell 1994). Modes of regulation represent temporary solutions to crises, although the crisis tendencies do not disappear. Crises do resurface again after a period of time due to the inherent contradictions of capitalism (Peck and Tickell 1994). Modes of regulation are considered to be the result of active human struggles, emphasising agents' actions and possibilities to transform the structures. Different modes of regulation can exist in relation to *one* regime of accumulation, and thus modes of regulation vary over time, within a country, and between countries (Peck 1996, Peck and Tickell 1994).

A mode of regulation involves both capitalists and employees, and also people outside the workforce such as pensioners and unemployed whose social existence is also regulated (Castree et al. 2004). The regulation is both implicit and explicit; it is also both planned and unintended. Castree et al. claim that all social regulation involves objects of regulation, institutions of regulation and regulatory mechanisms. The state is the largest institution of regulation and negotiates the needs and desires of social agents (companies, workers and others). The state regulates due to its monopoly over legislation, and mediates due to its alleged neutral position. In this context it is important to remember the discussion on hegemony and historic bloc above as Engels (in Creaven 2000:255) points out:

The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slave, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labour by capital.

The objective of regulation is to secure the conditions needed for further economic growth and to avoid widespread dissatisfaction with the existing system. However, supranational institutions, like World Trade Organisation (WTO), can in some cases exercise as much power as governments in processes of regulation (Castree et al. 2004). The institutions of regulation can not always handle capitalist labour market problems successfully.

In the regulation of companies and capitalists, the Government establishes structural conditions. These structural conditions are formal laws and regulations which specify what companies can and cannot do, both when it comes to their relation to other companies and their relation to workers. Workers' rights, company rights and pension rights are all central elements within these structural conditions. These rights prevent the worst encroachments on workers' rights, for example child labour, at the same time as they maintain some rights for companies (Castree et al. 2004). In order to make these rights functional and effective they have to be monitored and controlled, which in turn presuppose strong state authorities. Furthermore, according to Castree et al., the Government can influence both the degree and the type of activities carried out by companies in the economy, which is mainly done through taxes, interest rates, import- and export tariffs, and subsidies to new business. The Government can use both disincentives and incentives in the regulation of capitalists and workers.

The regulation of labour by state authorities implies among other things that the Government grants basic work rights and working conditions, both within the public and the private sector (Castree et al. 2004). Examples of work rights and working conditions can be the right to unionise or the right to meal intervals. The Government also plays a crucial part when it comes to the social reproduction outside the workplaces. Without the Government's responsibility on the issue of social reproduction, basic needs like housing would be hard for a lot of workers and their dependents to satisfy.

State authorities also regulate the conditions for other agents than companies and workers; individuals who are potential future workers, like children and unemployed, and individuals who are permanently outside the workforce, like pensioners and disabled people. Important regulations in this respect are the educational system, the pension fund, unemployment benefit fund, and welfare (Castree et al. 2004).

However, social regulation is not perfect. Social regulations can never eliminate specific contradictions within capitalist societies. These contradictions are inherent in capitalism, and from a critical realist perspective, they are generative mechanisms of capitalism. Social regulation can, however, alleviate these contradictions for some time.

Furthermore, social regulation stems from a political process involving many agents, and this results in unpredictability and a possible discrepancy between objectives and achievements. In turn this can result in protests from companies, workers or other agents at different levels and in different economic sectors (Castree et al. 2004).

Workers and capitalists/managers are always developing a relationship to each other at every workplace. Through this relationship, both workers and capitalists are using their respective power repertoire in order to affect the labour market regulations. Each workplace has its own workplace dynamics, seen as the interaction between workers and capitalist/manager. This reflects how regulations are being designed and its consequences at each workplace. Hence, local labour markets are unique (Peck 1996, Castree et al. 2004). The point is that the local context decides how the implementation and the consequences of labour market regulations look like in different local settings, which in turn influences future labour regulations. This dialectic development is the *analytic dualism* of critical realism outlined earlier. The structure, labour regulations, lays the premisses for agents' actions, capitalists/managers, workers and trade unions, which in turn reproduce or transform the structures.

Despite that the world has become more and more integrated through globalisation; *places* still occupy a central role in the understanding of the capitalist labour market. Workers and companies may not be bound to specific places, but they are based in specific places (Castree et al. 2004). For instance, my interviews with workers could not take place in general in Namibia, they had to be conducted somewhere. Castree et al. argue that most workers neither have the time nor the money to travel long distances, thus a majority lives near the workplace. In general, all production is place-based, that is the production is performed in a specific place; the workplace. At the workplace labour, materials and technology are combined. The social reproduction is also place-based through family, school and hospital. Furthermore, the consumption of goods is carried out locally for the majority of the people. The acts of buying and selling goods are done in physically located places. Hence, labour markets and labour regulation are practiced locally. Buying and selling labour is carried out where workers and capitalist are located. Despite the fact that institutions of regulation often are "extra-local", the mechanisms of regulation are often locally designed and negotiated. For labour regulations to have an impact on the labour market they must be locally adapted. A place can thus be interpreted as:

[T]he sphere where local and non-local (national and international) systems of rules, norms, customs, legal structures, and regulatory mechanisms intersect to shape and institutionalize the behaviour of both workers and employers.

(Martins in Castree et al. 2004:80)

However, it is important to notice two aspects connected to the *local* in the regulation process. The first aspect is that labour regulations are only local in their practice, that is extra-local regulation initiatives are being locally implemented. The second aspect is that extra-local regulations are being influenced by local regulation experiences, which in turn are later considered when designing new regulations (Castree et al. 2004). This means that the consequences of social regulation vary from place to place, but this does not mean that the control over labour regulations is at a local level. Castree et al. argue that it is important to remember that labour market regulations, and also their consequences, result from relations between local and extra-local institutions and mechanisms. First, many local institutions are part of larger extra-local institutions. Local institutions of regulation are thus influenced and shaped, to various degrees, by extra-local institutions. Secondly, many regulatory mechanisms are implemented at an extra-local level. Despite the fact that the consequences of such implementations differ from one place to another, they are extra-local regulations in their origin. It is labour regimes that connect the national (regulatory mechanisms, regulation objects, regulation institutions) to the local (workplace relations).

In other words, places are unique, but at the same time open and mutually dependent. Labour regimes emphasise the relation between labour and capital as determined by local and extra-local dynamics. On the basis of this it is clear that workers, households, companies, civil society, governmental and non-governmental institutions are all shaping labour regimes. Work regimes are the combined result of the unique and specific relations between companies, workers, trade unions and regulation institutions which creates labour processes. At the same time, work regimes influence relations at the workplace level, which I will label *workplace work regime*.

Modes of regulations are a central aspect in work regimes. The relations at workplaces are another central aspect in reproducing or transforming work regimes. Thus, capitalist interests in getting labour to perform in accordance with the production objectives become important.

## **The Hidden Abode of Production**

This section discusses how labour regulations and working conditions can be conceptualised. It also tries to clear up the theoretical concepts of labour regime, work regime, factor regime and the politics of production. Due to there being several versions of the concept, I will in what follows simply use ‘regime’ when referring to all of them.

## **The Web of Regime Concepts**

Burawoy (1985) uses the concepts of *The Politics of Production* and *Factory Regime* in his analysis of labour relations both in factories and at a national level. A factory regime is the organisation of the labour process and the regulation of production relations. Factory regimes then appear to be both the labour regulation at a national level as well as how these regulations are reflected at workplaces. The concept Politics of Production is his attempt of combining base and superstructure. The politics of the production are an inseparable combination of its economic, political and ideological aspects.

Andrae and Beckman (1998) draw inspiration from Burawoy’s work and use the concept of *Labour Regime*. Labour regime is conceptualised as the regulation of the relations between capital and labour. At the same time they identify labour regimes at the enterprise level and generalise them to groups of companies and to locations. They use the concept labour regime to summarise the complex of institutions, rules and practices that regulate the relations between capital and labour as they manifest themselves in the workplace.

von Holdt (2005) uses The Apartheid Work Regime when he characterises the relations at workplaces in South Africa. von Holdt also connects the labour relations to the broader relations in society. In this way he combines both labour regulations, ethnic relations and workplace relations in his conceptualisation of work regime. Like Andrae and Beckman, von Holdt draws inspiration from Burawoy’s work.

The capacity of the national labour movement to take action depends to a considerable extent on what kind of regime and politics of production that exists, and it also affects and is affected by the labour relations at the workplaces. National regimes vary and the exact form taken is a result of by the power relations between the involved agents (labour, capital, and regulatory institutions). These power relations are in turn influenced by the dominating ideology (Castree et al. 2004) and by hegemony, historic bloc and resistance between dominating and dominated classes. Furthermore, dominating discourses on labour issues may also influence the power relations. Hence, due to the fact that regimes are based on a dynamic



mix of social relations and power structures, regimes are not static. Instead Castree et al. argue that regimes are constantly changing.

Capitalist societies are characterised by a multitude of regimes. Regimes can differ between countries, while relations at workplaces can differ within the same industry in the same country or even city. This leads to a great variation in workers' course of action between different workplaces (Castree et al. 2004).

Burawoy (1985) differentiates between several kinds of factory regimes. The shift between factory regimes are consequences of: a) Conflicts between workers and capitalists at workplaces, b) competition between companies, c) social regulation, and d) the power relations between the Government, labour and capitalists in the struggle for hegemony. In this connection, I will add that the competition between workers influences the shape of a factory regime just as much as the competition between companies. As mentioned earlier, competition between workers worsen the working conditions. Competition between workers must thus be added as a fifth point in addition to the four identified by Burawoy. Across time and space Burawoy (1985) identifies several ideal type factory regimes and three of them are:

- *Market Despotism* means that all relations in society and at the workplace are controlled by the market. Everything is commercialised, leaving workers with little space for negotiation. The workers are dependent on the capitalists, and the role of the Government is to prepare the way for the production. The Government should not have any direct involvement in the production process, or in workplace relations. The Government rather has the role as "Night watchman".
- *Company State Regime* is Burawoy's name for a factory regime in which the Government regulates labour at workplaces, for instance by not allowing trade unions and strikes. However, if trade unions do exist and act it is a reasonable chance of overthrowing the Government. The state is strong, implying a relatively weak market. I believe this to be the dominant factory regime in contemporary China.
- *Bureaucratic Regime* arose with Fordism. The assembly line makes it easy for the workers to shut down the production process, because it needs to operate continuously. Thus, workers have great bargaining power. In order to prevent this the capitalists try to decrease the individual worker's bargaining power by running negotiations with trade unions. These negotiations should not be held place too often.

Andræ and Beckman (1998) also add *Corporatist Regime*. In corporatist regimes, trade unions have, more or less, gained monopoly in the representation of workers in negotiations.

Corporatist regimes can be divided into state-centred and a more social form of “corporatism”. In more state-centred societies trade unions enter into agreements with the Government which are mainly dictated by the Government. In the more socially shaped corporatist regimes, trade unions enter into agreements with the Government based on their own strength. The first form, which is a more authoritarian labour regime, mainly occurs in fascist societies or in underdeveloped countries. The second form mainly exists in capitalist welfare states (Andræ and Beckman 1998). A regime can be more or less bureaucratic, corporate or any of the other forms of regimes (some of the forms are mutually exclusive). What kind of regime that exists in a country is partly influenced by what kind of labour relations that exist at workplaces. The variety of workplace relations, within a country or economic sector, can result in difficulties for labour mobilisations, through causing further fragmentation and segmentation.

According to Burawoy (1985), the transformation from one factory regime to another arises from changed circumstances, for example, changed market or changed technology, and from how these changes are met by different agents. It is conflicts that spur the transformation of one factory regime into another.

Regimes can be put under pressure from both trade unions and companies, and can also be re-regulated by the Government through new legislations. The conditions under which workers offer their labour power depend on their bargaining power, both at the individual workplace and in the labour market. This bargaining power is based upon a complex balance between social and political forces in society (Andræ and Beckman 1998). Thus, the ability to and success in organising are important instruments in order to strengthen the bargaining power. From this perspective, the regulation and control of trade unions are central issues.

All of the abovementioned regime concepts have a strength in including agency and structural aspects as well as a scale dimension. However, not only does the different names given to the same phenomenon make this a confusing theoretical field, but this scale dimension can also be a source of critique. As seen above, factory regime, labour regime and work regime are all combining the labour relations at workplaces and the national labour regulations in their conceptualisation. This needs to be cleared up. The abovementioned regime concepts are also descriptive tools and thus not readily transferable, while I will attempt to conceptualise more explanatory ideal types focusing on the dynamics of abstract structural relations.

## **New Regime Concepts**

The relation between capitalists/managers and workers at workplaces which defines working conditions are from now conceptualised as *Workplace Work Regime*. The labour regulations formed by the power relations between state, capital and labour are conceptualised as *Work Regime*. Workplace work regimes and work regimes influence each other, and the main framework within which this takes place is conceptualised as *Labour Regime*. Labour regime entails the hegemonic struggle and ideology. Central aspects in the ideology are accumulation regime and mode of regulation. Workplace work regimes exist at the local scale of workplace or group of workplaces. Work regimes exist at the national scale due to the regulatory institutions, while labour regime can exist at a global scale since ideology is global.



## **5. Hegemony in Namibia**

To understand why workers accept and actually work under the different working conditions in the retail sector of Oshakati, and to understand why capitalists practice the specific labour relations in the workplaces, we need to understand the politics behind, as it is practiced by both the political and economic elite. In other words, how do national and global structures and struggles for power influence policies and decisions of agents in Namibia, and how does this affect the agents' actions in the different retail categories? As we have seen I will employ theories of hegemony and social partnership to illustrate this. To better understand how the concepts of hegemony and social partnership can explain the present political and economic context we need to start in the past.

Until 1968 Namibia was called South West Africa, but here I will for simplicity only use Namibia. From 1884 to 1915 Namibia was colonised by Germany, and from 1915 to 1990 South Africa had the colonial power. On 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1990, Namibia achieved its independence as the last African colony. Namibia is a potentially rich country with great natural resources. Namibia's history during the colonial era is very much about exploitation, of nature as well as of people. The living conditions for the majority of Namibia's population during the colonial era were characterised by extensive use of repression and control, and the working conditions resembled slavery (Cronje and Cronje 1979). South Africa's colonisation of Namibia does not only make sense as a form of imperialism or in the Greek meaning of hegemony; the dominance that a state has over other states. At a closer look the South African strategy to incorporate Namibia as the fifth province of South Africa was so sophisticated that several aspects can be understood using Gramsci's concept of hegemony. I will now describe the South African rule in Namibia and the country's struggle for independence. I will also describe, in general terms, how Namibia has developed from the time of independence until today. I will not analyse the German rule although it would be interesting, due to time and space constraints.

### **The South African Rule**

During a six-year period, from 1915 until 1921, Namibia was ruled by South African martial law. In 1921 South Africa became the trustee for the League of Nations' (LN) mandate over Namibia, but behind this administrator role there was a wish to incorporate Namibia as the fifth province of South Africa (Diener and Graefe 2001). This wish would be an increasingly prominent feature in the following years. Already during German rule a migrant labour

system with spatial and social segregation was created, which was further developed during South Africa's reign.

When South Africa invaded and took control over Namibia, sixty percent of the area was immediately designated for capitalist agriculture and mining, and was inhabited by white people. At the same time a process started with the aim of squeezing the black population, approximately ninety percent of the population, into *homelands* (a majority in the north, but also some in the south and central Namibia) which made up less than ten percent of the country (Diener and Graefe 2001). Thus, geographically speaking, Namibia was divided into white and black homelands. When the black population was dispossessed of their land and squeezed into homelands, which was located in areas with low potentials for high agricultural productivity, such as deserts or semi-deserts, a new necessity arose: The need to make money and thus find waged work in order to buy the necessities they needed to survive. This is an example of primitive accumulation, that is the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production (Marx 1867), in this case arable land. Furthermore, a set of laws and rules were established to limit the mobility of the black population. The black population could not live in the white areas unless they had a permit which was often handed out together with a work contract. Thus, about two thirds of Namibia's black workers were migrants since they only had the permission to stay in the white areas as long as they had a work contract with (Cronje and Cronje 1979). From a Gramscian perspective the process of geographically segregating the native Namibians can be seen as a strategy for averting the seeds of resistance to be sown and for concealing their common interest. By keeping them apart their collective strength and their sense of common identity were weakened, and their sense of difference was increased.

According to Smith (1986) and Winterfeldt (2002), the South African rule only acknowledged three legal categories of black workers. The first category, which contained very few, consisted of those workers who, under strict control, were allowed to stay permanently on white-owned farms or in cities. The second category consisted of labour migrants from the homelands in southern and central Namibia. In the third category, which were the largest, contract workers were mainly from Ovamboland in the north, and they were used to fill in the gaps that the first two categories could not fill. Workers from this category received a significantly lower wage compared to the first two categories because they were regarded as inferior (Smith 1986). This can be seen as a strategy used by the South African rule further weaken the workers' conception of common interests, and thus undermine any form of common resistance.

In 1926 the South African rule tightened its grip on the recruitment of workers from the last category by creating two labour organisations; Southern and Northern Labour Organisation (SLO and NLO). SLO and NLO were in 1943 merged into South West African Native Labour Agency (SWANLA) (Winterfeldt 2002). This labour contract system was managed by SWANLA's special offices which were established in the black areas. SWANLA and its precursors (SLO and NLO) dispossessed workers, by law, of their possibilities of finding a job on their own. Winterfeldt also writes that the organisations divided the workers into groups according to the needs of the labour market, by assigning them to categories A, B or C, which in turn depended on their health and physical strength. The A-category got the highest paid work, while the C-category had to settle with the lowest. This is an example of how segmentation of labour demand can be practiced. All black male workers below sixty-five, and without any serious disabilities, had to apply for work at these offices. If they did not, they simply could not find the means to survive. At registration, workers had to leave personal information to the Government and blacklists of mobilising "troublemakers" were also made (Cronje and Cronje 1979). Separating workers by health and strength, which lead to a three-tier system, is another example of how the South African rule sought to weaken the workers' common interests and thus undermine any form of common resistance. The establishment of SWANLA offices and the creation of blacklists reveal how the South Africans ruled by coercion rather than by consent. Through this system Namibia's black workers participated in the white economy for short periods of time, just to return to their family in the black homelands. In the contract system, the black workers were semi-proletarians and this made it possible to maintain a *disarticulated* society (de Janvry and Garramón 1977) so common in *peripheral capitalism* (Amin 1976). As I mentioned in the theoretical framework a semi-proletarian is understood as a worker who is paid less than he/she needs to survive and to reproduce. This is possible because the worker's family runs a subsistence farm. The semi-proletarian workers received wages when they were working in the white areas, but the wages were not enough for them to survive, let alone to foster local development in, for example, Ovamboland which thus stayed underdeveloped and served as a source of cheap labour.

It was also in the interest of the South African rule to ensure that poverty became permanent in black areas, especially Ovamboland<sup>8</sup>, and that agriculture never exceeded subsistence, but rather stayed below. This because the commercial farms were then ensured

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<sup>8</sup> Ovamboland was seen as the most important homeland since a majority of the native Namibians were Ovambo people.

cheap labour which in turn supplies cheap food to the urban sector where it sustains low wages. This is an example of *functional dualism* (de Janvry and Garramón 1977). According to Winterfeldt (2002), to maintain this structure the South African rule had only to keep the black homelands separated from the rest of the country both in an economic and geographical sense. The ecological circumstances did the rest. The rationale behind this strategy was to keep the northern (also the southern and central areas, but the northern was seen as the most important) areas isolated. *The Red Line*<sup>9</sup> was constantly pushed further north, which in turn decreased the reserve population's possibilities to sustain themselves. According to Winterfeldt, the only black people allowed to pass *The Red Line* were contract workers on their way to, or returning from, twelve or eighteen month periods of heavy and poorly paid work. The low wage was, together with the delimited periods of work contract, the only thing that separated this contract system from slavery. Winterfeldt points out the rest of the criteria making up a slavery-based mode of production, were fulfilled in an indisputable way. Maybe this is worse because in the slavery mode of production the slave is seen as an asset and is thus taken care of. During Apartheid the workers were overexploited and then sent back to the reserve with very little money, and the capitalists did not care what happened to them. Women were not allowed to pass *The Red Line* as their labour power was not interesting. The work to be done in the *Police Zone*<sup>10</sup> was mainly heavy, physical toil, and if the need for service workers may arise, this was also mainly done by male contract workers. According to Winterfeldt, this contract system resulted in families breaking up for long and recurrent periods of time. For both men and women, this meant large changes to their lifestyle, which generated social problems. In the white areas, the black workers lived under constant surveillance from the police and the employers, both during and after work. The Apartheid Work Regime, under which the black workers worked, is something that I will return to later. Every tendency towards revolt or demonstration was efficiently stopped by the coercive power of the South African rule (Cronje and Cronje 1979). The whole extensive control system exercised over the native Namibians shows how much the South African rule in the early years based their hegemony on coercion. The most important aspect of this phenomenon is, however, the South African strategy of coercively controlling civil society, and thus minimising the possibilities of organised resistance around a counter-hegemony. The fact that the South African rule had a strong police and military force made them able to rule through

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<sup>9</sup> Between the directly controlled and inhabited white part of Namibia, which was usually called *Police Zone*, and the northern area, including Ovamboland, a border was made. From 1919 it was called *The Red Line*. Along this border military picket was set up (Winterfeldt 2002). This shows how the South Africans ruled by coercion.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 4.



coercion rather than consent. Ruling by consent is stronger and provides more stability, but since the South African rule was based on occupation this was not possible. To occupy means taking control over someone against their will and this is not possible with consent. Nonetheless the South African rule still tried this strategy at a later point in time.

As Bauer (1998) argues, a new era in South African politics towards Namibia began in 1978. Concerning labour, an amendment to the labour law allowed black workers to form and join trade unions for the first time. However, the new legislations still restricted the freedom and the movement of workers and trade unions' political affiliation was also prohibited. Bauer points out that this led to a crumbling of trade unions inside Namibia. Outside Namibia, however, trade unions grew in strength through educating and training future trade unionists. The new era of politics appears to involve attempts at co-optation when considering why the South Africans all of a sudden allowed trade unions inside Namibia. This amendment is an attempt to stop widespread complaints by arguing in favour of obliging. It is also an attempt of a gradual shift from coercion to consent, and hence a strengthening of their hegemony. But a complete legislation would give trade unions too much power.

### **The Counter-Hegemonic Force of SWAPO**

The rationale behind Apartheid and segregation was to separate, and to confine the different tribes into economically, politically and socially marginalised “cells”. The main objective for doing this was to create destitute and desperate army of cheap, mobile and powerless workforce<sup>11</sup>, for the reasons given above. One of the most important events in the history of resistance, and the start of a counter-hegemony, was the establishment in 1957 of *Ovamboland People's Congress* in Cape Town, South Africa (LaRRI 1999). It was founded by approximately two hundred Namibian workers who, for different reasons, ended up in South Africa. The organisation was partly functioning as a trade union (LaRRI 1999). In the beginning the organisation tried to improve the working conditions for the Ovambo contract workers. The organisation transformed itself in 1958 into *Ovamboland People's Organisation* (OPO) in connection with its establishment in Windhoek (LaRRI 1999, LaRRI 2006). The organisation itself was never forbidden, but was oppressed and members were harassed from day one. Chosen to lead OPO was Sam Nujoma, who later was to become Namibia's first president. The struggle now changed focus towards *self-determination and national unity, and freedom from poverty and exploitation*. In 1960 OPO again changed name to *South West Africa People's Organisation* (SWAPO) (Cronje and Cronje 1979). Cronje and Cronje points

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<sup>11</sup> With workforce I mean all the people in these homelands that were able to work.

out that the change from OPO to SWAPO can be explained by the fact that OPO had their roots among Ovambo contract workers, and fought against the economic part of Apartheid. SWAPO's main target was, however, to liberate the Namibian people from the South African rule, and thus ensure a national liberation. This can be seen as a national-popular struggle as SWAPO involved a national interests and did not restrict the struggle to class. This liberation movement was rapidly recognised as "*the sole and authentic representative of Namibia's people*" at the international level (Diener and Graefe 2001:23), and received massive support in their struggle against the South African rule. Thus, SWAPO appealed to a broader range of the population than OPO did, although its basis was still contract workers (Cronje and Cronje 1979). Because of the small and scattered civil societies (black homelands), and the extensive surveillance of them, it is no surprise that the fight for a counter-hegemony started abroad. In a Gramscian terminology, the establishment of OPO, and later SWAPO, was a kind of joint venture between Namibian traditional intellectuals and contract workers. As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, Gramsci refers to, among others, organisers as intellectuals with the task of mobilising against the existing order. At the beginning OPO only focused on one aspect, the labour contract system of Apartheid and a small part of the native Namibians, the Ovambo. The transformation into SWAPO can be seen as alliance building across specific interests (better working conditions for Ovambo contract workers) to the benefit of the common interests of all (national independence), as in the Russian revolution, and can in line with Gramsci's terminology be termed a *national-popular* struggle. This national-popular struggle resulted in a much broader participation. In other words, this is the making of a *historic bloc*. When OPO became SWAPO, and thus started a national-popular struggle, the war of position in Namibia was won in a sweep. Almost all Namibians were in favour of independence. But how take the power away from the South African rule?

SWAPO's work at this time was affected, to a certain degree, by international circumstances. When the LN was replaced by the *United Nations* (UN), after the Second World War, LN's mandate<sup>12</sup> over Namibia was at the same time transferred to the UN which in 1978 proclaimed that Namibia should prepare for independence (du Pisani 2000). South Africa, however, never accepted that LN's mandate should be transferred to the UN. Instead, du Pisani points out, South Africa made it clear that they wanted Namibia as the fifth province of South Africa. Resulting from a dwindling support at the international arena, South Africa

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<sup>12</sup> "Neither the Mandate Agreement nor Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations defined the exact legal nature of a mandatary's powers. [...] While the League sought to improve the standards of colonial rule, the UN sought to liquidate colonialism entirely." (du Pisani 2000:61)

slowly tried to shift their rule towards consent and away from coercion in order to obtain more support and get Namibia to volunteer as fifth province. This prolonged tug of war between the UN and South Africa resulted, in 1966, in armed struggles breaking out in Namibia. Behind this armed struggle was SWAPO and their armed branch *People's Liberation Army of Namibia* (PLAN) (Saunders 2007). However, SWAPO was not a military organisation, but rather a political organisation that set out to win the hearts and minds of civil society through a non-violent independence struggle. The armed struggle by PLAN, which grew out of SWAPO, could be termed *war of movement*, in the Gramscian sense. SWAPO's political work to win hegemony/consent in civil society is termed *war of position*, which is something I will return to below. As Gramsci (Sassoon 1980) pointed out, war of movement and war of position are often complementary to each other. In contrast to the Russian revolution, the war of movement (PLAN) was in Namibia only a supplement to SWAPO's war of position. That is, I interpret the armed struggles as complementary to the war of position, and not primary as a strategy for direct take over based on the fact that PLAN was founded on the back of frustration over the prolonged disagreement between South Africa and UN. Further substantiation can be found in the fact that the South African army was overwhelming both in size, skills and equipment. Although gaining state power was the main objective, seeking a military take over seems too naive. Thus, SWAPO's main focus was the war of position. To answer the question above; SWAPO sought support for independence at the international level at the same time as PLAN engaged in the armed struggle, the war of movement. SWAPO won the war of position over the South African rule at the international level and used it to win the war of movement, that is, to gain state power in Namibia in 1990.<sup>13</sup>

After independence a new war of position ensued as a result of dissonance over how Namibia should develop, and what the role of international capital, Namibian capitalists, Namibian workers, peasants, farmers and so on should be. At the same time SWAPO did not achieve a complete victory in the war of position due to resistance from the economic elite, mainly South African businessmen and companies. SWAPO's earlier ideology during the war of position had been *Namibia's independence*; now having achieved that, SWAPO had to take into account the different agents and interests in society in order to win the war of position. This is something I will come back to.

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<sup>13</sup> Note that it is not common to use this concept on an international arena.

At the same time that PLAN started their armed struggle, SWAPO was able to perform political work vis-à-vis civil society inside Namibia, which, in Diener and Graefe's (2001) view, was made possible by Namibia's international position as under UN mandate. The domestic political work was successful and resulted in absorbing other, smaller, organisations into SWAPO. Thus, SWAPO's position was strengthened in most parts of Namibia. This alliance building by SWAPO, to strengthen its position as a counter-hegemonic force, is again an example of national-popular struggle. However, as Bauer (1998) points out, SWAPO's domestic work was under strict surveillance, and members were often harassed by the secret police, who also found excuses for charging the leaders. The coercive rule made mobilisation difficult and actively undermined alliance-building on the part of opposing classes/groups. In 1979 the harassment, torture and murder of SWAPO activists, and finally the bombing of SWAPO's office in Windhoek, led to a temporary abandonment of SWAPO's political work inside Namibia. SWAPO's deputy national chairman claimed that the party could "*no longer guarantee the lives of people and the protection of property*" (Bauer 1998:68). About the same time, the South African rule also tried to persuade SWAPO into condemning the armed struggles and instead enter into negotiations, which in my view is a strategy of shifting focus from confrontation towards "peaceful" negotiations, and thus to reach consensus. This can be interpreted as a strategy of passive revolution from the South African rule, as they engaged in compromises with SWAPO in an attempt to weaken resistance. SWAPO's objectives can be seen as an antithesis to the South African thesis while the compromise is the synthesis. It is also an attempt by the South African rule to start ruling by consent instead of coercion.

In 1975 the so-called *Turnhalle Conference* started, and South African leaders nominated the participants (Tapscott 2001). Political parties were not asked, but instead representatives from different ethnic categories were asked to participate. According to Tapscott, the negotiations were strictly controlled by the South African rule, and were not democratic. SWAPO, which was placed on the sideline, characterised the negotiations as a farce. The changes only benefited a small number of blacks who had relatively high incomes and soon became *the new collaborative elite* (Tapscott 2001). The new collaborative elite became part of the nascent historic bloc. The Turnhalle Conference can thus be seen as another example of a strategy of passive revolution or what Gramsci called *transformism*. The South African rule tried to weaken the adversary by allowing some changes and co-opting arguments from the resistance. The formation of a new collaborative elite was meant to divide the counter-hegemonic forces, and create a new ally in their own hegemonic struggle.

Because of the legislation against affiliation between trade unions and political parties inside Namibia, the establishment of National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) had to start abroad. The creation of NUNW, in the early 1970s, cannot be disconnected from SWAPO. Bauer (1998) argues that SWAPO's "Department of Labour", and the NUNW were one and the same. NUNW was just a "Name on paper" (Bauer 1998:59). Bauer emphasises the disagreement around whether NUNW should be a free trade union or affiliated to SWAPO led to enormous internal problems within SWAPO and NUNW. SWAPO prevented NUNW from electing their own leaders, and thus continued to exercise control over the trade union which was what they wanted. Furthermore, a SWAPO leader stated in 1981 that: "a trade union in an independent Namibia would perhaps upset the economy and politics through strikes" (Bauer 1998:60). While a trade union student noted: "The purpose of trade unions in post-independent Namibia will be determined by the objectives of the state" (Bauer 1998:59). This implies a change in SWAPO's objective which breaks with the earlier ideology. This change is important for how present-day Namibia looks like.

The earlier attempts at establishing trade unions inside Namibia failed and the real start of a trade union movement inside Namibia is dated to the mid-1980s.<sup>14</sup> SWAPO's objective of keeping NUNW as part of the party gives them a tighter grip on the broad masses of workers, and thus strengthens a future hegemony through spreading consent. I will return to this later.

Capital had proposed changes to the labour regulations in the late 1970s (Bauer 1998). The mining industry was at the forefront in pointing out the need for a fully proletarianised, settled and trained workforce. This is in contrast to the semi-proletarian, transient and unskilled Apartheid workforce. Primitive accumulation was thus completed with the abolishment of the contract system, and this "freeing" of workers increased the number of unemployed. According to Macfarlane (in Bauer 1998) they were also concerned about a future black government and wanted to act acceptably. The Chamber of Mines produced a paper which stated the desire to improve labour relations and minimise labour conflicts by changing the labour framework and shifting attitudes. From this, organisations were formed to improve labour relations, although their activities were curtailed by employers who regarded trade unions as a threat to profits, and the existing Master and Servant relation between whites and blacks was not given up that easily. Nevertheless, according to Bauer, improvements in

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<sup>14</sup> Although NUNW was established in the 1970s, the formation of trade unions inside Namibia are dated to the mid-1980s (Bauer 1998). However, NUNW claim that they were organising workers already in the mid-1970s, but there is little evidence of such a thing, according to Bauer.

the overall living and working conditions were seen. In July 1978, the law governing labour relations was amended to include black workers in its definition of an employee for the first time. In 1983, the South African rule attempted an internal settlement by the formation of the Multi-Party Conference, which was a coalition involving eight political parties and alliances; once again not including SWAPO (Bauer 1998). This is yet another attempt at passive revolution, where the South African rule formed alliances with Namibians in order to co-opt alternative opinions and annihilate the opposition. This could have strengthened the South African hegemony by consent. This attempt remained in place until 1989. As the last of the African colonies, Namibia was finally declared independent the 21st of March 1990.

### **Independence**

So, in 1990 Namibia became independent and SWAPO came to power. The struggle for independence cannot be separated from the workers' struggle for improving their rights. Due to SWAPO's roots in the working class, the future policies of Namibia were to a large extent associated with its workers. As I mentioned above, the trade union centre, NUNW, has close ties to the ruling party that goes back to the mid-1970s, and this is important for the dynamics of the present day class struggle.<sup>15</sup> NUNW is a federation and has a number of affiliates, but many trade unions are not part of NUNW (Jauch 2002, LaRRI 2004a). Even though Namibia became an independent nation, the economic wheel was still, to a high degree, connected to the South African economy (Tapscott 2001). As part of keeping the Namibian economy running, SWAPO decided to keep a majority of the former economic elite in their positions. The small Namibian elite, which was allowed to form under the approval of the former South African rule, also allied themselves with the political elite, SWAPO, after independence and was thus able to continue their business (Tapscott 2001). Despite SWAPO taking control over the political sphere, the economic power was still in the hands of the former South African white elite and the small Namibian black elite. In other words, through letting a majority of the former economic elite keep their positions, SWAPO engaged itself in alliances with the South African and the Namibian economic elite. In this *economic-corporate* struggle, as Gramsci calls it, SWAPO engaged in compromises in order to become the national representative of a broad bloc of social forces. This new power constellation gave them control over both the political and the economic sphere, and thus ensured hegemony. Furthermore, in line with Simon's (1991) interpretation of Gramsci, when a hegemonic class

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<sup>15</sup> In 1979 NUNW tried to separate itself from SWAPO, but it was turned down by the leaders of SWAPO with the argument that they feared a strong and independent trade union after independence.

combines the management of its bloc of social powers within civil society with the management within the sphere of production, this new power constellation has become a historic bloc, and this historic bloc still maintains the hegemony in Namibia. In addition, NUNW's organisational ties to SWAPO make the institutionalisation of the new culture and ideology stronger, which strengthens the hegemony through ensuring and spreading consent:

NUNW is affiliated to a political party but TUCNA (which NWRWU is affiliated to) is not. But as individual persons we can be political. When we represent a member we represent them from the opinion of the trade union, not from our personal political opinion. But for our colleagues in NUNW they represent with the political opinion. The politics and the trade union should not be mixed, but when you mix them automatically you might mislead someone not to understand exactly what is the goal and target of the trade union.

(NWRWU official, Oshakati)

NUNW's affiliation do not make NUNW members part of the ruling class, (although this might hold for its top leaders), but it makes the union an important brick in the historic bloc as it ensures consent for the ruling party, in the same manner as Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) did for ANC in South Africa (Lier 2005). After independence several new legislations have been introduced (Tapscott 2001). Democracy with free multiparty elections has been granted. Legislations involving free mobility and the freedom to live in the former white areas have also been adopted. Wage workers have got several rights which they previously did not have, or which at least were not effective. Additionally, resolutions about land redistribution, which means that land can and should be transferred back to the "people" from the white capitalist farmers, have been passed.

SWAPO's program from 1976 states that their objective is to create a Namibian society without any class distinction, based on socialist principles and ideals. Despite this declaration, Tapscott (2001) claims that SWAPO has chosen a political path which leads in the opposite direction. According to Tapscott, independence did not bring about any immediate changes in the economic and social structure. Land redistribution has only taken place on a few occasions (Werner 2001). The new legislations for wage workers only cater for the most basic rights, while the law emphasises a clear ambition to avoid conflicts between employers and employees through negotiations and mediation (Hinz 2001). This ambition is a clear request for employees and employers to engage in social partnership. Hinz (2001) and Jauch (2007) claim that social partnership increases the power of employers rather than employees. It does so because of the enormous imbalance in terms of economic power between capital and labour and because the historic bloc between the economic and political

elite. This can be seen in the fact that national economic growth is the Government's number one objective. At the same time, the historic bloc between SWAPO and the economic elite, and SWAPO's objective of national economic growth, is the reason for the social partnership. Social partnership, through ensuring consent and avoiding conflicts, creates an attractive market for local and international business and investors. In light of social partnership, the new legislations appear as a means of transformism because they co-opt the opposition through compromises. Hence, since nothing has really improved since independence, it appears to have been a strategy in order to stop the criticism. In case of any criticism from the labour movement towards the Government, SWAPO can answer by claiming that they have taken measures to regulate labour relations as a "neutral" referee through negotiations and not taking the side of capital. Their efforts are to consolidate SWAPO's relation to NUNW. Since NUNW is the central trade union, and is thus allegedly working in the interests of labour, NUNW legitimises SWAPO's legislations concerning labour relations as NUNW consent with labour legislations in their negotiations. The power is still thus in the hands of a small economic and political elite.

### **Global Relations**

At the same rate as Namibia is incorporated into the processes of economic and political globalisation, the number of foreign corporations in Namibia increases and, like before, the fruits of economic growth pour out of the country (Melber 2007b). In this case we talk about the TNC practice of transfer pricing and the extraversion of underdeveloped countries, which both hinder a trickle down effect. The economic consequences of increasing globalisation are in line with the arguments put forward by dependency theorists about imperialism. Furthermore, connected to the increased importance of foreign corporations, the prospects for and competitiveness of domestic companies are decreasing. This development results in lower wages and worsened working conditions for workers in domestic companies, as a direct consequence of the competitive strategy of these domestic companies (Endresen 2007). This competitive strategy is made possible by the large number of unemployed. Now, although an increasing division of labour and use of machinery is not so prominent in the retail sector compared to some other sectors, the immiseration in other sectors do affect the retail sector. Thus, a growing number of unemployed and decreasing wages are features of the retail sector. When the economic spread effects fail to materialise the domestic companies close down, and this strengthens the immiseration effect. When profits are exported by foreign companies, the broad masses start to complain (Jauch 2007). Despite this dissatisfaction with an increasing



invasion of foreign companies, SWAPO and their allies defend this development by claiming it is inevitable, and that globalisation will lead to economic growth in the end. This defence is directly based upon a neoliberal ideology, which is explicitly described and hailed by Bhagwati (2005) and thoroughly criticised by Petras (1999). SWAPO also claims that Namibia is forced to practice policies of free competition and privatisation, which result in increasing numbers of foreign companies, as in the rest of the world. SWAPO's answer to the criticism can from a Gramscian perspective be seen as a way of creating acceptance for their politics and describing the existing order as something *natural*. In this way SWAPO tries to indoctrinate the ideas of the existing social order as *common sense* and in this way strengthen the hegemony.

### **A Neo-Colonial State**

Although political alternatives left of SWAPO do exist, they are no real threat to SWAPO in Namibia today. This is partly because of the strong identification of SWAPO with independence, and thus a strong loyalty to the party. This loyalty further strengthens SWAPO's hegemony. It can also be discussed whether UN's statement about SWAPO as "*the sole and authentic representative of Namibia's people*" affects the possibilities for alternative political parties. This emphasises SWAPO's hegemony in the Namibian political sphere. Namibia is increasingly displaying the characteristics of a neo-colonialist state, including continued economic dependence on its former colonisers, accelerated social inequalities, the arrogation of power by an emergent elite, the drift towards a *de facto* one-party state, and the slow but progressive erosion of civil liberties (Tapscott 2001, Melber 2007a). Namibia is also facing growing corruption, and Melber (2007b:117) refers to a NGO report saying; "*Namibia as a small economy has substantial volumes of corruption, which in most cases involve Government agencies*". Moreover, Melber claims that corruption is about self-enrichment. The liaison between the political and economic elites is also evident in the politicians' involvement in company boards for the purpose of self-enrichment:

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that there are more white Namibians who continue to benefit financially from the political stability created in this country when it comes to amassing wealth. And I say good for them. I admire them and I am learning from them. They make use of their connections and take advantage of well-worn loopholes in the system. That's what business is all about: taking advantage of financial opportunities that might present themselves. My beef is that when black entrepreneurs do the same they are purported to be corrupt!

(Jacobs 2006, quoted in Melber 2007b:123)

SWAPO's failure to proceed and accomplish their earlier promise of becoming a nation with equality and without social classes, can be explained by the fact that SWAPO only enjoyed hegemony in the political sphere and not in the economic sphere. Even after independence economic power was still in the hands of the South African elite. To take that away from them would ruin the country's economy due to Namibia's dependency on trade with South Africa. The only alternative was thus to keep the South African elite in their positions and become their ally. Hence, in line with Gramsci, we see that it is not enough to gain political power to become the hegemonic class in a new society; economic power is also necessary if society is to be transformed. It is not inconceivable that SWAPO would practice the same neoliberal policies today despite having a real chance of becoming a socialist government, due to the increasing self-enrichment and corruption made possible from the privatisation process. Moreover, as I stated earlier, although SWAPO had a socialist ideology during the war of position, after gaining independence SWAPO's practice has been far removed from it. They have become the antithesis to Marxists, socialists and a substantial part of poor black workers. The attempt to form social partnerships can in this context be interpreted as a synthesis.

It could be claimed that SWAPO's creation of a historic bloc with the economic elite was influenced by international relations, for example pressure from other countries that wanted to continue the foreign trade with Namibia. Furthermore, one can also claim that SWAPO plays a role in strengthening the global neoliberal hegemony through accepting supranational organisations (like WTO, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)) and their "rules". SWAPO does not, however, have the power to construct a global counter-hegemony, but has chosen to secure the neoliberal policy in its own country. This points to the importance of the neo-Gramscian argument that hegemony cannot be understood solely by looking at the nation level, but instead that nations are influenced and affected by international relations. In this thesis I will not analyse the international relations beyond this argument.

### **Today**

SWAPO has not overthrown capitalism, but instead adopted a neoliberal ideology with national economic growth as the main objective. Jauch (2007) points out that Namibia's neoliberal policy has manifested itself in for instance the introduction of EPZs. As we have seen, SWAPO has emphasised the importance of social partnership in order to achieve economic growth. Jauch argues that the neoliberal policy has resulted in trade unions trying to define a new role within this structure. In recent years it has become clear that the Namibian

labour movement is divided. SWAPO's influence over NUNW has been discussed frequently. Not only has there been a rivalry between NUNW and Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA), but also within the NUNW itself.

In other countries the trade union is the pillar of labour movements. But in the Namibia we have problems because we become failures. Because some unions are affiliated to the ruling party but we don't do that. We are focusing on the unfair practise and unfair treatment, but the other group are acting on orders from the party. So now we are 2 different unions. If you are acting with instruction from the party you cannot handle like a trade union should do because the investors are coming in with approval from the Ministry of Trade. If the other trade union is criticising the company, the Government tell them to stop because it's bad for the economy. But we don't take orders from nobody.

(NWRWU official, Windhoek)

This rivalry weakens the position of trade unions in relation both to the state and the capitalists. Jauch (2007) also claims that the trade unions are facing dwindling membership as a result of increasing casualisation of work. This casualisation of work is facilitated by the emergence and growth of labour hire companies. Jauch argues that trade unions find it difficult to represent such workers, due to the shifting between workplaces and their insecure contracts. But the biggest challenge of trade unions is their accountability towards members, due to the common practice of union leaders negotiating behind closed doors and just informing their members through media without consulting them. Another challenge is their loss of vision:

As trade union leaders entered (and continue to enter) company boards as part of a poorly defined union investment strategy, their views (and interests) increasingly converged with those of government and business. Also, some trade unions leaders are now occupying management positions in the public and private sectors, which contradicts the principle of worker control within unions. These developments points to a lack of clarity regarding the working class base of the labour movement and whose interests it is meant to serve.

(Jauch 2007:61)

SWAPO's introduction of social partnership is clearly a strategy to hinder trade unions' and workers' possibilities of creating an alternative through militant actions and attitudes. This strategy is an outcome of the alliances between the political and economic elite, and has been accepted by NUNW due to their subordinated relation to SWAPO in the historic bloc. The people employed in NUNW, and thus those who are in positions, are connected to SWAPO, while the members are not necessarily so. The following rivalry within NUNW, and between NUNW and TUCNA, is seen as positive by the capitalists, because it weakens the adversary in negotiations. This is because the rivalry between TUCNA and NUNW weakens both of

them. I realise I do not have data to substantiate that this is a strategy and not an unintended consequence of an action, but in my view, if SWAPO really wants a level playing field they should not take sides with capital. Instead of aiming for economic growth through social partnership, they should focus on economic and social equality and development in the broad sense of the term.

## 6. Labour Relations

Moving on from the power relations in Namibian society, I will now focus on how these power relations have shaped the regulation the labour market. First I will focus on the national work regime before moving on to the concrete relations and working conditions at individual workplaces. These working conditions are presented in different categories, as mentioned in the methodology chapter.

### Scale, Space and Place

When analysing *labour relations* there are *scale*, *space* and *place* dimensions which need to be pointed out. The scale dimension is, in my case, about how the national labour regulations are adopted and presented at the highest political level in Windhoek, and how their implementation ensures a discrepancy between regulations and the real relations between employers and employees at the shop floor in Oshakati. As I will show below there is a sharp contrast between the objectives of labour regulation at national level and the real working conditions in many shops. This calls for work regime and workplace work regime.

The spatial dimension concerns the fact that working conditions differ between workplaces which are separated geographically, even within the same *company*. This can have many possible explanations ranging from different local cultures, via the fact that different agents (employers) have different strategies for “good business” within the structure (economic frame), to a pragmatic explanation resting on the argument that the closer a business is to the institutions that enforce labour regulations the better are the working conditions. This can be explained through the strength or weakness of the authority monitoring the relations at workplaces. The more sparsely populated areas do not have their own local labour inspector office, but are dependent on labour inspectors coming from towns. In a country like Namibia, which undergoes a process of privatisation and is characterised by the neoliberal policies of state erosion, it is likely that the authority monitoring the relations at workplaces will get less economic funding. This, in turn, results from an overall decrease in economic funds for state authorities. Thus, it is likely that the longer the distance from the authority monitoring the relations at workplaces, the worse are the working conditions. The size of the local pool of unemployed also influences the local working conditions, as Marx pointed out in his immiseration theory. Marx (1847) pointed out that a large pool of unemployed is advantageous for capitalists because the price of labour-power is depressed

due to over-supply. Employed workers must submit to wages and working conditions below the value of labour because they are afraid of losing their jobs to someone from the pool of unemployed.

It is at workplaces that the relations between the employer and employees are played out and negotiated, hence the need to conceptualise workplace work regimes. Furthermore, both employers and employees live close to their work, the latter sometimes at the workplace. It is at workplaces the consequences of labour regulations are experienced. Hence, place matters.

Before I describe the different working conditions in the retail sector at the local level in Oshakati, I will first outline Namibia's national labour regulation which constitutes the structure within which agents transform or reproduce structures. The analysis is based upon data at a national level, through trade unions in Windhoek and the labour acts. At the local level, I have interviewed trade union officials, the local labour commissioner, labour inspectors in Oshakati; and workers.

### **Namibia's Work Regime**

With work regimes as an analytic framework I will now analyse the labour regulations at the national level in Namibia. Work regime involves, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, the labour regulation as it is formed by the power relations between labour, capital, state and other institutions in society. As mentioned before the state is the largest and most important institution when it comes to the regulation of labour relations. Thus, the most important piece of regulation in this field is the national Labour Act. Bearing in mind the power relations outlined in the previous chapter, I will now analyse the Namibian labour regulation in order to identify an ideal type national work regime, but first I will have a look at the work regime during Apartheid.

*The Apartheid Work Regime*, dominant in Namibia during South African rule had its roots in earlier colonial rule, and the political and social exclusion of blacks was reflected in workplace exclusion and oppression (von Holdt 2005). von Holdt argues that the Apartheid work regime was characterised by a racial division of labour, a racial segregation of facilities, and a racial structure of power in the workplace. The racial division of labour entailed white employees monopolising skilled jobs, as well as manager and supervisor positions. Black employees were clerks or given whatever unskilled job they could occupy, and were always subordinated to the whites. Black workers constituted a cheap labour force, while white workers constituted an expensive labour force. The racial division of labour replicated the

wider social inequalities of Apartheid. The racial segregation of facilities involved the segregation of houses and canteens, again reflecting the wide social gap between blacks and whites (von Holdt 2005). The racial structure of power in the workplace meant that the workplace was a place of white power and black powerlessness. von Holdt points out that any white had the right to issue instructions to any black to ensure that the black workers understood that they were working in a white man's workplace. This had deep colonial roots and was intertwined with the idea that blacks were the servants of white masters. This also implied an employment relationship not only to the company as such but also as a personal obligation to serve whites. Furthermore, the Apartheid work regime also meant that black workers were under the surveillance of whites. In addition, according to von Holdt the whites had indirect control over the black workers through the creation of black supervisors that could report back from black meetings being held after working hours. This shows how the Apartheid work regime is characterised by coercion and not by consent.

Since independence several new acts of legislations have been passed. The first piece of legislation directly linked to working conditions came with the Labour Act of 1992,<sup>16</sup> which was later redrafted and replaced by the Labour Act of 1994 (Jauch 1998). The Namibian government has through the Labour Act regulated the relations between employers and employees. In the Labour Act the position of workers is strengthened by workers' rights. The Labour Act seeks to promote good labour relations and fair employment practices, and sets out basic conditions of employment, or what I would call minimum conditions. Wage workers now have the right to organise themselves in and establish trade unions. Theoretically this has been a right since 1978, but never in reality. Wage workers also have the right to collective bargaining. Laws against forced and child labour have also been introduced, as well as maximum working hours. Later, the maximum working hours have only been reduced from forty-six to forty-five hours per week, while the maximum overtime hours are set to three hours per day and ten hours per week. Workers now have the right to a fully paid annual leave of twenty four consecutive days after twelve months of continuous employment with the same employer. The right to paid sick leave at the same rate of payment as a normal working day has been granted. Paid sick leave days are one day for every five weeks of employment. Women who have been working continuously for twelve months with the same employer had the right to three months of *unpaid* maternity leave. The right to strike is also granted by law, even though strikes can only be resorted to when conflicts concern economic interests of

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<sup>16</sup> Labour Act 6 of 1992 can be downloaded at:  
[http://www.superiorcourts.org.na/high%20court/relevant\\_legislation/labour.html](http://www.superiorcourts.org.na/high%20court/relevant_legislation/labour.html). Accessed 07.01.08

wage workers, for example wage increases. This means that workers cannot strike in solidarity or around political issues. Neither the Labour Act of 1992, 1994 nor 2004 included a national minimum wage.<sup>17</sup>

The Labour Act of 2004 was meant to replace the earlier labour acts although it was never implemented and was replaced by the Labour Act of 2007. However, at the time of writing I did not have access to the latter. While the amendments in 2004 covered many areas, such as paid compassionate leave and *paid* maternity leave, the initial intention was to make amendments to the dispute resolution system. The old dispute resolution system from the Labour Act of 1992 was adversarial in nature, which resulted in an overworked District Labour Court:

The system was too bureaucratic and legalistic with very slow reaction times. The system was not equally accessible to employers and employees. The District Labour Court (DLC) had lost credibility due to severe backlogs, while the DLC's orders and decisions were difficult to enforce and implement due to the unclear divisions of responsibilities of court officials and labour inspectors.

(LaRRI 2005:71)

Hence, due to the weaknesses of the former Labour Act, the new Labour Act established the Committee for Dispute Prevention and Resolution with functions to:

- Determine rules and codes of ethics in conciliations and arbitrations.
- Determine guidelines for dispute prevention and resolution.
- Make recommendations to the Permanent Secretary of Labour on Conciliators and Arbitrators.
- Review and report the dispute prevention and resolution performance to the *The Labour Advisory Council (LAC)*.

These regulations seem to be designed for a Namibia that has been troubled with strikes and unstable industrial relations, but this is not the case. These amendments were made despite few strikes and relatively stable industrial relations.

In redrafting the old 1992 Labour Act, a new mediating and negotiating system was introduced. The Labour Act of 1994 has several labour institutions and bodies, which includes:

- LAC, which investigates and advises the Minister of Labour in issues concerning International Labour Organisation standards, collective bargaining, amendments to

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.larri.com.na/research/Labour%20Rights%20Report.doc>. Accessed 28.04.06



Namibian labour legislations, prevention and reduction of unemployment, and national policies of basic conditions of employment. The LAC is also required to make recommendations in the appointment of Labour Court Judges and Labour Commissioners.

- Committee for Dispute Prevention and Resolution
- *The Office of the Labour Commissioner*, whose main functions are resolving disputes through conciliation or arbitration, and giving advice and training to registered trade unions and employers' organisations on a range of issues, including dispute resolution design.
- *Labour Inspectorate*. Labour Inspectors have the power to inspect workplaces and issue a compliance order if an employer does not comply with the Labour Act.
- *Wage Commission*, who investigates remuneration of employment and report to the Minister of Labour for the purpose of making a wage order.
- *Labour Court*.

Disputes around recognition of trade unions or unfair labour practices are referred to the Office of the Labour Commissioner for conciliation and, if unresolved, arbitration. If the a side is not happy with the arbitration award it may appeal to the Labour Court. Disputes concerning economic interests are referred to the Labour Commissioner for conciliation when they have reached a deadlock (LaRRI 2005). Conciliation is a service of the OCL to help solving disputes, while arbitration is a process resulting in binding decisions in disputes. Both the conciliator and the arbitrator are, allegedly, of a third party.

The Namibian government also regulates the conditions for people outside the employee-employer nexus. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, this is important in securing the basic needs of children, unemployed, retired workers, students, and disabled workers. The Social Security Act of 1994, which came into effect in January 1995, includes an income support system, and is administrated by the SSC, which is a tripartite body comprised of representatives from the Government, trade unions and employers' organisations (Hinz 2001). The Social Security Act system involves benefits schemes and is divided into three different funds of which only the first one is in effect:

1. The maternity leave, sick leave, death, disability and retirement fund.
2. The national pension fund.
3. The national medical benefit fund.

A female employee on maternity leave qualifies for 80% of her remuneration, while the sick leave benefit will amount to 60% of an employee's remuneration the first 6 months and 50% for further 18 months. A single payment of N\$ 3000 will be made upon a death, retirement or permanent disability of a fully paid-up member (SSC 2006). Every employee that works more than two days per week must be registered with the SSC, as well as every employer who has employees. It is the employers' duty to ensure the registration of both himself/herself and his/her employees (SSC 2006). According to Hinz (2001), the Social Security act is not working properly, partly because it does not reach workers in the informal sector (often street traders). Even some of my informants in the formal sector told me of employers neglecting the Social Security Act. This is in sharp contrast to what an official at the SSC office in Oshakati told me in an interview:

[A]ll the companies in the area register workers in the register of Social Security Commission. The reason for this is that we (Social Security Commission) have unnotified inspections and if these inspectors find workers who are not registered in the Social Security Commission the company will get a fine.

(An official at SSC's office in Oshakati)

This information from the official at the SSC office in Oshakati is misleading. The reason for this is probably his/her desire to give me the impression of a system that works. On the national level almost one fourth of the workers were not registered with the SSC, which is serious when we take into account that almost half of the Namibian households are dependent on one income, and that about two thirds of those households support between two and seven persons (LaRRI 2004b). At the same time the unemployment rate in Namibia is high, and many people have only odd jobs. Together the unemployed and people with odd jobs add up to more than half of the population.<sup>18</sup> The Social Security Act does not include an unemployment benefit fund (Jauch 1998, Hinz 2001). To be able to benefit from the funds in the Social Security Act one has to be filed in the SSC register. In this situation, a large number of people live in destitution, not only the unemployed but also families who depend on *one* low income. As mentioned before, both in the theoretical framework and in the beginning of this chapter, a large pool of unemployed and other people living in destitution puts huge pressure on wages and working conditions of employed people, resulting in immiseration.

A LaRRI report shows that workplace inspections in Namibia are absent for the majority of workers; about 72% of the workers covered by the survey have never had a visit

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.larri.com.na/research/Labour%20Rights%20Report.doc>. Accessed 28.04.06

from labour inspectors, and only a small percentage of the workers have had more than one visit. Furthermore, at a majority of the inspections the inspectors are talking to the employers (or the managers/board) and not to the employees (LaRRI 2004b).

The fact that neither of the labour acts include a national minimum wage, coupled with the fact that the Social Security Act does not include an unemployment benefit fund, have been the target of a huge amount of protests. The absence of a national minimum wage and an unemployment benefit fund are important aspects of the lack of welfare among the Namibians. Jauch (2007) refers to the same Labour Force survey from 2004 when he writes that 47% of all Namibian households depend on wages and salaries as their main source of income. In urban areas, like Oshakati, the figure was as high as 74%. The fact that 68% of households in the country (82% in urban areas) lack a secondary source of income, and that unemployment<sup>19</sup> in Namibia stood at about 37%<sup>20</sup>, make the issues of a national minimum wage and an unemployed benefit fund even more important (Jauch 2007). The figures indicate that urban areas are more fully proletarianised than rural areas. About one in three has incomes other than wages in rural areas, which indicates a high number of semi-proletarians. The existence of a semi-proletarian workforce enables a functional dualism and a disarticulated society (de Janvry and Garramón 1977), as mentioned in the theoretical framework. Thus, a still existing semi-proletarian workforce, a legacy from the colonial era, ensures the maximum exploitation of the working class. Resistance on the part of companies against the new legislations, the Labour and Social Security Acts, has been reported from many different places around Namibia (van Rooyen 1996). Metal & Allied Workers' Union (MANWU) met resistance when organising members during work, while domestic and farm workers are being threatened by employers when they are trying to organise. Many employers are still hostile towards trade unions, and many refuse to recognise them. Not accepting their presence, employers also refuse to bargain with them. Furthermore, there are still occasions of child labour as well as forced labour in Namibia (van Rooyen 1996). A report from 2003 shows that despite the right to strike, about 86% of workers in Namibia have never participated in a strike (LaRRI 2004b). According to the report, workers' fear of dismissals was a decisive factor explaining why so many had not participated in any strikes. van Rooyen (1996) claims that several labour rights are being neglected at the shop floor, among them the right to collective bargaining. This neglect is partly made possible by the lack of inspections

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<sup>19</sup> The definition of the unemployment rate used here is: "every person who is 15-65 years of age and without work but available for work as being unemployed, whether he/she is looking for work or not." (Jauch 2007:53)

<sup>20</sup> Increased from 34,5% in 1997 (LaRRI 2004b).

at workplaces. Among those who actually have a job in Namibia, a significant part is dissatisfied with their wages. A LaRRI report (2004b) shows that about one fourth of the workers were dissatisfied with their work as a result of low wages, while about one fifth were dissatisfied with too heavy work burdens or too few benefits. Workers' dissatisfaction with low wages and poor working conditions is something which is expressed by informants throughout my interviews. A recurrent topic in my interviews was my informants' dissatisfaction with their wages, even among the informants at the top end wages. Namibia's inflation has increased faster than the average wage. This has resulted in a widening economic gap between the rich and the poor in Namibia (Jauch 1998).

Despite NUNW's position as the strongest organisational force in civil society in Namibia, the working conditions are just marginally better than during Apartheid at many workplaces. Racism, unpaid wages, unfounded dismissals and other assaults on workers still exist at many workplaces. Almost in passing the Namibian government criticises and condemns these labour practices, but their real intention might be their appeal to the trade unions to avoid militant action and instead contribute to an atmosphere of economic stability, which in turn attracts foreign companies and investors:

In 1991 the former Minister of Trade and Industry, Ben Amadhila, urged unions to take responsibility for the economic development of the country and to stop opposing employers 'for the sake of it'.

(Jauch 1998:83)

The discrepancy between national regulations and actual working conditions are large. The quotation above also bears witness to an assumption in SWAPO that economic development and economic equality does not go hand in hand. Thus, it seems that SWAPO has bought into the whole *trickle down* concept. The objective is not first and foremost a growing domestic market, but rather a "good business climate" for FDI and TNCs in their search for locations where they can produce cheaply and maximise profits. At the same time, the guidelines in the law concerning dispute resolution show a clear ambition to avoid open conflicts between employers and employees through negotiations and mediation. Thus, the Government is trying to convince unions and employers to engage in social partnership, both from a practical and ideological point of view. In order to avoid widespread dissatisfaction and strikes among workers the consent of trade unions is sought. Making trade unions responsible agents for the economic development of Namibia is an ideologically based strategy, and is founded on the alliances formed in order to fight the South African rule. The introduction of a tripartite and cooperative system is an example of social partnership in practice. In my opinion, the

attempts to form social partnerships are closely connected to SWAPO's hegemonic struggle, which I analysed in the previous chapter. As I mentioned earlier, Jauch (2007) claims that due to the huge asymmetry in economic power between capital and labour, the Government's role as "neutral referee" and creator of an enabling environment for collective bargaining effectively benefits business interests. The Labour Commissioner in Oshakati agreed:

I observed that the business is very strong compared to the unions, so the unions are a little bit weak. So they have to be strong, to give education to the shop stewards so they become strong in meetings.

The Namibian government appears to have put economic growth as their top priority and superior goal. This attitude has not been popular among trade unions and workers. Some trade unions claim that the slow process of improving workers' rights and working conditions shows how the Government turns a blind eye to employers' assaults and lets employers continue colonial work practices (Jauch 1998). This can be interpreted as the Namibian government trying to actively regulate, or to make way for, capital in the country. The Namibian government has a clear ambition of increasing economic growth in the country and this has resulted in tax reductions for establishing certain businesses in Namibia. It has also resulted in tax reduction on imports and exports and other benefits (that indirectly or directly affect workers) for international companies (Dubresson and Graefe 2001).

### **The Betrayal**

How can we understand this development and why has it developed the way it has? The answer to these questions lies in the power relations between the state (the Government), labour (trade unions) and capital (companies). The fact that SWAPO came to power after a prolonged liberation struggle against colonial occupation and repression ensured a strong support for SWAPO in civil society. The national-popular struggle, due to the change from OPO to SWAPO, and thus a shift of struggle from an Ovambo contract workers' struggle to a struggle for independence further strengthened this. Thus, SWAPO has a broad power base in most areas and among most groups (both ethnical and economic groups) in Namibia. Due to the central position of trade unions in the liberation struggle one should think that they enjoyed a strong position, but instead they actually occupy a relatively weak position, according to Tapscott (2001). This is partly because of the subordinated relation of NUNW to SWAPO, which I described in the previous chapter, but also because trade unions only organise about half of the workers in the formal sector. Trade unions are also confronted with a decreasing membership base due to the increasing casualisation of work (Jauch 2007). The

close relation between capital and the state also puts trade unions in a relatively weak position due to being co-opted by the historic bloc formed by the political elite and the economic elite. From the struggle for independence NUNW is connected to SWAPO, the political elite, through the national-popular alliance. But this alliance functions to emasculate the unions in the historic bloc. Thus, trade unions which are part of NUNW are being marginalised. As I pointed out earlier, at the time of independence both the economic and political power were in the hands of a small part of the population. The small economic elite consisted of only a few percent of the population, but generated almost three quarters of the domestic production. After independence the elite was divided into the economic elite (the former elite) and the political elite (the new SWAPO elite). The economic elite today consist of newly emerging black Namibian entrepreneurs, big international investors and the former South African economic elite. Put simply, the political elite mainly consists of Ovambo people in different positions in SWAPO. The economic and political elite quickly developed common interests, and thus created a strong and mutually beneficial relation. Their common interest was to keep the Namibian economy running, but for different reasons, and to do this they needed to cooperate. In my opinion, the Ben Amadhila statement (above) can best be seen in light of intra-elite (the economic and political elite) relations in Namibia and partly in the light of global pressures. In this context, IMF plays a central role through its Structural Adjustment Programmes, in which Namibia takes part in order to play along with WTO, and hence to be a part of the global market (Jauch 2007). This shows the influence international relations have on national policies, which neo-Gramscians point out.

The neoliberal policies created deep divisions among SWAPO members. On the one hand many members identify themselves with SWAPO due to the prolonged liberation struggle, and are thus not willing to criticise or go against SWAPO, even if their own situation has not improved since independence. On the other hand, some members feel that SWAPO has turned its back on them and left the Marxist/socialist orientation it once had. Many of them have left the party or are considering doing it, as a result of their dissatisfaction. There have also been discussions about whether NUNW should stop their affiliation to SWAPO and become independent (Tapscott 2001). SWAPO has at the same time argued that the privatisation process and the neoliberal policies are results of globalisation. SWAPO's argument can be seen as a hegemonic project because SWAPO tries to establish a common sense that globalisation is a process which is inevitable and positive for national development.

Opposition to such policies by the labour movement was frequently countered by accusations that the trade unions were still living in the (ideological) past and that trade unions were obstacles to economic growth and job creation.

(Jauch 2007:60)

According to neoliberal strategies Namibia has to open its borders for international companies and undergo a process of privatisation. The privatisation process leads to an increase in competition between both companies and workers. The privatisation process also leads to a decrease in governmental involvement in the market. This, Tapscott (2001) argues, can result in job losses, given the fact that the Government is still the largest employer in Namibia. Job losses mean an increasing number of unemployed which in turn worsen the working conditions, and leads to immiseration. According to Harvey (2003), privatisation is the cutting edge of accumulation by dispossession, which is guided by four practices (privatisation, financialisation, state redistribution, and manipulation of crises). In this context I refer to the privatisation practice. Privatisation and commodification is characterised by the process of transferring assets and properties from public ownership to private ownership. This serves the interests of the capitalist class as these assets becomes means of production after the transaction (Harvey 2003). The formalisation of land rights, from traditional and common to private ownership, outlined in a master thesis by Smedsrud (2007), is one example of privatisation and accumulation by dispossession. The change from public to private ownership is a change from the right to common access, and the right to make a living in those places, to a private determination of who should have those rights. The concept of accumulation by dispossession highlights the strength of capital in the power relation between capital and labour in society, and at the same time shows how labour regulation has been in favour of privatisation and capital at the expense of labour and marginalised classes/groups.

### **State Centralized Corporatist Regime**

The Namibian national work regime can, in my view, best be conceptualised as what Andræ and Beckman (1998) term a *state centralized corporatist regime*. As I have pointed out, the “agreement” which NUNW and SWAPO has, is to a great deal dictated by SWAPO. I have also mentioned the historic bloc between the political and the economic elite and illustrated it with Ben Amadhila’s statement. The Labour Act of 1992 entailed some improvements for workers compared with the colonial labour legislation. The new Labour Act encouraged collective bargaining, granted basic workers’ and trade union rights. It also opened for legal strikes and provided protections against unfair labour practices. However, the act fell short of other expectations on the part of trade unions, such as minimum wages (Jauch 2007). The new

Labour Act mainly aims to improve the dispute resolution system, but also entails improvements like paid maternity leave. Jauch argues that through the labour acts, the trade unions have gained monopoly in representing workers in work place disputes, but at the same time workers have lost their militancy due to the focus on negotiations between union leaders and management. This hegemonic process and social partnership are central aspects shaping the labour regulation. The power relations and the labour regulation are central in my interpretation that a *state centralized corporatist regime* is the dominant national work regime. However, even though the national work regime does resemble a *state centralized corporatist regime*, different workplace work regimes prevail in different economic sectors, and even between different companies in the same economic sector. This is related to what I described as the scale and space dimensions at the beginning of this chapter.

Having analysed the power relations in Namibian society and the Namibian labour regulation, i.e. the national work regime, the next step is to describe the labour relations and working conditions in different workplaces in order to identify some ideal types of workplace work regime.

### **Working Conditions**

Oshakati is a bustling town with a mix of different kinds of companies. Four different categories of retailers are represented. Along the main road, which runs through the whole of Oshakati, the shops are placed next to each other without any distinct pattern. There is also a large number of private *Shabeens* (pubs/shops in private houses) and other street traders, which belong to the informal sector.<sup>21</sup> The modern malls are not placed along the main road, but are instead located along some of the major side streets.

Over the last years, there has been a steady increase of both international/South African and Chinese retailers setting up business in Oshakati. There is, however, a clear distinction between the Chinese retailers and the international/South African ones. While the international/South African retailers are part of what was called economic globalisation in the theory chapter, being almost exclusively transnational chain stores with a relatively strong financial base, the Chinese retailers mainly consist of private persons setting up small shops. While the international chain stores focus on the upper and middle layers of society (regarding income and status) the Chinese shop owners focus on the low-income market segments. The working conditions in the international/South African chain stores and the

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<sup>21</sup> Many street traders pay a yearly fee for selling goods along the streets or at a market place, but very few pay income taxes which place them in the informal sector. Personal communication with Herbert Jauch 15.05.08



Chinese shops are also different. The fact that Namibian retailers, regardless of whether they are Big National companies or Small Local businesses, also have their own place in the market, and again have different working conditions, makes the mapping of working conditions and the workplace work regimes interesting and challenging. There are several reasons why working conditions differ, which I will point out below.

### **The Chinese Category**

The strategies vary between the different shops, and this affects the working conditions. When Chinese entrepreneurs come to Oshakati to set up businesses they meet an already existing and functioning retail sector. In light of the fierce competition from other shops and chains, migrant Chinese entrepreneurs have to find their own measures to compete and survive which is an intrinsic part of capitalism. In the Chinese category discipline was something that the informants brought up:

I don't feel there is anything nice there. Nothing [...] I don't like the job because when you stand you must stand the whole day. You cannot sit down. You have to stand straight. And about lunch, we don't have lunch, but they deduct some money from your wage and then they buy some bread. You must eat while you're working. So, no lunch time [...] If it was me, I was going to put in lunch time, increase the money, just everything.

(A worker at Xià)

The working conditions in many Chinese shops are relatively tough compared to the working conditions in the other categories. The wages are also lower, sometimes only a tenth of the wages in an international/South African shop. The informants told me the wages were not enough to live on. In other words, the wage was below the costs of reproduction. This means that they had to have a second income or rely on the income of another family member. To pay them below the minimum living wage is not a problem, both in relation to recruiting and the risk of employees resigning, due to the large pool of unemployed. In this way the workers do share the same misery as the slaves, but without sharing the same benefits: the slave owner's care for the worker. One of the problems they face in this respect is that the long hours they work decrease the prospects of an extra income. It is not unusual to not get paid for working overtime, making the extra hours at work even harder considering the consequences:

[E]ven if you work overtime he never give you that money.

(A worker at Dōng)

Another crucial aspect of the working conditions at the Chinese shops is the total absence of work contracts, leaving the workers without any documentation to secure the most basic

working conditions. Just as important, the absence of work contracts makes it even harder to find a new and better paid job (if they ever find time looking for it) since they cannot prove that they have been working anywhere:

Back in China [I assume he/she means the shop Dōng] they don't have permanent employees. But I've worked there now maybe 7 years [...] No work contract, nothing. Even if you ask them. They say they don't know English, but they understand. But they don't want to give us a permanent. Even I live there, job there, I go somewhere I show my paper; nothing. I've got nothing. Even at Venus [next door to Dōng] I'll say I've worked for many years there, but they ask me 'where is your paper?' No testimonial.<sup>22</sup>

(A worker at Dōng)

The absence of work contracts is another means of disciplining the workers, and as we can see from the quote it is an efficient means. It also shows how the labour demand is segmented as the international/South African shops seem to be employing people either with work experience or educated people.<sup>23</sup> In addition, benefits are rare in the Chinese shops. A worker was telling me that he had no benefits at all, and others were telling me similar stories:

The wage is too low, I'm working a lot but the wage is too small. And the lunch time: nothing; and sick leave: nothing. Many things, no holiday. Even me, starting 1999 and until now [...] No breaks. Not even one. Just to the toilet and then come back. I say "Saturday, no I don't work", but they force me to work. The whole month, the whole year. Every day, every day I work, but Sundays we are free.

(A worker at Dōng)

These working conditions are maintained, not only through discipline at the workplaces, but also through the large pool of unemployed, the lack of involvement by trade unions and labour inspectors. The communication between Chinese owners/managers and their workers was characterised by it being non-existent. The informants neither regarded the Chinese owners/managers as nice nor intimidating, instead they talked about them as persons who did not care or pretend not to understand. Could it be that the Chinese owners/managers simply do not care about the workers and actually see and treat them as commodities in abundance?

[T]here are many of us because, you know, they are recruiting all the time so they don't care whether you come in today and they chase you away at the same day.

(A worker at Xià)

As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, Marx' immiseration theory explains how both wages and working conditions are affected by the relation of supply and demand. When the

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<sup>22</sup> Testimonial is a word that is used in Namibia, for a work/employment contract.

<sup>23</sup> With educated people I do not necessarily mean people with a university degree, it can also refer to people who have finished regular school which a lot of people do not do in Namibia.

supply exceeds demand the price of the commodity (in this case labour power) falls and there is no pressure for “good” labour practice. Thus, I ask myself if the Chinese managers think: “Use them if they fit, if not exchange them with someone who does”? Many of the Chinese shops pay no heed to national regulations, i.e. the Labour Act. They are, of course, obliged to by law, but they do not comply with the law in these matters. When the Labour Inspectors take them to court, the owner has often been replaced or the shop has closed and opens again under a new name:

The Chinese don't speak English. When we take them to court an interpreter from Windhoek comes here. But they know enough English to employ the workers. Most cases with the Chinese who end in court, they lose. But very often the Chinese have changed the owner of the shop when the case is up in court. That's why they are difficult to catch.

(Labour Inspector, Oshakati)

The workers' relation to trade unions tends to vary. While some are members, others are not. Their experiences with trade unions also tend to vary from mainly positive experiences, with concrete examples where the trade union has helped, to exclusively negative experiences leading to workers regarding the unions as corrupt or not helpful. It seems, however, that the trade unions would like to help, but they find it hard in the Chinese shops because each shop has only a small number of workers and they do not have any work contracts. Additionally Chinese owners/managers are working against them:

Regards to the Chinese investors the problems are they don't understand the language of this country. If we address them with one issue they say “Me no English”, that's the bottom line. You can not force those people, so at the end of the day you have to address the Government why they send those people to come and invest.

(NAFAU official, Oshakati)

The workers' attitude towards trade unions is partly influenced by the experience from dealing with trade unions in labour relation matters, but it is also influenced by the ideology towards NUNW as part of the liberation struggle.

### **The International/South African Category**

The same national framework which applies to the Chinese retailers also applies to the international/South African chain stores. But, in contrast to the Chinese shops, the international/South African chain stores have some of the best working conditions in the retail sector. However, there is a pattern of a relative worsening of these conditions. In contrast to the more homogeneous Chinese category, the international/South African category provided me with a greater diversity of working conditions. A hypothesis is that the working conditions

at the different international/South African chain stores tend to worsen over time from the first establishment in Namibia. In other words, the longer a company has been operating in Namibia, the worse the working conditions. Despite being a more heterogeneous category, the different shops still have some characteristics in common. As I just mentioned, the working conditions among the international/South African chain stores are relatively good:

[T]he managers are okay, the boss is okay and the wage is a little bit okay.

(A worker at Saturn)

But there are also examples of disciplining:

People resign because it's too much work and the wage is too low. And all the time there are warnings; if you are short of money in the till it is a warning, if you are over it is a warning, maybe if you chew a gum in the shop it is a warning. If you scream it is a warning. It's too much.

(A worker at Saturn)

Most of the workers at international/South African companies have a working contract, which include the worker's rights and obligations. The wages range between 2200 to 3000 per month, making the workers in this category the highest paid in the retail sector. The relatively high wages make them able to support themselves, but when it comes to supporting the whole family the answers were not exclusively affirmative. That the answers vary shows the difficulty even for these workers. The varying ability to support the family depends on the size of the family, but it also bears witness to how low the wages generally are in the unskilled retail sector. The informants in this category were generally satisfied with their wages, as they compared themselves to others in the same sector. This fact stands in contrast to what Miller (2005) found in her study of workers at Shoprite. In Miller's study Shoprite workers in Zambia were dissatisfied with their wages and working conditions because they compared their benefits to those of Shoprite workers in South Africa. Concerning other benefits, the international/South African chain stores complied with the Labour Act:

[W]e have lunch break and other breaks, and we have sick leave and annual leave. We also have pension and medical aid but this newly started and we don't know how it is yet.

(A worker at Mercury)

For others there were drawbacks, which would probably not be complained about in the Chinese shops:

[W]e get maternity leave and annual leave but it can be like; you take 2 weeks leave and then the other 2 weeks you can leave in case of an accident or if something happens in the family. But if you leave it and then you do not take it they are not going to pay a holiday

compensation for those 2 weeks. So you have to take it all at the same time. Otherwise they are not going to.... And then you can sometimes tell them you want May because also you want to have a holiday together with the kids, but you have to wait until they decide for you. Sometimes you must take in August not in May.

(A worker at Saturn)

These two quotations show us the different attitudes to workers' benefits on the part of employers and can be seen as an example of how benefits tend to decrease with the length of the company's stay in Namibia. Saturn has been established in Namibia since before independence, while Mercury has only been established in Namibia since 2004.

Maternity leave, sick leave, holidays, breaks, overtime pay and the right to organise are just some of the benefits many workers in this category enjoy. Informants also emphasised a good relation to the manager as well as with colleagues. To talk to the manager about good and/or bad things, and things that could be improved or be done in other ways, was seen as an obvious solution.

I really like that we are involved and a part of the things that is happening in the shop. We can tell the managers about things we don't like and give advice. In the other shops that I have worked in we could not do that.

(A worker at Mercury)

This shows that the relation between managers and workers in the international/South African chain stores is characterised by co-operation between the parties. Every morning, before the shop opens, the workers and the manager have a morning meeting where the employees can bring up issues. However, in this way the workers are individualised which may make it difficult to voice complaints. Hence, to the manager the morning meeting can be seen as a safety valve ensuring workers' co-operation and consent while at the same time making the union superfluous. This is in contrast to the more asymmetric relation between the parties in the other categories. In other words, the relation between managers and workers appears to be influenced by an ideology of social partnership. The background for this may be built on the argument: "If we let the workers be part of decision-making they feel happy and involved in the development of the business, and thus do good work instead of becoming militant. This in turn results in good business for the company". This is based on the ideology that together we are making it better for all. In this respect, the type of corporate culture that the chain stores bring with them when investing abroad may play a role when determining the working conditions. However, as pointed out, workers in some shops do not enjoy the same good relationship with their manager:

[I]t can be like if you're packing t-shirts and then the manager says "How can you pack the t-shirts like this?" and then I say "No, I was busy with shorts!" and then the manager can say "Don't you respond at me, get out!"

(A worker at Saturn)

Moreover, the communication channels between the national regulatory institutions and the international/South African stores seem much better than in the case of Chinese shops, Small Local shops and Big National shops in Oshakati. This renders the impact of the Labour Act greater in the international/South African chain stores compared to the other retail categories. Furthermore, I would argue that the past colonial relation between these two countries and that SWAPO still upholds an image of being the national liberator ensure a stricter enforcement in order to legitimise permitting South Africans to invest in Namibia without facing charges of imperialism. Although there is use of camera surveillance, informants told me that they did not feel monitored. This might be because the surveillance is built on consent. This also makes the surveillance somehow different from the other shops where the workers feel monitored. The unionisation among workers in this category is relatively high. It is a well established practice to have a union representative among the workers in these chain stores, and the relation between the trade unions and the workers is good:

[I]f we have a problem we can make a meeting with the shop steward, then the shop steward can go to the manager to say this worker needs this and this and this then the manager can decide it.

(A worker at Venus)

Most workers seemed to have good experiences with the trade unions, regarding them as active and helpful, and especially emphasising the trade union's active role in the process of collective bargaining. There is also a good relation between the trade union and the managers in these international/South African chain stores. I believe that this good relation is due to social partnership. At the national level, the international/South African chain stores are the main target of trade unions, partly because they are being judged from a historic point of view, where the whites are linked to the Apartheid system. But also partly because they have in recent years become large workplaces with many workers holding work contracts, and are thus easy to identify.

### **The Small Local Category**

Increased competition, due to the growing numbers of Chinese shops and international/South African chain stores, forces the Small Local businessmen to find their own way of competing in the retail sector. Their strategy affects the working conditions. Wages range from around

500 to 1000 per month, making the wages just slightly better than in the Chinese shops, but nowhere near the wages in the international/South African shops:

[W]hen you start you get 400 and then later he's going to increase you, like her she has got increased with 150, so she get 550.

(A worker at Gamma)

The hours worked for the monthly wage is much higher compared to the international/South African category, and even higher than in the Chinese category. Overtime work is a daily routine, and is rarely paid for by the shop owners:

[W]e are working too many hours and our wage is really low. It's not enough. On Sundays we start at 9 o'clock and the rest of the days we start at 8 o'clock. We knock off at 9 o'clock.

(A worker at Sigma)

This shows an average week of 90 working hours compared to the legally established forty-five hours per week in the Labour Act. This is in sharp contrast to the chain stores. My informants in this category were not able to support their family on the wages. Considering the long hours at work, it is hardly possible to get an extra income which is needed for the household. This problem is shared between the workers in the Small Local shops and the Chinese shops. Benefits for workers in this category are not common either, since they are also squeezed as a "competitive advantage-strategy".

Since we got employed there we never go for the weekend, we don't have a public holiday, if you ask for leave to go to see your parents they refuse [...] We don't have lunch. [W]e don't have a sick leave. If you went to the hospital today and you can't work, you still have to come to work. You must die while you are there [...] If your brother die you must not go, you must stay.

(A worker at Gamma)

Another crucial part of this "squeezing the worker as a competitive advantage-strategy", which distinguishes the working conditions in the Small Local shops from those prevailing in the Chinese shops, is the relation between the manager/owner and the workers. As opposed to the relation in the Chinese shops, where the relation was practically non-existent, the relation in the Small Local shops is very hostile and distinct. In this category the managers/owners make use of their ability to control and repress their workers both at work and off work, some of them go to extremes:

If you do something the manager shout at you in front of the people and they have to divide people when they go home like if she [pointing at fellow worker] go home the other one must stay [...] And the other one has better wage, so if you are paying people

more they are going to be happy for you. And the other thing is he has to give sick leave to the people. If someone is sick, really sick, he can even see that you are really sick but he don't give you time to go home. There are so many people who have died in that place. Like now we have HIV-positive people, you can see that this person is very tired and that she needs to go home to her family but you are going to stand there until you die. Someone is very tired and you can see she has no chance....There is no respect.

(A worker at Gamma)

There is a clear pattern in this category that workers are afraid of their manager/owner. The ways of controlling the workers vary, and the stories I heard were all different, but they had the same underlying mechanism; namely workers' dependency on a wage and thus keeping their jobs despite inhuman working conditions. My informants in this category had no work contract, except those employed by Delta,<sup>24</sup> contributing to lower chances of getting a better job. Additionally, the long working hours further reduced the possibilities of finding a better job. At one workplace the whole staff was migrant workers from other parts of Namibia. At another workplace the workers were divided into work teams, consisting of two persons, and this division was also in effect after working hours. The teams were then set up against each other in an effort to make them believe they were rivals. If someone did something wrong, people from other work teams then told the manager or owner about it, which in turn punished the one doing the mistake. This witness of workers informing on each other:

[T]he main thing that brings the conflicts can be, like us, we are friends, but the other staff maybe they don't like us. So if one of us did a mistake the other staff, if they don't like us, they [are going to] report it. And then the boss is coming in a good way to ask us. So we are going to try to defend ourselves and the other ones are trying to support... That's why it has come to conflicts here at work.

(A worker at Gamma)

The workers fear not only the manager/owner but also their fellow workers, a result of divide and rule. Kelly (2002) argues that by individualising the workers capitalists avoid collective consciousness and mobilisation, and this weakens the position of the workers. Also, at Gamma all the workers were living in barracks behind the shop. The workers have one hour free after finishing work, after that electricity is turned off and they have to be inside. If any of them break this rule, other workers will report them to the manager/owner. This, and since they work so many hours per day, ensures that they can only buy food in their own shop:

I cannot move to somewhere else. [T]hey only want us to spend money in their shop and not go to Supa Dupu (*supermarket across the street*) or Venus.

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<sup>24</sup> The owner of Delta is Muslim and not a native Namibian – so maybe culture and religion plays a larger part concerning working conditions than I have chosen to theoretically focus on in this thesis. However, due to time and place constrains I have had to exclude the theoretically dimensions of this aspect.



(A worker at Gamma)

Kelly (2002) claims that this is a way of disciplining the workforce by controlling the physical movements of workers and preventing them from changing workplace. Furthermore, if the workers are short of money in the cash teller they are deducted for a lot more, like a penalty, at the end of the month.

[I]f you work in the cashier you give change to the customer. Sometimes you give more money, instead of give 6 dollars maybe you give 8 dollars because you didn't check well, so at the end of the night it is going to show that you give more money to the customer. Sometimes you can bring more money to the system in the good way, maybe you forget you suppose to give the customer 10 dollars and then you give 8 dollars it is going to be over again. Then at the end of the month they are going to say you owe the company... let me say 1000 dollars. So you have to pay that 1000 dollars and imagine you get 400. How many months are they going to deduct this money? And you only get 400, and they have to take 200 from your wage so you are going to get 200 dollars per month. In how many months are you going to pay that money? So instead of earning money you are living for the job, because there is nothing else. And the other thing is the work is too much and the money is too few. So if you are there there is no anyway out.

(A worker at Gamma)

In this way the employer always holds back part of their wage. All these measures make the worker controlled 24 hours a day, and the consequence of this control is discipline. It also shows how dependent the workers are on wages. The fact that they are fully proletarianised and do not have a subsistence farm to go back to, like a semi-proletarian, increases their dependency on waged work. The fact that there is a large pool of unemployed and few available jobs make the workers accept working conditions below the limits of reproduction, which in turn is a feature in disarticulated economies. To be frank, they live in fear and despair. In another interview, an informant told me that if they are sick they either have to work anyway or get a replacement for themselves. If a person replaces a sick one, he or she only gets paid one third of the wage while the sick worker does not get anything:

If you are sick you can't go home. You have to fix replacement and she gets 1/3 of your wage. [I] get nothing and the boss gets everything else. [We] have to pay more from ourselves or we have to work even when we are sick.

(A worker at Alpha)

Additionally, the sick worker often has to pay some extra to the person replacing him or her in order to make him or her work. The consequence is often that workers work even when they are sick or they have to pay a part of the already low wage in order to get a replacement. If they refuse to do neither of the two alternatives, they are dismissed. There is also a more widespread use of Labour Hire companies in this category compared to the other categories.

Workers' rights are often neglected when employed through Labour Hire companies (Jauch 2007), making a difficult situation even worse:

[W]e get our wage from him in labour hire. It's not from our boss just from him. Now I don't understand. Are we working for him or we working for Beta? That's why I'm confused sometimes. And that gentleman in that organisation, he's just sitting at his office and I do the job. But I have to give, I don't know how many percent I have to deduct from my wage. I don't understand those companies. Okay, only if they even can have a little bit from my boss. That I can understand. But that man is just sitting there and drinking cool drink there while I'm doing the job. What is that? [...] They are recruiting people, that's why they don't have a contract. That's bullshit of them. They don't have a contract and they know that if you make a mistake you can go home; they still have a lot of people. You can go home that one, you can come [...] The thing is, all of us that is working there is not feeling good about that [...] But I was asking one question one day. The supervisor was saying that the boss of this company because there were many people having the trade union. They used to go to the union to complain and they used to be in the court some time. That's why he change it to this labour hire..." [B]ut it is not good [...] I don't have a contract so tomorrow I don't know if to work. What is that? Is that good? It's bad, it's not good. I'm telling you the truth. You can ask one of my colleagues, he can tell you the same thing. He can tell you the same problems [...] You know I just hate him because of his company. If you go to him you be fucked [...] Tomorrow I will say: "Yesterday was fine, man, because I told the story of my life, so now I'm feeling fine" [...] You know money is very little, money is very small. I don't have a problem if money is very small, if I know I have a job every day.

(A worker at Beta)

The use of Labour Hire companies is a strategy to decrease the employer's responsibilities towards the workers, and minimise the risk of conflicts between him/her and the workers. At the same time it imposes insecurity upon workers. It is also much easier to dismiss labour hire workers without having trade unions breathing down their neck (Endresen 2007). There appears to be a strong aversion towards trade unions from the managers/owners. Informants in this category told me about their manager's dislike of trade unions, but still many of them are union members:

He doesn't like, he tries to stop it or maybe scare us but most are members anyway.

(A worker at Alpha)

None of my informants at these shops had experienced collective bargaining, and facing the manager with demands for such a thing was out of the question:

No we don't have, because everybody is scared to be the one who talks to the boss. You get dismissed.

(A worker at Alpha)

All complaints were met with threats of dismissal, for instance, if the workers told the manager about things they disliked at work and wished could be changed:

No, if you tell him he ignores you or he bark at you.

(A worker at Alpha)

### **The Big National Category**

Already starting to build up contacts and capital during Apartheid, some Namibian actors in the retail sector got a flying start. Soon they became Big National companies and were setting up big supermarkets in a lot of places around Namibia. Rhino, Hippo and Zebra are all represented in Oshakati. This category is more diverse, like the international/South African, when it comes to competition strategies and the every day practice of the companies. Although some aspects of the working conditions differ, there are important commonalities which I will soon be sketching. However, due to the diversity, I will in what follows present the working conditions at each workplace. The wages at Rhino and Hippo vary from 400 to 600 per month, which make them close to the wages in the Small Local category, but with an important difference; the workers get paid for overtime. However, the wages in this category are still below the level needed to ensure the reproduction of labour power.

They say normally it's not enough, they are just going to work for fun but automatically if they find any job they will not look back, just go. They are working there just for..., to get some because they don't want to steal.

(A worker at Rhino)

Again this is made possible by the disarticulated economy and the large number of unemployed. The working hours are slightly shorter compared to the Chinese shops and the Small Local shops. The wages are slightly higher than in the Small Local category, and benefits vary to a great extent. At Rhino and Hippo the workers get basic benefits like annual leave, sick leave and social security. This comes, however, with some limitations; at Rhino most benefits are just for permanent workers, while at Hippo the manager himself decides when annual leave and days off are to be taken.

Okay, she says these 7 days is Hippo himself who decides; like you go in January for 7 days. After 7 days there is no more, only 25 December. Like now she has already taken 7 days. She says she is already taken those 7 days, but today is Sunday and he gives her this Sunday off to clean the uniform because he himself tells her it is her day off. But he has to deduct 10 dollars from you. Like today's off but she's going to be deducted 10 dollars because it's him who gives her Sunday.

(A worker at Hippo)

Like in the Small Local and Chinese shops, work contracts are absent at both Rhino and Hippo. The consequences of not having a work contract are as we have seen a weakened position when claiming labour rights. It also weakens the chances of finding better jobs, due

to the fact that the workers cannot provide any documented experience. Furthermore, they cannot ask for an attestation nor name the employer as a reference because it will probably cost him/her the job. The fact that these workers do not work “too many” hours, and have days off and other benefits means that they have a chance of getting a second income or a chance of looking for better jobs while they are still working at their present workplace. However, the fact that they have not got any work contract means that the chances of getting a better job are very small. The relation between the manager/owner and the workers, at both places, is characterised by being asymmetric, which in this context means that the manager’s/owner’s relation to the workers is rather based on coercion than consent. In the same way as at the national level, where the elite previously ruled by coercion, the owner cannot “afford” to rule by consent. This relation of coercion is similar to the relation in the Small Local shops and Chinese shops.

However, the relations between the manager/owner and workers are different at Rhino compared to Hippo. At Rhino threats from the manager are rare, but the manager is exercising his power by other means. The manager sets the wages on a daily basis without any formal table. Instead, this appears to be determined in a haphazard kind of way, contributing to insecurity:

It’s the manager’s issue. And then he counts it and says “you are going to get like 70 cents per hour”. Okay, the manager himself if you want to increase the wage so they are having this clock cards. If you want to increase your wage he just decides himself like today we are getting 70 cent and tomorrow is 80 cents by himself, the manager.

(A worker at Rhino)

The haphazard wage scale could be a strategy of making the workers feel insecure. However, this does not seem to negatively affect the relation between workers. In contrast to what often occurs when a divide and rule strategy is used:

So they say they like the work because they have a soccer team at work.

(A worker at Rhino)

Thus, if it is meant to be a divide and rule strategy it does not seem to work. Another aspect at Rhino is that if a worker, by accident, happens to damage a commodity at work, the worker then not only has to pay for the commodity, but also leave work for a week without pay as a punishment:

So they say; I give them an example like they are carrying cement and it falls down and break. So they say you have to pay for the cement but they are not going to give it to you to take it home but you have to pay for that and then they have to cross their clock card so

it means that you must be at home for the whole week. Like, let me say, it happens today so he has to cross from Monday to next week's Monday. And you have to pay for that cement, you are not going to have that cement, and have to be at home for 6 days. Unpaid, because how are you going to clock in the card that is already been crossed?

(A worker at Rhino)

Furthermore, at Rhino there is no trade union representation although it is seen, according to my informants, as something positive by the workers. The reason for this, they told me, is that the union has never showed any interest in them. The low interest from trade unions in unionising workers in this category could be due to the objective of strengthening black entrepreneurs in an effort to build a new Namibia. This results in a group of black entrepreneurs who are almost untouchable.

There is an even more widespread use of coercion on the part of the manager in one of Hippo's supermarkets. An informant at Hippo told me about the high risk of wage deduction if anything happens that the manager does not like.

She's telling the story that if you are short, like a 10 cent, in the till, you have to pay for that. And the other story she's telling me is that: in the shop she is working in the department for clothes but it has happened one day in the ring department somebody came in and they stole the rings and then disappeared. So he charged all the people in the shop because of that ring, 1800. So she's always getting deducted for 50 dollars.

(A worker at Hippo)

A worker was also threatened to pay Hippo an amount of money which corresponded to the wage for three months if the worker resigned:

She wants to resign because... You know what he said to her? If you resign on my work so you are going to pay for... she's going to pay for work if she resigns. She must work until she get dismissed because if she resigns she lets Hippo the work to be done. So there is no one who is going to work in her place. If she's going to be out by herself she have to pay for it. (Talking in Oshivambo) She asked him: "If I want to resign from Hippo". He won't talk officially, maybe it was a meeting or something, and then he said: "If you are going to leave my job, you are going to pay me 3 months ahead." If she's leaving the job she's going to pay for him for 3 months. But she wants, if she resigns, at least she has to get something from Hippo because she has been working for a long time. She says "He's not going to give her anything but she's going to owe him money". She thought maybe if she resigned she'd get something from Hippo and then could start a business, but now it's a little bit difficult for her to resign because she's going to pay for 3 months.

(A worker at Hippo)

Workers that are told to stay at work until they are dismissed reeks of bonded labour as they are threatened to run into dept. There are also incidences where the manager/owner has changed supervisor from one day to the next without any reason. Furthermore, when it comes to days off, it is only the manager/owner who decides when these days are to be taken. If a

worker gets his or her day off on a Sunday, Hippo is going to deduct money from the worker's wage, which he does not do if it is on a weekday or Saturday:

If he decides that they have Sundays off he is going to deduct 10 dollars from the wage. But he can also give you a day off during the week like Friday or Saturday. Then he's not going to deduct anything from you. If you are lucky you get during the week.

(A worker at Hippo)

These examples show how Hippo is controlling workers by coercion (threat and fear). At Hippo there are workers with trade union membership, but this membership has not helped them much so far. According to the informant there are instead close ties between the manager/owner and NAFAU.

Zebra has a different strategy than Rhino and Hippo, bearing closer resemblance to international/South African chain stores when it comes to working conditions. At the same time that Zebra is playing along with Rhino and Hippo to try to hinder international businesses to enter the Namibian market, which will increase the competition, Zebra is also, for example by having new and modern outlets, imitating the way the big international/South African companies are running their business. This actually makes Zebra a Big National retailer, but with a "face" of an international/South African company. Zebra, along with other Namibians, is regarded as qualitatively different from white employers, due to black solidarity, and is not the main target for NAFAU. Drawing on the concept of social partnership and the earlier national-popular struggle, Zebra, Rhino and Hippo enjoy a kind of implicit "hands off" from SWAPO and thus NAFAU. An informant at NWRWU found this problematic:

But it would be easier if the Government were helping us 100%, like in the case with Zebra. They can find out whether this is true, but now the Labour Commissioner are telling us that there is nothing we can do or that we can not go to court. What is that? He is the last person to tell us that.

(NWRWU official, Windhoek)

This narrower objective of strengthening of black entrepreneurs is happening at the expense of an overall black empowerment, and can be tied to SWAPO's redefinition of the aim of the national-popular struggle in the direction of economic growth. At the same time, this "hands off" could maybe be justified in this case due to Zebra's "modern" working conditions, which are similar to those found in international/South African shops. At Zebra, the informant had a wage of 3000 per month, which is one of the best wages among my informants, and at the same level as the relatively newly established international/South African companies. Many

workers appear to be temporary for different time periods, but in contrast to other temporary workers they have work contracts. The workers have benefits according to the Labour Act. The relationship between the manager and the workers appears to be just as good as at *Mars* and *Venus*. The workers can tell the manager about things they do not like and things that could be done in another way. If they do something wrong they will not get dismissed or yelled at, instead the manager tells them not to worry and be careful:

The Company will pay. We don't pay. The manager says "take care".

(A worker at Zebra)

Most of the workers had a trade union membership, but they were not happy with the union.

Trade unions, I don't know if they help or not, because sometimes we say we want increasement only by 4% but no, no agreement. But always at the end of the month they deduct you from the wage. We don't get anything from the union. I don't like the union.

(A worker at Zebra)

This is interesting because according to the informant the trade union did not do anything, but at the same time he was happy with collective bargaining. Could this "collective" bargaining be an individual bargaining between the manager and the workers? The informant also claimed that the relationship between the manager and the trade union was good. To me this further signals the strengthening of black entrepreneurs at the expense of black empowerment. The information from this worker at Zebra is in sharp contrast to what was told in an interview with an official in a trade union not affiliated to SWAPO:

Like tomorrow I will talk on the TV that Zebra Group is not letting the workers get union membership. And we must stop this, even Zebra have many shops and many workers.

(NWRWU official, Windhoek)

The contradictory information given by the worker and the NWRWU official is interesting in the sense that one of them has clearly misunderstood the situation or has been misleading me. At the time of the interview there were plenty of articles in the national newspapers in Namibia discussing poor labour relations at Zebra outlets. This strengthens the reliability of the official. Is the informant embellishing the working situation? If the worker has misled me, one possible reason could be that he/she was afraid of reprisals, for example being dismissed, by the manager.

Common for workers in all categories was the fact that they compared their wage and working conditions to other workers in the retail sector of Oshakati. An answer to the question of “whom do you compare your wage with” was:

Other people in shops. Like Shoprite they are not like us. Shoprite, Lion I can say our company is the best one.

(A worker at Venus)

This comparison does not support what Miller (2005) found out in her study of Zambian Shoprite workers’ *regional claim-making*. Claim-making refers to the people from an area to which they compare themselves when they look at wages or other working conditions. These workers studied by Miller compared their wages and working conditions to Shoprite workers in South Africa. I agree, however, with her notion of *regional claim-making*, where claims are understood as a demand for inclusion, of for example wages and working conditions, into a particular bounded entity. But instead of Southern Africa as a region for claim-making my informants rather see Oshakati or the local area as a region for claim-making.



## **7. Conclusion**

This study set out to explain how labour regulations are affected by broader power relations in society, and how these relations are manifested in the working conditions. My interest in emancipatory science led me to employ theories separating capital and workers in order to analyse the marginalisation of workers. I regard my research hypotheses as substantiated based on my empirical findings in chapter five and six, and my theoretical framework in chapter four.

I will in this conclusion discuss my contribution to the refinement of theories on work regimes, building on my new regime concepts outlined in the theoretical chapter. I will also provide the basis for my claim that the hypotheses were substantiated.

### **Identifying Workplace Work Regimes**

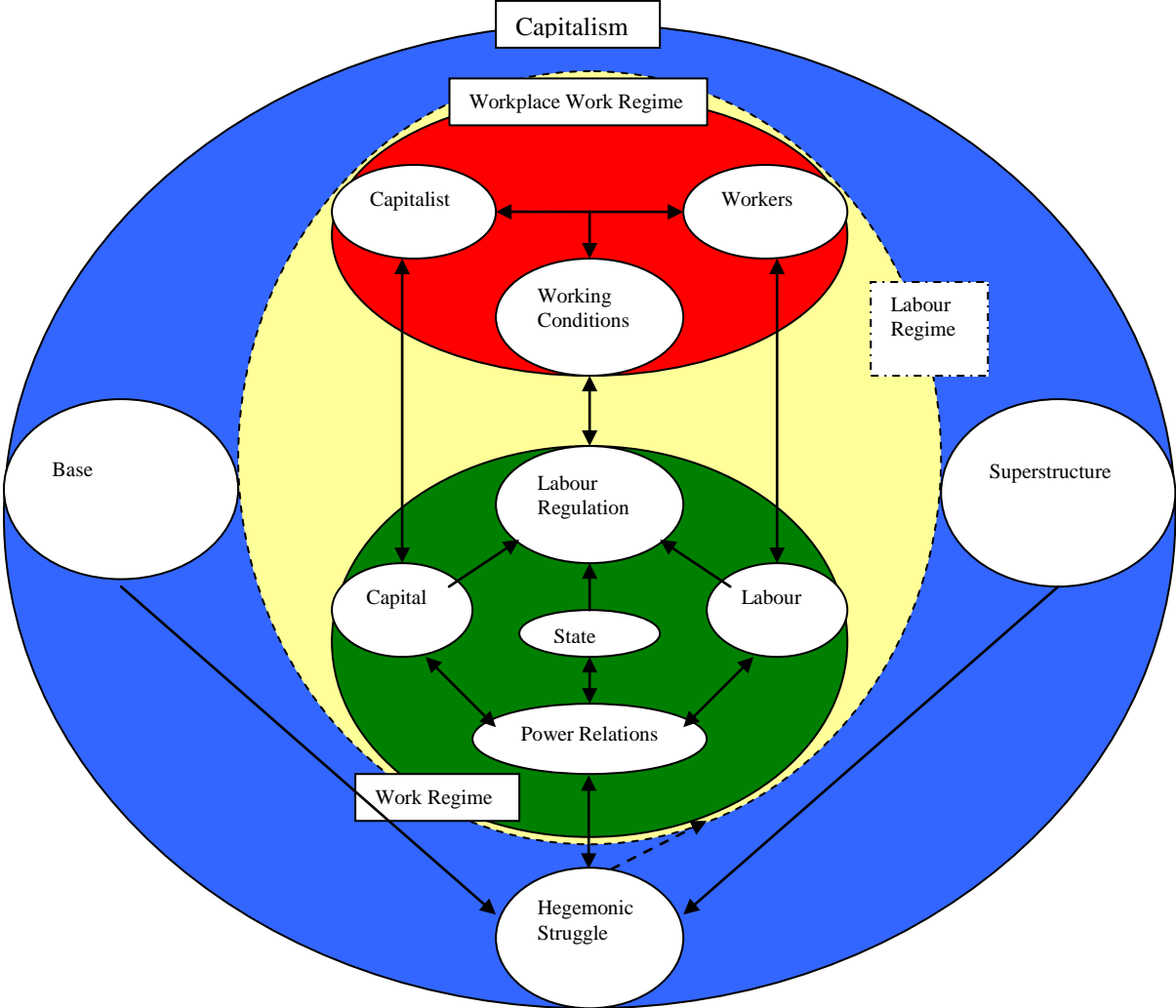
Drawing on the analysis of the national work regime and the relations and working conditions at the workplaces, I will now be sketching three different workplace work regimes. These workplace work regimes are ideal types based on theoretical abstractions from the empirical data collected through interviews with workers, trade unionists and government officials. The working conditions are also analysed in light of the labour regulations.

When Burawoy (1985) coined the phrase factory regime he assumed that the national policies concerning labour issues resulted in a homogenous framework for all workplaces. The reason, to him, for differing factory regimes between workplaces had to be sought in specific aspects at the individual workplace. I disagree with Burawoy in this aspect.

In the retail sector of Oshakati, I have found out that the national framework for labour relations, i.e. the Namibian Labour Act, conditions the labour relations differently between different retail categories. In this way, I do not agree with Andr e and Beckman (1998) and Burawoy (1985) that relations at workplaces and national labour regulations should be included in the same concept. Workplace work regimes need to be explained with reference to more than just specific aspects at the individual workplaces. The hegemonic struggle constitutes, together with the neoliberal accumulation regime and Namibia's mode of regulation, the framework, i.e. labour regime, of work regimes and workplace work regimes. At the same time it appears that the labour regime determines the relation between work regimes and workplace work regimes. The identified workplace work regimes are combinations of several aspects of the factory regimes identified by Burawoy. However, none

of the workplace work regimes I identified can be placed squarely in one of his categories. A new conceptual framework can be illustrated in the following model.

Figure 5. Model of a new conceptual framework for studying work- and labour regimes.



I found it necessary to construct the model above both in order to tidy up the various conceptualisations of regimes and to explain the varying discrepancy between the national work regime and the workplace work regimes within the same labour regime found in this thesis. The arrows highlights the relations between different spheres, structures and agents at different levels within society.

**The Coercive Workplace Work Regime**

Although coercion is not common at workplace level, *coercion* is here understood in the Gramscian sense, and I have chosen to place both the Chinese category and the Small Local

category in this workplace work regime. I have done so because the shops in these categories have working conditions relying on insecurity, discipline, long hours, very low wages, few benefits (if any at all), control over workers both during and after work, and a relation to the manager/owner characterised by either non-existence (i.e. giving workers the cold shoulder) or fear. All of these parameters are indicators of a coercive rule at the workplace, not only considered together but also separately. The restriction of benefits and the extended working hours are both in breach of the Labour Act. The way that the workers are deducted for shortcomings in the till and how they are forced to pay that back resembles bonded labour.

As I mentioned earlier, in Gamma the workers had to be inside before ten o'clock or else they would be reported to the manager/owner. This is a breach of civil rights and resembles Apartheid working conditions. Furthermore, trade unions are not so much involved in these categories. Partly because trade unions find it difficult to organise workers in the Chinese category, for reasons mentioned earlier, and partly because what started as a policy of black empowerment has developed into a strategy of strengthening black entrepreneurs in which they are to be protected at almost whatever cost.

It is a coercive regime because the owners/managers simply say no to all requests and threaten workers if they complain. There are no negotiations or efforts to listen, compromise or ensure consent. The workers are forced to work under these hostile conditions due to their (and their families') destitution, and accept the working conditions because of the lack of alternatives. The shops are competing on low prices, and are in that way focusing on the low-income market, which allow them to have these kinds of working conditions. My informants in these categories were neither pleased with their wage nor their working conditions.

### **The Workplace Work Regime of Consent**

Consent is here both related to the Gramscian understanding of the concept, and the concept of social partnership. I have chosen to place the international/South African category in this workplace work regime. I have done so because the workers have all (or almost all) benefits and relatively high wages. They can to a relatively large extent express disagreements and come up with suggestions on how to practice certain things. The workers are represented by trade unions and shop stewards are pointed out. The relation between trade unions and the managers is characterised as good. The Labour Act is complied with, and more than that. Workers in the international/South African category are, more or less, pleased with both their wages and their working conditions. These factors were decisive when identifying this as a workplace work regime of consent. The international/South African chain stores have relative

high prices and are focusing on the upper-income market. A coercive regime would not be possible if they were to uphold this up-market image, because the shops base much of their standard on the workers' consent and pride. The workers feel responsible for the sale and success of the shop and thus do a good job, which in turn makes the costumers feel taken care of.

However, as I described, the working conditions in the international/South African category are more heterogeneous than in the Chinese and the Small Local categories, and the longer a company has been operating in Namibia the worse the working conditions tend to be. When new chain stores move into Oshakati with their glittering façade, the old ones are not seen as modern anymore and lose some of the up-market image. As a result of the competition among shops the customer segment change and eventually also the working conditions. This highlights the constant shift that workplace work regimes undergo, and at some point shops in this category may not be characterised by consent anymore.

### **The Workplace Work Regime of Abusive Partnership**

With abusive partnership I refer to the efforts to uphold the earlier image of up-market shops, and of building labour relations on consent in a way that reminds of social partnership. The reality is, however, somewhat different. I have chosen to place the shops in the Big National category in this workplace work regime. I have done so because the shops in the Big National category were once the modern shops where everybody wanted to shop and many wanted to work. But these shops have lost their appeal and image long ago. Now these shops have moved down the ladder when it comes to customer segment and working conditions. Wages are almost as low as in the Chinese and Small Local categories, although workers get paid for overtime. The working hours are significantly lower compared to the Chinese and Small Local categories, but still more than the regulated forty-five. Benefits are given, although with restrictions. Unionism is allowed, but is not encouraged by the owners or managers. On the whole, the Labour Act is complied with in most respects, but behind the façade of benefits and wages, there exists an abusive relation between managers/owners and workers. The category containing Big National retailers is, as we have seen, heterogeneous and the working conditions vary relatively much between Hippo, on the one hand, and Rhino and Zebra on the other, although they share the regime of abusive partnership. Competition in the sale of foodstuffs is more intense than in building materials, which could explain the worse working conditions in Hippo compared to Rhino and Zebra. This is based on the argument that the stronger competition the worse the working conditions, which in turn is based on the inherent

relations of capitalism. Not much attention has been directed towards these working conditions, and the workers receive little help from unions. Again, that the Big National shops are allowed to continue these practices can be explained by reference to black empowerment, i.e. the strengthening of black entrepreneurs.

### **The Development and Spread of Workplace Work Regimes**

To understand why these workplace work regimes have developed and how they may develop we need to bear in mind the critical realist notion of structure and agency. In a capitalist mode of production, the capitalist has to compete in order to stay a capitalist. However, the strategies in this competition vary.

The spread of “good” and “fair” labour practices from international/South African chain stores to the other categories is being conspicuous by its absence. Instead it seems to be the other way around. The “good” and “fair” labour practices at international/South African chain stores are deteriorating over time, and are getting more and more like the workplace work regime of abusive partnership and the workplace work regime of consent. First of all, this pattern can be seen when we compare the international/South African chain stores with each other. Those which have been established in Namibia for a long time seem to have worse working conditions than the newly established ones. For example, relatively new shops, like Mars and Venus, have considerably better wage and benefit schemes compared to Shoprite and Saturn which have been established in Oshakati for a longer time. Secondly, there is a tendency that wages are getting worse over time within the international/South African chain stores. After independence wages went up:

Maybe they were getting like 11% increase and then they get 10% and then they get 7 and then 3.

(A worker at Saturn)

This might be true in all categories. Already in 1998 Jauch (1998) claimed that workers’ incomes in terms of purchasing power had decreased, as wage increases were below the inflation rate. This is in line with Marx’ immiseration theory (1847). Thirdly, these chain stores are set up in Namibia with an aim of boosting profit:

Shoprite reports that margins for stores outside South Africa as a whole are sufficiently higher than in South Africa, thus offsetting the operational risks entailed in this expansion. In many of these areas, Shoprite is the ‘pioneer food retail investor’.

(Miller 2005:126-127)

This can be seen as a kind of imperialism and is in line with what I discussed in the theoretical framework under globalisation. In other words, if the international/South African chain stores can make more money by increasing the exploitation of labour they probably will. The large pool of unemployed in Namibia strengthens their possibility to do so. Fourthly, the international/South African chain stores are not so vulnerable to consumer boycott in Namibia, since it is seen as prestigious to buy groceries at these chain stores due to the change in consumer culture/lifestyle (Dawson 2007, Endresen 2007). Endresen (2007:10) writes: *“To them, the glittering façades of the chain stores are yet another reminder of a lifestyle way beyond their reach”*. As Wrigley and Lowe (2002) argue, the introduction of supermarkets changes the whole consumption space, i.e. it changes not only where we shop but also how, when and why we shop. In other words, it changes the consumption culture.

The Chinese shops have a clear strategy when it comes to workplace work regimes. The strategy of overexploiting the workers are their way of making profit and to stay capitalist. And from how I interpreted my data, they are going to continue this practice unless the enforcement of labour rights is considerably strengthened.

Both the Small Local shops and Big National shops have been pressured into practicing these workplace work regimes in order to make profits, due to the increasing competition from international/South African chain stores on the one hand and Chinese retailers on the other. When I chose the word “forced” I did so because if the owners of these shops do not make any profit, which they could reinvest in the shop, they would eventually stop being capitalists. The structure thus establishes some constraints, although agents (in this case the shop owners) are free to choose between different actions in order to achieve the same goal (profit in this case). The shops in the Small Local category, which are often localised at corners close to people’s home or work, are furthermore threatened by eviction from the land owner, who wishes to build a complex and rent it out to international/South African business (Smedsrud 2007). The shops in the Big National category are facing another problem; they lose customers to the international/South African chain stores as they are no longer regarded as modern. The ones that cannot adapt to the new modern shopping mall concept are heading to a certain close down (Endresen 2007). The working conditions in these categories are deteriorating over time and will probably continue to do so until they have to close down or the enforcement of labour rights is strengthened. A decrease in competition does not seem realistic since it is inherent in capitalism. The casualisation of labour is putting further strains on workers not only in the Big National category, but also in the other categories.

## **The Research hypotheses**

- i. *The historical struggle for independence has played a significant role in shaping the class struggle in Namibia.*
- ii. *The struggle for hegemony affects the Namibian work regime and the workplace work regimes in the retail sector of Oshakati.*

### **From Hegemony to Work Regimes and Workplace Work Regimes and Back Again**

By analysing the historic struggle for independence we gained a better understanding of Namibia's relations and of how the relations between SWAPO, NUNW and the economic elite were shaped. I have analysed this through Gramsci's (1929-1935) concept of hegemony. During the South African rule, the black population was repressed by means of coercion. The black workers had to withstand inhuman working and living conditions during the Apartheid era. In 1957 Ovambo People's Congress was established to empower the Ovambo workers, but soon developed into SWAPO; an organisation for the struggle for independence, thus embracing all Namibians. As a part of SWAPO, NUNW was established to organise workers into unions, but due to prohibition against political affiliation it had to work abroad until the mid-1980. SWAPO's war of position was won immediately inside Namibia and later on the international arena. The growing discontent with the South African Apartheid policy on the international arena made them attempt a passive revolution in order to maintain its control over Namibia. A result was the rise of a new black Namibian economic elite.

After winning the war of movement, the new political elite, SWAPO, engaged in an alliance with the economic elite, both the new Namibian and the South African economic elite, which secured them hegemony. This historic bloc and the struggle to maintain hegemony set the stage for today's class struggle in Namibia. Hence, the class relations in Namibia today need to be studied against this backdrop, and the Namibian labour regulation is shaped by the Namibian power relations. Furthermore, the Namibian labour regulations and power relations set the premisses for the relations at workplaces, which in turn enters the struggle for through disputes.

By recapitulating the main points from the analysis, I will argue that hegemony affects Namibia's work regime and the workplace work regimes in the retail sector of Oshakati. The historic bloc between SWAPO and the economic elite has resulted in a strengthening of capital as against labour. SWAPO's development discourse rests on neoliberal policies, such

as privatisation, economic growth, trickle down and the self-regulating market. Not only does capital have the upper hand in terms of economic power, they also enjoy cooperation and advantages from the Government (their ally) due to the historic bloc. The asymmetric relation between capital and labour is further strengthened by NUNW's affiliation to SWAPO. NUNW's affiliation to SWAPO make the union part of the historic bloc. In this way, SWAPO can legitimise its policies through gaining the acceptance of NUNW. The result is that the Namibian labour regulation, the Labour Act, and especially its enforcement, benefits capital and not labour. There are several examples: no national minimum wage, no unemployment fund, no functioning pension fund or medical benefit fund. The Government's objective of social partnership between capital and labour is an attempt at passive revolution. The concept of social partnership makes the workers responsible agents in the economic growth of Namibia and in ensuring an attractive market for FDI and TNCs. Hence, this policy further legitimises the exploitation of workers. The historic bloc between the economic and political elite and their struggle for hegemony have resulted in social partnership, and this has undermined the very principles of labour regulation. Labour regulations are means of preventing labour and capital from making unreasonable demands, but when the supposed neutral state takes the side of capital, the demands of capital are accepted while the demands of labour are not. In this context, capital can put forward unreasonable demands which labour is compelled to accept, due to the hope that creating a capital-friendly environment will ensure new employment possibilities, and being a disarticulated society. I have characterised this national work regime as what Andr e and Beckman (1998) call a *state centred corporatist regime*.

The working conditions in the different categories of shops in the retail sector of Oshakati vary. The worst working conditions were found in the Chinese and the Small Local categories. The working conditions were slightly better in the Big National category, while the international/South African category had the best working conditions. I found workers regarding themselves as lucky or unlucky not only compared with other workers in other shops in Oshakati, but also compared to workers in the same shop. This points towards a segmented labour market, which in turn further hinders workplace struggles and the class struggle at large. The everyday struggles at workplaces and the unions' attempts to improve working conditions and labour regulations in turn affect the overall structure and the hegemonic struggle.



### **My Ontological and Epistemological Starting Point**

Without my positioning within critical realism and critical theory, I would probably not have come to the same conclusions. An ontology based on stratification and differentiation regards reality as beyond our immediate understanding. We have to make abstractions and retroductions in order to gain knowledge about phenomena. I regard society as shaped by the interplay between structures and agents' actions. This interplay either reproduces or transforms the existing structures. In this thesis I have shown how SWAPO's struggle for independence changed the structure of Apartheid and how the historic bloc between SWAPO and the economic elite constructed new structures, like the Namibian work regime. Trade unions, workers and other agents transform or reproduce the labour regulation structure through labour struggles, either at workplaces or at larger scales.

An epistemology based on emancipation informed my choice of topic for the study. Without this interest and without my objective of contributing to social development the topic and the results might not have been arrived at.

### **Relevance in Other Contexts**

How can the findings of this thesis be of relevance in other contexts/cases? Despite being grounded in a specific context, the case study highlights abstract structural relations when identifying work regimes and workplace work regimes, and not empirical characteristics to be extrapolated. It is these abstract structures which ensures the transferability to other contexts, and I will thus argue in favour of a theoretical relevance. By referring to the generative mechanisms and inherent relations of capitalism we were able to see the antagonism between the interests of the two fundamental classes. Furthermore, the concept of hegemony is a helpful analytic tool for understanding how relations between capital, labour and state affect labour regulations and working conditions. My external validity is strengthened by Lier's (2005) study of how the ties between ANC and COSATU could be interpreted as a historic bloc, and thus as an obstacle to trade union work and new alliances in the struggle against neoliberal economic globalisation. It is also possible to see parallels to the Irish struggle for independence where the new political elite in the Irish Free State joined forces with the economic elite in order to secure hegemony (Bergene Forthcoming).

### **What I would Like to See**

I would like to see an independent relation between NUNW and SWAPO. A trade union is anchored in its members and compelled to cater for working class interests. Political parties,

on the other hand, do not have this anchor. An affiliation to a political party can thus be problematic as I have tried to show in this thesis. Trade unions can or must be political but not through political parties. I believe that a strengthened position of trade unions vis-à-vis the state and capital will lead to improved results in negotiations concerning working conditions and worker rights both at the national level and at the individual workplace. The Namibian trade unions should not only strive for increased unionisation, but also engage in popular struggles to strengthen its position towards the state and capital. This kind of cooperation between trade unions, churches, non-governmental organisations and other organisations is called Social Movement Unionism (Lier 2005). As already mentioned, work regimes are to a great extent influenced by power relations in society at large, and a work regime is never static due to agents' ability to transform structures through actions. Workers' struggles for improved rights and working conditions is a constant, ongoing struggle.

### **Further Research**

As mentioned in chapter four, Gramsci regards hegemony as a process which involves a political dimension, an economic dimension as well as a cultural dimension. Wrigley and Lowe (2002) argue that the establishment of supermarkets changes the consumption culture as the new glittering façades of supermarkets attract customers of all classes/groups into new ways of shopping. Furthermore, as I briefly noted in the section on working conditions in chapter six, Delta has better working conditions than the rest of the shops in the same category. This may have several explanations; *one* of them can be a different cultural background, as the owner of Delta is a Muslim in a Christian-dominated population. Hence, the cultural dimension is an interesting object for further research both when it comes to hegemony and workplace work regimes.

Additionally, above I briefly reflected on the development and spread of working conditions. Some arguments, of immiseration and the competitive nature of capitalism, were given to explain this. Further research is needed in order to explain why and how certain working conditions develop and spread, and to find out to what extent they worsen over time, a development which might be explained with reference to Endresen's (1994) theory of retrogression.

Last but not least, more research is needed in order to find out whether the concept of labour regime can be used as a theoretical framework in order to study why there is no one to one relationship between national work regimes and workplace work regimes.

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## Appendix 1: Informants

### Workers

Anonymous	Mars	Interview Outdoors 11.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Lion	Interview At a café 12.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Dōng	Interview At a restaurant 13.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Venus	Interview Outdoors 13.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Gamma	Interview At a café 14.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Xià	Interview At a restaurant 14.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Sigma	Interview At a café 15.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Chūn	Interview At a restaurant 15.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Rhino	Interview At a café 15.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Jupiter	Interview At a restaurant 18.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Saturn	Interview At home 18.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Zebra	Interview At a restaurant 18.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Delta	Interview At home 19.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Beta	Interview At a restaurant 19.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Mercury	Interview In the shop 20.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Saturn	Interview At a café 23.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Hippo	Interview At home 24.09.06	Recorded
Anonymous	Alpha	Interview At a restaurant 25.09.06	Not Recorded

### Trade Union Representatives

Collin Nepela	NAFAU, Oshakati	Interview At the office 21.09.06	Recorded
Jafet N Mateus	NWRWU, Oshakati	Interview	Recorded
The only one who asked to see the interview guide in advance.			
		At the office 21.09.06	
Anonymous	NAFAU, Windhoek	Interview At the office 03.10.06	Recorded
Joshua Mabuku	NWRWU, Windhoek	Interview	Recorded

At the office 03.10.06

**Manager**

Tomas	Mercury	Interview In the shop 20.09.06	Recorded
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**Officials**

Not Stated	Social Security Commission	Dialogue At the office 15.09.06	Not Recorded
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Not Stated	Chamber of Commerce	Dialogue At the office 22.09.06	Not Recorded
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M. Nangoma	Labour Commissioner	Interview At the office 25.09.06	Recorded
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Not Stated	Labour Inspector	Dialogue At the office 25.09.06	Not Recorded
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## Appendix 2: Interview Guides

### Interview Guide for Wage Workers

#### A. Background

1. Are you married?
2. Do you have children?
3. Do your children live with you?
4. How old are you?
5. Are you from Oshakati?
6. Are any of your work mates' migrant workers?
7. Do you live at a private house or has your employer set you up with the housing?  
(- If so, do you live with your work mates or do you live by your self/with your family?)
8. Did you know your employer before you started working there?
9. Are any of your family members, besides you, working at the shop?

#### B. Working Conditions

10. What is good with your place of work?
11. What do you dislike about your place of work?
12. Do you have a permanent job or are you casual worker or labour hire?
13. Do you have a work contract?
14. What does the contract say and what is your opinion of it? (Is it covering and fair?)
15. What is your wage (salary)?
16. Are you satisfied with your wage?
17. To whom do you compare wages?
18. Who decides your wage?
19. Does your place of work use collective bargaining?
20. Do you earn enough to support your family members?
21. Do you get paid during training?
22. To your knowledge, is your work mates contracted through *Labour Hire*? If so, what is it used for?
23. Has it been taken action for improving the working conditions? If so, what kind of action?
24. What kind of improvement could you wish for if it was up to you?
25. Are you involved in decisions concerning changes of working conditions?
26. Are there other rules at the work place?
27. Have you had wage increase or other benefits during your employment so far?
28. Is it anyone at work who gets extra benefits from the manager?
29. Have you experienced child labour at your place of work?
30. How is your manager controlling you at work? Is it the manager himself or is it someone else?
31. How much does your manager control you at work?
32. Do you feel watched over?
33. If someone steals how is that handled by the manager?
34. What kind of punishment do you get if you do something wrong at work?
35. Can you tell the manager about things at work you dislike?
36. Does your manager use to shout at you?
37. Do you have more and more to do at work?

- 38. Are you afraid of loosing your job?
- 39. Are you afraid of the manager?
- 40. Have you worked at other retailers before? What are the differenses?

### **C. Level of conflicts resolving**

- 41. What is the main reason to employees resigning?
- 42. Has anyone resigned? Why?
- 43. Has it been conflicts between employers (managers) and employees?
- 44. What was the conflict about?
- 45. How did the conflict develop?
- 46. Was the trade union involved?

### **D. The involvement of trade unions**

- 47. Do you have a union membership?
- 48. How would you describe the relation between you and the trade union?
- 49. How would you describe the relation between the manager and the trade union?
- 50. Is the trade union active? (Training, meetings, demonstrations etc)
- 51. In your opinion, what is your employer's attitude towards unionisation or union membership?
- 52. Does your work place have a union representative or committee?

### **E. Other**

- 53. Is it positive to be organised through trade union? Why (not)?
- 54. Have you knowledge aboute Namibias *Labour Act*? (Vacation, maternity leave, overtime, meals, sickness, termination of employment)
- 55. Do you have any questions for me?

## **Interview Guide for Trade Unions**

I have done a research aboute the working conditions for wage workers among different retailers in Oshakati. My findings are that.....

### **1. Working Conditions**

- What is the trade unions (NAFAU, NWRWU/NARAWU or NUWRU) opinion concerning the different working conditions among retailers?
- Have you had knowledge aboute this allready? If so, how long and what have you done aboute it?
- What is the trade unions strategy concerning the different working conditions?
- What is the trade unions opinion aboute retailers using *Labour Hire*?

### **2. Trade Unions Involvement**

- To what extend do the trade union wish to be involved in conflicts at the specific places of work concerning working conditions?
- Is the trade union involved in working conditions conflicts as much as it wishes?
- Do you see any obstacles for trade unions to improve working conditions at the "worst places"?
- What is the strategy of trade union when it's working towards goverments officials and Chamber of Commerce and Industry concerning the improvement of working conditions for the wage workers?
- What is the strategy of trade union when it's working towards goverments officials and Chamber of Commerce and Industry to try to strengthen its position as a regulation institution?

### **3. Position of Regulation**

- What is the trade unions relation towards Chamber of Commerce and Industry?
- What is the trade unions relation towards the labour commissioner and more generally towards Ministry of Labour?
- Who do you see as your allied in questions concerning working conditions and workers right? Why?

### **4. Other**

- What is the trade unions main target right now?
- If you could wish for one change, what would it be?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## **Interview Guide for the Labour Commissioner**

I have done a research about the working conditions for wage workers among different retailers in Oshakati. My findings are that.....

### **1. Working Conditions**

- What is the Labour Commssioners opinion concerning the different working conditions among retail workers?
- Have you had any knowledge about this allready? If so, for how long?
- What is the Labour Commssioners opinion aboute the reason for this development?
- What are the Labour Commssioners opinion aboute Labour Hire workers?
- What is the Labour Commssioners strategy towards the different working conditions in the retail buisness?
- What is the main reason behind conflicts between employer and employees?

### **2. Level of Conflicts Resolving**

- How does the main part of the conflicts resolve? Which institutions are involved?
- To what degree is the Labour Commssioner involved in these conflicts? Do the Labour Commssioner wishes to become more involved?

### **3. Position of Regulation**

- What are the Labour Commssioners opinion aboute trade unions?
- What is the Labour Commssioners opinion aboute the strenght of buisnesses, in particular internaional, in those working conditons conflicts?
- Who do you see as the Labour Commssioners allied in questions concerning working conditions and work rights?

### **4. Other**

- What is the Labour Commissioners main target right now?
- If you could wish for one change, what would it be?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## **Interview Guide for Managers**

### **1. Working Conditions**

- Does your employees have work contract?
- Are they permanent workers, casuel workers or *Labour Hire* workers?
- Do you use more or less of *Labour Hire* workers then before?
- What is the average wage at work?
- Do they have lunch break, vacations and other benefits according to Namibias *Labour Act*?

- Are the workers registered in Social Security Commission?
- Have you done anything to improve working conditions? If so, was it at request from the workers or trade union?
- Are the employees involved in decisions concerning working conditions?
- What do you know about the working conditions among your competitors?

## **2. Level of conflict**

- What is the main reason for workers resigning?
- Has it been any conflicts between you and the workers in the last years?
- If so, what happened?
- Was the trade union involved?

## **3. Trade Union**

- How would you describe the relation between you and the trade union?
- What is your opinion about trade unions involvement in work conflicts?
- Is it common that your employees are union members?
- Is it a union representative among your workers?

## **4. Other**

- What is your opinion about Namibia's *Labour Act*?
- Are you organised through *Chamber of Commerce*? Or do you get any support from Chamber of Commerce?
- What is your opinion about the labour commissioner's involvement in work conflicts?
- Do you have any questions for me?