“One Namibia – One Nation”


Jenny Schwerdt

Master (One Year) Thesis in Social and Cultural Analysis (Social Science)

ISRN: LiU-ISV/SKA-A--19/09--SE
**Title**

**Abstract**
Namibia won its independence in 1990 after a long liberation struggle lead by the – since independence ruling party – SWAPO. There is an ongoing nation-building process in the multiethnic country ever since, with a vision about a unified nation. This study examines the relationship between the nation and one of its ethnic minority groups; the San. From a socio-economic perspective the San is the most disadvantaged ethnic group of contemporary Namibia. How do members of San experience national participation? How does the nation handle the ethnic diversity? This study illustrates that a national identity is promoted by the government and that the struggle for an unified nation is legitimized with the liberation struggle and its won independence. At the same time members of San seem to identify their living situation with ethnicity and are more concerned about the survival of their closest community than national participation. The discussion is based on qualitative interviews where experiences among San-members and one NGO-volunteer are analysed with inspiration of the method Grounded Theory, related to earlier research on the field and theories of nationalism and ethnicity.

**Keywords**
Namibia, San, Bushmen, nation-building, ethnicity, participation, empowerment
Acknowledgements

I am looking at the illuminated waterhole close to the Etosha National Park. If I am lucky I will see a lion while chewing my dinner. It is peaceful, quiet and dark, only the candle light allows me to see what I am writing. Martin, the waiter serving me at the table in the open restaurant with no walls and the magnificent view, is a San he explains when I ask him if he is Namibian, after he has asked me where I come from. I continue our conversation with asking to which San-group he belongs. “Hai//om”, he answers with a smile of pride. “Do you know?” he asks me. “I have only met Ju/'hoansi so far”, I answer. “We are different but all the same family”, he says before he moves on to the next table in the restaurant.

I am grateful to a number of people for support and encouragement throughout the process of writing this text.

I would like to start by thanking you, Magnus Berg at the Department of Social and Welfare Studies at University of Linköping. You have not only shared your valuable knowledge within the field of social and cultural studies, but also opened the door for me to the particular research field of the Namibian context with its interesting nation-building process. I thank you for your never ending humoristic spirit that has kept me happily motivated and inspired throughout both this research project and my education at the Program for Social and Cultural Analysis. How can I ever express my gratitude to you? A bag of Biltongs and the most recent album of Jackson Kaujeua is my best try.

I also want to thank you, Volker Winterfeldt at the Department of Sociology at University of Namibia. I appreciate our interesting morning tea-conversations and all your constructive comments on my text. Thank you for a priceless guidance and for your will of sharing your knowledge of Namibia.

Khalid Khayati at the Department of Social and Welfare Studies at University of Linköping – thank you for helpful and important discussions during the Swedish autumn of 2008, which have contributed much to the structure of this text.

Furthermore I would like to thank Gittan Arwén at Africa Groups of Sweden for your continues interest in my research and for all valuable contacts in Namibia.

Norman Tjombe at Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and Ben Begbie-Clench at Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), both in Windhoek – thank you for the generously shared literature and network on the field.

Many thanks also to the Linnaeus-Palme grant and the Alreiks grant. Your financial support made the travel to and stay in Namibia possible.

My dear family and Sonja & Frank – thank you for unforgettable memories while you visited Namibia and for showing so much interest in my passion for this country by travelling so far.

I am also indebted to Elin – for your warm support despite the long distance. I hope the phone bills won’t take too long to get rid of…
In particular, I owe my gratitude to my Windhoek-room mates who have become my Namibian family – Charles, Johanna, Sanna, Sebastian and Toomas. Thank you for your never ending support and friendship. I have seldom experienced so much love developing within a group of people – so quickly and intense! A special gratitude to Charles, for bringing me along on the Namibian roads and helping me discover its beauty by sharing all your secret corners.

This text is dedicated to the informants of the interviews and the members of your community. Thank you for welcoming me so warm to your home and for sharing your important experiences and reflections. A sincere thank you goes to the interpreter that took me to the informants’ homes and helped us to understand each other.

The lion does not show up at the waterhole this evening. Maybe it is too cold. The Namibian winter reminds me to go back to the tent and my warm sleeping bag. In the moment I decide to get up from the table five giraffes approach their source of water – slowly and very elegant. I feel complete peace.

Jenny Schwerdt
1st of June, 2009
Onguma Bush Camp, Namibia
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBO – Community-based Organisation
CERD – Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
GDP – Gross Domestic Products
GRN – Government of the Republic of Namibia
GT – Grounded Theory
LAC – Legal Assistance Centre
NBC – Namibian Broadcasting Corporation
NDF – Namibian Defence Force
NGO – non-governmental organisation
NNDFN – Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia
OPC – Ovamboland People’s Congress
OPO – Ovamboland People’s Organisation
SWA – South West Africa
SWAPO – South West Africa People’s Organisation
UN – United Nations
UNAM – University of Namibia
WIMSA – Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa
## Contents

Acknowledgements  
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms  

### INTRODUCTION 1

### PURPOSE OF STUDY AND QUESTIONS OF ISSUE 2

### DISPOSITION 3

### METHOD 3

#### PROCEDURE 3

- Qualitative Interviews 4
- Grounded Theory 4

#### METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS 5

- Ethical Aspects 5

### CENTRAL THEORETICAL CONCEPTS 7

#### NATION AND NATIONALISM 7

- The Modern Nation-state 8
- State-nationalism 9
- Socially Constructed and Imagined Communities 10
- National Symbols and National Identity 10

#### ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC GROUPS 11

- Socially Constructed and Situational Ethnicity 11
- Instrumental Ethnicity 12
- Assimilation, Integration and Ethnic Incorporation 12
- Stigma, Status and Class in Relation to Ethnic Identity 13

#### POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION 14

#### INDIGENOUS PEOPLES 15

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION 16

#### COLONIALISM, APARTHEID AND THE NAMIBIAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE 16

#### NAMIBIAN NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY 17

- The Construction of a National Identity 17
- A Nation-building Process – Excluding the Majority? 18
- Namibian Political Structure of Today 20
EARLIER RESEARCH

SAN

   History of the San  23
   The Construction of the “Bushman Myth”  24
   Living Conditions and Employment  25
   Resettlement  26
   Literacy and Health  26
   GRN, NGOs and CBOs  27
   Traditional Leadership  28
   Representation, Alienation and Rights  28

ANALYSIS

   CONTRADICTIVE OPTIMISM  30
   SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM  31
   ETHNIC LIMITATION  31
   LACK OF TRUST  32
   LACK OF AWARENESS  33
   ETHNIC COMMUNITY STRONGER THAN NATIONAL UNITY  34
       Empowerment instead of Participation?  35
   WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?  35
       Community Projects  35
       Multiple Identities  36
       “A Chain of Social Workers”  36
       A Re-built Trust  37

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION  37

   A SWEDISH PARALLEL  40

SUMMARY  42

REFERENCES  44

PUBLISHED MATERIAL  44
   Articles  46
   Internet  46

OTHER MATERIAL  46
ANNEX

ABOUT NAMIBIA

People 47
Language 47
Economy 47
Chronology of the Namibian History 48

MAP OF NAMIBIA

Map of Namibia during the Apartheid Era 51

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide for the Informants in the Resettlement Camp 52
Interview Guide for the NGO-employee 53
Introduction

I mean, you could put it down to colonialism and all those kind of problems but then also other tribes have gone through those problems so I don’t know whether it’s just that they [the San] have a position which makes them a lot less confident then other tribes. They [the San] haven’t been able to kind of push themselves forward and take advantage of development opportunities as much as other tribes have done. I mean, some of it has to be put on other tribes, there is still a lot of negativity about the San. You hear so many stereotypes all the time so I think a lot of it is down to the way they are treated still. If you feel like people don’t respect you and they think you are the lowest below then that’s how you stay.1

These are the words of Sheila, a volunteer employed by one of Namibia’s non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Since the Namibian independence, in 1990, a nation-building process is taking place “in a field of tension between a nationalistic, political elite and relatively strong ethnic identifications”.2 South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), the ruling party since independence, is strongly supported by the majority of the Namibians and often associated with the founding of the nation.3 Earlier research suggests that the ongoing Namibian nation-building process is promoting a national identity based on a common political ideology4 whereas the ethnic identities are discouraged although they in fact play a very important role concerning redistribution of wealth and national resources.5

Interesting in this mentioned “field of tension” between the nation-building process and ethnic related living conditions is, if one asks me, to look at the relationship between the multiethnic nation and its ethnic minorities. How does the nation handle the ethnic diversity? Is it possible to include all the nation’s ethnicities in the nation-building process? And, perhaps more importantly, is it possible to provide equal conditions to all the ethnic groups in the nation?2

The ancestors of today’s San (also known as Bushmen) were once the first population of the region that we at present call Namibia.6 The estimated number of San living in today’s Namibia lies between 30 000 and 38 000, which constitute less than two per cent of the national population.7 Earlier research illustrate that the San struggle with social, educational and health problems, dependency, extreme poverty and political alienation. These are not problems that are

---

1 Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009 (All names of the informants are fingered.)
3 Berg (2004), p. 256
unique to the San. What is unique to the San, however, is the fact that the San are more or less collectively extremely poor while “only” proportions of other Namibian ethnic groups are extremely poor. Statistics suggest that Namibia has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world and there is a clear gap between San and other Namibian ethnic groups. The San have the lowest income per person in the country and most San have no direct cash income. From a socio-economic perspective this makes San the most disadvantaged ethnic group of contemporary Namibia with little access to existing political and economic institutions.8

The following quote from Sofia, one of the informants for this study who identifies herself as a member of the ethnic group San, might illustrate how participation, power, priority and discrimination can be experienced among San.

Sofia: We, the San people, we don’t get a chance to participate in the meetings. … They [other ethnic groups] have more power in the meetings, or more power in the office, so the San person doesn’t have that more power. … The other peoples’ problems are always taking over and from there we [the San] start getting angry and just go home. … The other people think they are more important than the San. … We [the San] will always be discriminated.9

---

**Purpose of Study and Questions of Issue**

The purpose of this study is firstly to examine the experience of participation in the multiethnic nation Namibia among members of San communities in rural areas, and secondly to relate these experiences to the ongoing official nation-building process. To achieve my purpose I base the study on the following overall questions of issue:

- How is participation experienced among the informants?
- How is the disadvantaged living situation of the majority of the Namibian San experienced among the informants?
- Which factors seem to have an impact on the feeling of national belonging and “closeness” to the nation? Which factors seem to have an impact on the construction of a national identity and the feeling of being included in the nation?

The attempt of approaching the study’s overall questions of issue is based on the following more particular questions of issue:

- How is participation and empowerment defined among the informants?
- How is national identity being constructed by the government since the independence of Namibia?
- How is the relationship between ethnic and national identity experienced among the informants?

---

9 Interview with Sofia, 17th of March, 2009
**Disposition**

This study begins with a methodological description of the study’s procedure including reflections about the method *Grounded Theory* and the process of doing qualitative interviews. Next section of the study contains definitions of central theoretical concepts – such as nationalism and national identity, ethnicity and ethnic identity, social exclusion and indigenous peoples – which are utilized throughout the study. Once the theoretical concepts have been outlined I apply these on the Namibian context in a literature-based discussion, initiated by a brief summary of Namibia’s past. After that the discussion about the Namibian nation-building process turns to earlier research of the living situation of the ethnic group San in Namibia. Now an analysis of my fieldwork follows with the purpose of illustrating experiences of the Namibian San context. In conclusion I withdraw from the Namibian San context and enter a more general discussion on the field of ethnic minorities and nation-states.

**Method**

I have chosen to examine the introduced topic through conversations and meetings with people – who in my opinion seem to have subjective experiences of the topic – and relate these to earlier research and different models of theories within the field. The analysis of the data material, based on the qualitative interviews, has been done with inspiration of parts of the method *Grounded Theory*.

I do not intend to picture one objective truth about the living situation of the San in today’s Namibia, since I do not believe that that is possible. “[G]rounded theorists [do not] attempt to study the social structures of whole communities. Instead, we tend to look at slices of social life”¹⁰, sociologist Kathy Charmaz writes. My intention is to approach the complexity of many San’s situation with the purpose of trying to find ways to understand – and in the long run perhaps even change – oppressing social relations and hierarchies of power, which possibly can be seen as reasons that partly cause San’s status and living conditions. In line with Heléne Thomsson I am rather aiming for opening up new questions than to give answers.¹¹

**Procedure**

In March and April of 2009 I interviewed eight persons in a San resettlement camp situated in a rural area in eastern Namibia, and in Windhoek. Seven of the informants identify themselves as San and live in the resettlement camp. The eighth informant is a non-Namibian employed by an NGO that focuses on San development and empowerment in the area. The group of informants

---


constitutes of both women and men and I estimate their age to between twenty five and seventy five years old. All informants from the resettlement camp volunteered to be interviewed with a great interest and curiosity as I visited their home together with an interpreter from the area. The NGO-employee was contacted by me and a meeting was set up in Windhoek for the interview.

**Qualitative Interviews**

The qualitative method was chosen because of its strength when examining how people experience their own reality. The aim of the method is to understand how people define their own situation rather then to explain a phenomenon. The qualitative interview is a suitable method when trying to grasp subjective views, experiences and interpretations.\(^{12}\)

The interviews are based on two different interview guides (see annex), one for the informants in the resettlement camp and one for the NGO-employee. The interviews were done by the so called “not standardised” and “semi structured” interview techniques, which means that although certain overall topics were in focus the questions and the interview situations were not exactly alike by each and every interview. This method allowed flexibility so that every interview situation could influence which questions were of most importance. This often resulted in new angles of approaching the overall topic, in line with what Pia Åsbring describes, with references to Trost and Kvale.\(^{13}\)

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory (GT) was initially presented by Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967) and later on modified by Strauss & Juliet Corbin (1990). The method is suitable for research projects that aim for an understanding of social processes. The method is not used for testing already established theories. Its main purpose is to generate new theories grounded in systematically gathered and analyzed empirical data. The gathering of the data is guided by an outlined question of issue without a specific hypothesis, which makes GT an inductive method.\(^{14}\)

Once I finished the gathering of empirical data through qualitative interviews I moved on to the so called “coding” of the data which in a simplified way could be described as a study or even

---


\(^{13}\) Åsbring (2003), p. 28, partly with reference to Trost (1993) and Kvale (1996)

detailed inspection of the transcribed interviews line by line, the data is so to speak being conceptualized. The codes I discovered were thereafter translated into more overall categories for the purpose of comparison – within one interview as well as between the different interviews – comparing different views, situations and events, searching for connections and patterns, similarities and differences through the informants’ experiences.\(^\text{15}\) The study’s analysis is divided into sections. Each section is named after its core category.

**Methodological Reflections**

I would like to take the opportunity to express my uncertainties about GT as method. I am not sure of the fact that a scholar is able to approach a topic and its field unprejudiced and without any form of a hypothesis, which makes my use of the method strongly contradictory. If a study is meant to be totally free of assumptions it should definitely not include a chapter of central theoretical concepts – which this study does. Therefore I find it of importance to clarify that I have chosen to utilize only the parts of the method that assists me with analyzing my empirical data. With other words, I have selected the pieces of GT that are specifically developed as analytical tools. Consequently, only these parts of the method are described above. This basically excludes the part of generating a new theory and focuses more on how I have analyzed the material.

The interviews, however, are not the one and only core of this study. The core includes as well interviews as a literature-based discussion of the Namibian context. The interviews can perhaps more be seen as an instrument of illustrating the context. Constantly throughout the study I relate the empirical data from the fieldwork to earlier research (specifically on the San context) and more overall literature (particularly on concepts of nation-building processes). This has been done with the intention of being able to achieve more wide-ranging end results than only staying within the Namibian San context. This makes it possible for me to argue on a more general basis in the field of ethnic minorities and nation-states.

**Ethical Aspects**

The informant was well informed about that her/his participation in the interview was both voluntarily and anonymous before every interview took place, this in accordance with the ethical principles within academic research.\(^\text{16}\) However, due to lack of privacy the aspect of anonymity within the resettlement camp is strongly questionable. Each and every interview started out with three persons present; the informant, the interpreter and me, but ended with a crowd of between


ten and twenty persons standing around us, listening and observing. Following quote might illustrate my point.

Interpreter: He [one of the informants] says that he is now becoming angry. He is not feeling alright because people doesn’t respect him.

Me: Can you please ask him if he feels comfortable anywhere else, if we should move?

Interpreter: It won’t help, because when you move the people will follow you.17

I gave my opinion of the importance of anonymity several times but must admit that I finally gave up this ethical principle. Except for this incident nor informant or the interpreter seemed to be bothered by the crowded.

The respondent was also told that s/he could end the interview whenever s/he wished to do so. This did happen a couple of times during the interviews in the resettlement camp because of disturbance from neighbours, hunger or something that seemed to be lack of interest.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. An interpretation of the material has been done because of difficulties from time to time to hear (audible barrier) or understand (language barrier) what the informant or interpreter is expressing.

“What respondents assume or do not apprehend may be much more important than what they talk about”, Charmaz writes.18 During the interviews discussions about a few terms and concepts (such as nation, decision, freedom, travel and participation) took place since they either were not understood by the informant or interpreter or, according to the interpreter, did not exist in the San language Ju/'hoansi and the interpreter had to “walk around the word” as she explained it.

Me: Can you please ask him, what is a nation?

Interpreter: Nation? Nation in our language? How should I put it? Can you describe it a little bit so that I can find an easy way?19

This fact is definitely critical for the validity of this study, since a large part of the analysis is based on the interviews from the resettlement camp and I could not understand how the interpreter described the concepts that were not understood or did not exist in the informant’s language. I possibly could have searched for a second opinion from another interpreter. Due to, firstly, the ethical aspect having someone else listening to the recordings without having informed the informants about that and, secondly, the economical aspect of employing an interpreter to go through all interviews I chose not to go for a second opinion.

According to Charmaz the social world around us is constantly in process, which means that I can only interpret a reality, not the reality. Therefore it can not be claimed that I have constructed an image of an objective, universal and ever lasting truth with this study.20 Charmaz writes that

17 Discussion from interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
18 Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln (eds.) (2003), p. 257
19 Discussion from interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
20 Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln (eds.) (2003), p. 271f
“[t]he product [of a qualitative research] is more like a painting than a photograph”. It is impossible for me as researcher to keep objective since the informant, the interpreter and I interacted and got influenced from each other during the interview. With other words, together we constructed an understanding of a reality.

Throughout this study, especially in the chapter of analysis, I quote from the interviews with the intention of illustrating different phenomenon or situations to the reader. Since the quotes most of the times are the interpreter’s translation of the informants’ actual saying the quotes have sometimes been changed from third to first person in order to construct a more vivid text. For example “she thinks” or “he thinks” has been changed to “I think”. To that I have – when necessarily for the understanding – corrected some of the grammar.

**Central Theoretical Concepts**

“At a personal level, the nation-state closely dictates individuals’ identities, prosperity, and rights”, education- and language scholar Brian Harlech-Jones notes. My attempt is to picture and thereby approach an understanding of the marginalised situation of Namibia’s most disadvantaged ethnic group. For the reason described by Harlech-Jones I find it of importance to give the definition and discussion about the nation-state (and other concepts related to the nation-state) relatively much space. In this section theoretical concepts such as nation, nationalism, ethnicity, ethnic groups, assimilation, social exclusion and indigenous peoples are discussed. These concepts can take many different forms. Here I aim to focus on those who seem to be particularly applicable to Namibia, in an attempt to clarify the empirical context with which this study deals.

**Nation and Nationalism**

Definitions of the concept nation vary in literature. While examining the Namibian nation I experience a great importance of focusing on temporal components such as tradition and history, rather than the spatial component of territory, as political scientist Henning Melber describes it. The post-colonial situation demands more than drawn borderlines around certain territorial entities, he suggests. To that it is of importance to clarify that the analysis of the Namibian

21 Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln (eds.) (2003), p. 270
context requires a different approach than the traditional Western model of nation-state. This because of its dual structure of both modernity and tradition.25

**The Modern Nation-state**

The nation-state has become an international norm that legitimizes political units in the modern world. Social anthropologist Leif John Fosse states that SWAPO’s policies regarding nation-building and ethnicity have partially similarities with the modern state-building process, and partially with the apartheid strategy. (Apartheid will be described more thoroughly later.) Factors that are commonly seen as necessary for the development of the modern state and its nationalist ideology are the spread of literacy, the growth of capitalism, mobility, urbanisation, industrialism, exposure to mass media, cultural homogenisation and wider political participation on an individual basis.26

To simplify things, one could identify different nations’ distinctions by dividing the nations into different categories. In the *civic nation* people are united around a common political membership with common laws and rights, regardless of their ethnic belonging, whereas in the *ethnic nation* people hold only one ethnic identity and are united by this one.27 For the African context, the by social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen called *multietnic ideology* might be a more applicable category. This ideology is defined by the members’ equal rights in the nation, irrespective of ethnic belonging, rather than the population’s common origin.28 Many African nations have developed from tribe communities via colonies to modern states and their ideologies of nationalism can therefore not refer to one ethnic community. Often in African countries nationalism is presented as impartial and universalistic, based on principles of equal rights. Ethnicity and ethnic organisation can, then, sometimes seem as a threat to the nationalism.29

So, is it possible to relate Namibia to these established theories of nations? I find it problematic – perhaps impossible? – to place the Namibian context in one of the defined categories. As far as I can judge, inspired by Fosse30, the Namibian society in practice does not characterize one common membership since the majority of the population still seems to identify themselves through kinship and ethnicity rather than through national identity, and (un-)equal rights are very

---

much linked to an individual’s ethnic belonging. But regarding the (mostly by the educated and political elite) imagined idea about a universalistic Namibian nation I do find both the civic nation and the multiethnic ideology applicable.

**State-nationalism**

The internal legitimacy, that keeps the nation-state together, is provided by nationalism. Nationalism can be characterised by the “imagining” of a new community. The “imagining” of the nation-state-to-be called Namibia began to develop in the late 1950s. Other characteristics of nationalism may be senses of common suffering, struggle and destiny. 31 Berlin states, according to Harlech-Jones, that nationalism “usually seems to be caused by wounds, some form of collective humiliation”.32 These characteristics of nationalism are certainly applicable on Namibia with its history of genocide during the German wars, apartheid structure and land alienation through the introduction of Bantustans (“Homelands”) during the South African occupation.33

Ethnic nationalism includes individuals who are very similar when it comes to language, origin, appearance, historical circumstances and certain cultural or religious practices. This is obviously not applicable on the Namibian nation-building context. State nationalism on the other hand is.

Western nations with their models for nationalism and modernisation – which has had a great impact on the Namibian nation-building process – are assumed to be ethnically and linguistically homogenous. In this case diversities are considered as unfortunate barriers in terms of progress and development. State nationalism creates new values to which all members of the new nation can hold on in an attempt to undercut differences. Those individuals or groups who question the new values of the state risk political and economical marginalisation. Ethnic and regional identities are discouraged and labelled as primitive and undeveloped.35 Harlech-Jones argues that the political elite of Namibia create a distance between itself and the rest of the population with its Western norms of modernisation in a country where most people are peasants or labourers.36

Successful nationalism legitimises the power of the state and offers a meaningful life for its citizens – simultaneously. The power of the state may appear illegitimate if the state fails to deliver good living standards for the citizens.37 The most common problem for African nations

---

33 Harlech-Jones in Harlech-Jones et. al. (eds.) (2001), p. 110
34 Harlech-Jones in Harlech-Jones et. al. (2001), p. 110f
35 Fishman (1972), referred to in Harlech-Jones in Harlech-Jones et. al. (2001), p. 113
36 Harlech-Jones in Harlech-Jones et. al. (2001), p. 114
is, according to social anthropologist Sidsel Saugestad, to provide a safety-net of welfare such as subsistence, health and education to its citizens, rather than being threatened by neighbouring nations. Securing welfare is a powerful instrument for creating loyalty and unity among the nation’s citizens. Thus, lack of national welfare or an unequal distribution of wealth among the citizens may threaten the national unity. Most African nations have, according to Saugestad, faced challenges in the process of nation-building. One of the main issues is that an old western concept of nationalism is applied on the context of new African states. Nationalism and ethnicity is being understood as two separate forms of social classification. In so doing nationalism is being taken for unity whereas ethnicity is being taken for diversity.

Socially Constructed and Imagined Communities

Numerous scholars stress that nation, nationalism, ethnicity and national and ethnic identity are products of societal imagination and the institutional structure of the society. The nation is often – and foremost by Benedict Anderson – defined as an imagined community. Most members of a nation share the feeling of a common national identity although the majority of the members never have – or ever will – meet each other. Nations can be seen as structures of ideologies with the purpose of linking together an (often self defined) ethnic group with a state. Nations, thus, create abstract communities very different from the pre-existing family-based communities. They are often created through a mobilisation of people by a group of individuals whose goal is to gain power of the nation. Support from the people is crucial for the group who is aiming to gain the power since the support legitimizes the group’s actions.

National Symbols and National Identity

Effective national symbols – such as a national reconciliation, a national flag, a national anthem, a national language, a national shared and continuous history, a national education, a set of national heroes and monuments, national holidays or state ceremonies – may serve to establish the reality and importance of the state as the major representation of the nation and, thus, create a deeper

---

41 Benedict Anderson (1996) Den föreställda gemenskapen. Reflexioner kring nationalismens ursprung och spridning (Göteborg), p. 21
emotional attachment to the nation among its citizens.\textsuperscript{44} Simultaneity and the feeling of being united are key factors when it comes to effectiveness of national symbols. Anderson illustrates this with national anthems; “people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody”.\textsuperscript{45}

A national identity can be constructed through \textit{recognition} of a group’s shared features such as values, traditions, symbols and a specific language, and \textit{demonstration} of a contrast to others. With other words, by defining and excluding others the image of the self is confirmed.\textsuperscript{46} In Namibia, as in the rest of the world, nationalism often attempt to make national identity become something that can be experienced as a natural order and therefore many times goes unquestioned, according to Fosse.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups}

\textbf{Socially Constructed and Situational Ethnicity}

Ethnicity can be, and is by some, seen as something inherited, unchangeable and primordial. Accepting this belief, human beings are viewed, by nature, as parts of fixed ethnic communities. The concept is often used to describe different categories of people by objective and visible features, such as a group’s common language, appearance or origin.\textsuperscript{48}

Inspired by numerous scholars I suggest that one look into the concept of ethnicity as a relative and situational concept which allows changeable group identification. With this starting point, ethnicity can be defined as a product of social interaction – a cultural construct, created and recreated in social situations.\textsuperscript{49} Education and language scholar Stephen May states that “ethnic groups are situationally defined in relationship to their social interactions with other groups”.\textsuperscript{50} Ethnicity can, then, be seen as a process of self-ascription and ascription by others, rather than by objective and visible features.\textsuperscript{51} With other words, ethnicity “is constructed by (a) similarity within


\textsuperscript{45} Anderson (1983), referred to in Fosse (1996), p. 62


\textsuperscript{47} Fosse (1996), p. 66, partly with reference to Bourdieu (1977)


\textsuperscript{50} Barth (1969), referred to in May (2008), p. 30f

\textsuperscript{51} Saugestad (2001), p. 56
a group, according to shared values and experiences, and (b) contrast to others.”

Saugestad writes. Only if a group considers cultural attributes (such as a group’s language) necessary or socially effective as identity markers they become significant and can be constructed or reconstructed.

**Instrumental Ethnicity**

By recognizing ethnicity as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon we may discover its connection to other social forces. Given that ethnicity constitutes a form of social identity and political organisation one can argue that the concept may function as a dominant instrument for the power, legitimation and use of politics. Competing political elites over and over again use ethnicity with the purpose to mobilise people and seek support and thereby try to gain political power. This has been demonstrated by for example the South African apartheid and Nazi Germany.

**Assimilation, Integration and Ethnic Incorporation**

As long as Namibian nationalism is defined by the SWAPO-elite, which mainly consists of individuals from the Owambo group, minority communities face the risk of being excluded by retaining their cultural distinctiveness. In order to become full Namibian citizens and thereby improve the opportunities for better life the marginalised minority communities might assimilate and adopt the majority’s language, culture and traditions and thereby over time loose their own cultural distinctness. This process of assimilation is more inclusive than segregation policies such as apartheid but is still a highly unbalanced procedure. The minority group is expected to adopt and adjust directly to the majority’s lifestyle. When political pressure regarding “development” and the “joining of a more modern world” (which by the way in my opinion are very broadly defined concepts utilized by music education and ethnomusicology scholar Minette Mans) is applied on certain cultural groups a sense of instability may take place, which in turn might lead to a collapse of past forms, life values and identity for the groups. This might develop a feeling of not being socially validated.

In Namibia, I suggest, the just mentioned majority can probably be defined *either* by the SWAPO-elite with its Owambo dominance, which defines, practices and represents Namibian

---

52 Saugestad (2001), p. 56
56 Fenton (1999), referred to in May (2008), p. 36
58 Mans (2003), p. 26
nationalism officially, according to Fosse\textsuperscript{59}, or by the influence of Western modernisation where the Namibian nation-building process can be seen as “a cultural standardisation process in which little room is left for ideologies … other than those of modernity”,\textsuperscript{60} Fosse continues. To that I want to express the importance of recognising that there are different discourses of Namibian nationalism. As far as I can judge, the official (hegemonic) nationalism of Namibia is defined and represented by a SWAPO-elite, who does possess an Owambo dominance, but this does not equalize that the ethnic group Owambo (which constitute the majority of the Namibian population) in general defines nationalism the same way as the SWAPO-elite does.

Inequality in an ethnically stratified society is often maintained by the dominant group’s lack of interest to interact socially with the “inferior” group. In this situation social distance is used as an instrument to maintain control and status and out of fear of the unfamiliar. Because of the dominant group’s ignorance and lack of knowledge about the “inferior” group, stereotypes are often developed.\textsuperscript{61} In the assimilation process members of the majority group often tend to be uninformed about the culture of the minority. This because of lack of interest of learning about the minority group’s culture as the differences are expected to eventually disappear through adoption and adjustment to the majority group.\textsuperscript{62}

Saugestad stresses that the option for the minority group should not be to choose between the minority group’s lifestyle and the dominant society’s culture. The option should instead be to participate in development – which indigenous groups often want to according to Saugestad – but on ones own terms. Ideally would maybe be a policy of integration, which could make it possible for the minority group – in this case the San – to participate in the society’s institutions and at the same time maintain its distinctive culture, Saugestad suggests.\textsuperscript{63}

To avoid that the policy of integration only remains a policy on the paper while assimilation becomes reality in practice, Saugestad proposes ethnic incorporation. “The purpose of this strategy is, through participation in public discourse, to find innovative and unifying ways of defining group goals and strategies, and to define complementary ethnic statuses within those sectors of society which are vital to a future existence of the minority group.”\textsuperscript{64}

**Stigma, Status and Class in Relation to Ethnic Identity**

When individuals lack power and control because of negative stereotypes ascribed to them by others this group has been attached to a so called stigma. Once an ethnic identity is stigmatized

\textsuperscript{59} Fosse (1996), p. 244
\textsuperscript{60} Fosse (1996), p. 53
\textsuperscript{61} LeBeau (1991), referred to in Fosse (1996), p. 61
\textsuperscript{62} Saugestad (2001), p. 108
\textsuperscript{63} Saugestad (2001), p. 60, 64
\textsuperscript{64} Saugestad (2001), s. 60
the individuals identifying themselves with this ethnic group are socially disadvantaged. Within societies ethnic groups can hold different statuses and be ranked hierarchically. 65

“Ethnicity is not synonymous with class, but the two often coincide”, 66 Saugestad writes. When a group is permanently disadvantaged because of a ranking based on ethnicity the situation might be described with the concept of “class” (in terms of poverty). Saugestad suggests a focus on the underlying causes of the disadvantaged group’s situation, which would be the ranking based on ethnicity, rather than the provision of money or welfare programmes. With other words, the social mechanisms which have brought the group into an “inferior” position – and which maintain the group in that position – need to be identified to be able to improve the group’s disadvantaged situation. 67

In today’s society more and more people, especially indigenous groups of people, prefer to identify themselves ethnically rather than by class. This may be because of the preference of equalizing oneself with others in cultural terms, rather than accepting the position at the bottom of a socially and economically defined hierarchy. 68

**Poverty and Social Exclusion**

The gap and income difference between the rich and the poor is growing in Namibia. Securing social and economic rights and justice for all people are major concerns in the post-independence nation, according to former director of Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) Clement Daniels. 69

Namibia inherited a dualistic economy and society after independence. The formal economy with its commercial agricultural sector was mainly dominated by a white minority. The informal economy with its communal agricultural was on the other hand dominated by the black majority of the population. Statistical average income figures of today’s society (see annex) hide the high inequalities within the country. It has been estimated that five per cent of the population earn more than seventy per cent of the national income. 70 Alternative socio-economic indicators point to that the country’s economic resources are unequally spread over the population and that there are clear ethnic differences in income between the ethnic language groups. 71 Among households where the San languages are the main language spoken the incidence of poverty (2003/2004) is 59.7 percent whereas among households where English and German are the main language spoken the incidence of poverty is less than one percent, according to *A review of poverty and inequality in*

66 Saugestad (2001), p. 58
67 Saugestad (2001), p. 59
69 Daniels in Melber (ed.) (2003), p. 65
Namibia. The average household income (1996) for the German language group in Namibia measures 75 864 Namibian Dollars, while the same figure for the San language group measures 5684 Namibian Dollars, a difference of 70 180 Namibian Dollars. The figure points to a strong language-related poverty in Namibia. However, poverty is also linked to region (rural/urban), education and gender, according to social economist Klaus Schade.

Where inequality is high, poverty is also likely to be high, sociologist Pempelani Mufune writes. One popular belief is that the poor constitute a homogenous group of individuals who are apathetic, careless and lazy. Often the reasons why a certain group of people happen to be poor are not highlighted. Mufune refers to Chambers who insists that this belief is misunderstood and that many of the poor wish to be autonomous and develop self-respect.

Mufune argues that poverty can be related to social exclusion, which can be defined as “the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live”. Through this process the individuals or groups become poor or excluded and thereby marginalised. According to Mufune the concept of social exclusion identifies the many reasons of why individuals or groups become or are disadvantaged; “… low income, lack of dignity, poor nutrition, vulnerability, etc. … [These reasons] may result in an inability to fully participate in societal affairs.” According to Mufune it has been argued that the majority of Africa’s population suffers from social exclusion, due to a forced existence outside the formal economy.

Indigenous Peoples

People categorized as “indigenous people” around the world – in for example South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Scandinavia – all have something in common, according to Saugestad: “the lived experience of being disadvantaged compared to a national majority, and a recognition that this disadvantage is related to their structural position within the nation-state.” Social and geographical marginalisation and discrimination are products of negative attitudes and stereotypes from the majority society, Saugestad continues. The indigenous people’s competence and knowledge are many times not appreciated within the

---

76 Mufune in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 183
78 Mufune in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 183
79 Mufune in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 183
80 Saugestad (2001), p. 66
educational system, labour market and political system. As a result poverty, powerlessness, school drop-out, alcoholism, violence, apathy and depression often develops.81

Indigenous peoples are often related to a non-dominance within politics and no – or only partially – integration into the nation-state. These aboriginal groups of individuals are historically associated with non-industrial forms of production and a stateless political system. In modern nation-states they often face extreme disadvantages and marginalisation such as expropriation of land and near destruction of their language(s) and traditional, social, economic and political practices within their own historic territories as a result of colonialism.82 As far as I can judge, this description of indigenous peoples is in accordance with the situation of the Namibian San.

**Historical Background and Theoretical Discussion**

Now that concepts concerning nationalism, ethnicity, social exclusion and indigenous peoples have been outlined, let us apply these on the Namibian context. But first a brief summary of Namibia’s past. I have chosen to keep this historical summary relatively short on details so that the discussion about the Namibian nation-building process – and thereafter the history and contemporary situation of the San – is left with more space.

**Colonialism, Apartheid and the Namibian Liberation Struggle**

Namibia won its independence in 1990.83 Before the colonisation the region (that we today call Namibia) was no natural phenomenon of political or cultural unit. Contact and trade between the African communities in the area have, however, been documented.84 The territory was named Deutsch Südwestafrika in 1884 and governed by the German colonial power until the South African regime invaded the area in 1915. The legislation of apartheid was introduced in South Africa and therefore automatically also in Namibia in 1948. It was said that the apartheid system was brought in so that the ethnic groups in the country could develop culturally and traditionally one by one without influencing each other. The actual reason for apartheid was the construction of a cheap, movable and powerless labour. The country was divided into ten Bantustans. Each ethnic group was distributed with one of the Bantustans and by force relocated there. With time a national, anti-colonial resistance against the South African oppressors grew strong. SWAPO developed during the 1960s with a vision of an independent and united nation. In 1989 more than ninety per cent of the Namibian population participated in the free election which SWAPO won. A few months later, in 1990, Namibia was declared independent. The construction of a new

---

81 Saugestad (2001), p. 66
82 Minority Rights Group (1997), referred to in May (2008), p. 84
83 Berg (2004), p. 51
84 Fosse (1996), p. 49
nation started. The heritage of more than hundred years of colonialism and oppression is however still today present in the Namibian society, according to ethnologist Magnus Berg.85

**Namibian Nationalism and Ethnicity**

During apartheid ethnic categories were politically manipulated and racial discrimination formed the basis for government policies. Each so called “racial category” was attributed stereotypes for the purpose of creating and maintaining boundaries between the different ethnic groups. The heritage of the South African strategy of “divide and rule” is still present in the Namibian society today.86

As Sheila, the informant working for an NGO, puts it:

Namibia is very very tribalist and racist … It’s through all layers. I mean, even the San will talk negatively about a whole tribe, you know. All the tribes talk negatively about other tribes. It’s just the norm in Namibia. It’s just a very divided society.87

While discussing the Namibian context I am using the ethnic labels that I have experienced are utilized by the groups themselves in everyday life and by scholars in literature. The ethnic labels of today’s Namibian society refer to the former Bantustans that were established during apartheid, rather than to the ethnic categories that were in use before colonialism. Important to keep in mind though is that, from a perspective of social construction that has been discussed above, none of these labels are fixed or static and are therefore not always reliable, for example in the statistics.88

Today’s Namibian government tends to keep distance to the use of ethnic categories and encourages terms like “Owambo-speaking”, “Hereo-speaking” etc. instead.89

**The Construction of a National Identity**

In many post-colonial African nations governments have propagated national ideologies and symbols – such as a flag, an anthem (in a “neutral” language), a national airline, armed forces, a television network, a currency, a university – to accelerate national unity by producing a non-ethnic identity and thereby strengthen the nation.90 In Namibia, as far as I can judge, this can be exemplified with the Namibian flag, the anthem Namibia, Land of the Brave, the airline Air Namibia, Namibian Defence Force, the television network Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), the Namibian Dollar and the University of Namibia (UNAM).

---

87 Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009
88 Fosse (1996), p. 47
89 Fosse (1996), p. 47
Namibians have the right to maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion as long as they don’t intrude on others’ rights or the national interest, is to be read in the Namibian constitution. However, the process of nation-building discourages ethnic identities, Daniels argues, which in reality plays a very important role in the matter of redistribution of wealth and national resources in the country. According to Fosse, Hage Geingob (former prime minister and today’s minister of trade and industry) defines ethnicity as a dividing factor in the Namibian society. A national identity is therefore required, he states, “which supersedes all other identities … [W]e need to ensure that ethnicity never is allowed to be played up to replace national identity as the most important identity.”

In the majority of nation-states one single identity is impossible political scientist Mai Palmberg states and therefore suggests multiple identities as an analytical instrument to understand social change. For example ethnicity, gender, generation and life experience (such as years in exile or education abroad) all influence the formation of the national identity, she notes.

To avoid assimilation, which has been defined and discussed above, it could be fruitful to extend the definition of the Namibian nationalism to not only include one national identity but also ethnic and regional identities. This could open up for the option of holding double or multiple identities. With other words, it could be possible to be, for example, San and Namibian – at the same time.

A Nation-building Process – Excluding the Majority?

The rhetoric of nationalism which defined common enemies such as South Africa, apartheid, colonialism and Western imperialism was successfully used during the liberation struggle but may be too abstract in today’s Namibia. The majority of the Namibians do associate the nationalism in the country with the liberation struggle and independence, according to Berg. The question now is, however; for how long SWAPO still will be able to legitimize the national unity by the means of the liberation struggle? Namibia’s new generation will probably, with the time, find it difficult to remain loyal to SWAPO and its nationalism, if based only on a liberation struggle that they have never experienced in person. The majority of Namibia’s youth of today are looking for a nation which provides better material standards and living conditions. The unequal distribution of wealth among the Namibian population is especially noticeable in the newly established pattern of consumption, which is growing strong in the country since independence, mainly because of the economic globalisation. This pattern of consumption is on the one hand including expensive brands consumed by the new, black, urban middleclass (which constitutes twenty to
twenty five per cent of the Namibian population), and on the other hand it is excluding the majority of the population out of an economical reason. For the excluded majority these expensive brands will probably only symbolize a national unity that they are not able to be a part of, according to Berg with references to Melber and sociologist Tom Fox.97

For the purpose of increasing the significance of the state and the nation to the individual and reminding Namibians about their citizenship and national identity several actions have been – and are being – taken. The former Bantustans have been replaced with delineated geographically defined regions, economic redistribution have been placed “high on the agenda”, education and mass media have been democratized, English has been introduced as the new official language, and national symbols and national history have been constructed and reconstructed. Through demonstrations, journalism, educational materials and commemorative celebrations, such as Heroes Day (on the 26th of August), ethnic histories are being redefined as national histories in Namibia. Traditional heroes are being redefined as national heroes, fighting for national causes.98

A new official language in a nation can be seen as an instrument for nationhood and unity. The standardisation of a language, according to Hylland Eriksen, might bring a heterogeneous group of people closer to one and another.99 In Namibia English is the official language since independence and the majority of Namibians identify English as a symbol of liberation and modernity. However, far from all Namibians master English and the white minority and educated black elite belong to an exception. The real lingua franca100 in the nation is Afrikaans, which by many is associated with colonial oppression.101

Fosse describes the Namibian nationalism as both universalistic – with for example nationwide investment in education – and particularistic – with “sometimes low tolerance” towards ethnic and regionalist identities.102 The state does play a significant role in Namibians everyday life through for example taxation, voting rights, identity cards and welfare instruments such as pensions. However, the Namibian nation-building process with its popular slogan “One Namibia, One Nation” does not, according to Fosse, include the majority of the population who is economically and politically marginalised and still relate to one and another and their living situation through kinship and ethnicity. Only a limited number of people – the privileged and educated individuals that form the nation’s political elite – are imagining and practising the idea of Namibia as a unitary nation-state through the usage of national mass media and political

97 Berg (2004), p. 297f, partly with reference to a at that time unpublished article of Tom Fox (2003) and discussions with political scientist Henning Melber
98 Fosse (1996), p. 53f, 56f
99 Hylland Eriksen (1998), p. 130f
100 Lingua franca refers to a language that is utilized as a “connecting language” within a group of people who speak different languages.
101 Fosse (1996), p. 228
102 Fosse (1996), p. 51
processes. This means, according to Fosse, that nationalism and the image of the united nation Namibia do not yet play a dominant role of the majority of the Namibians’ everyday practices.\(^{103}\) Freedom for the nation may have been won but the majority of the nation’s inhabitants have experienced little change in life. Individuals from the marginalised groups of the population need to see tangible improvements in their life situation through economic and political reforms. Only then will they start contributing to the nation-building process, Fosse argues.\(^ {104}\) A successful Namibian nation-building process probably includes that the national official agendas are being closer related to local, regional and ethnic issues,\(^ {105}\) “economic redistribution, institutional development, further democratisation of public discourse, and the encouragement of a broader civil society”\(^{106}\), Fosse concludes.

The policy of national reconciliation forms the perhaps most important symbol for the construction of nationalism in Namibia. Reconciliation is meant to be achieved between former military and political enemies, economic classes and ethnic groups. Discrimination on ethnic grounds is prohibited.\(^ {107}\) However, according to Berg and Fosse, reconciliation is unlikely, or at least difficult, to achieve considering the inherited racist inequalities between the black and the white part of the population within the Namibian social and economical structure.\(^ {108}\) Namibia is suffering from a classical, colonial, economical heritage,\(^ {109}\) a “stereotype of the economy which produces what it does not use and uses what it does not produce”.\(^ {110}\) This heritage is difficult to change since the economical power lies in the hands of South African and transnational companies and white farmers. In order to change these conditions Berg suggests a redistribution of wealth and resources among the population. The security and safety that a nation should be able to offer its citizens appears to be distant in Namibia. The country has without doubts developed since independence, especially when approached from a moral, humane and democratic point of view. The reality remains, however, and SWAPO has failed to generate better living conditions for the majority of the Namibians, according to Berg with reference to Melber.\(^ {111}\)

**Namibian Political Structure of Today**

At independence, Namibia adopted a liberal constitution with a governmental system described as multiparty constitutional democracy with a free press and the freedom of expression and

---

\(^{103}\) Fosse (1996), p. 66f  
\(^{104}\) Fosse (1996), p. 54, 244  
\(^{105}\) Fosse (1996), p. 53  
\(^{106}\) Fosse (1996), p. 245  
\(^{109}\) Berg (2004), p. 53  
\(^{111}\) Berg (2004), p. 55, 294f, partly with reference to discussions with Melber
organisation. Namibia has however a dominant majority party with almost eighty per cent of national support. There are a national parliament, regional councils in each of the thirteen political regions and local authorities.112

The Namibian constitution recognises customary law as part of the Namibian law and having the equal status as the common law.113 In the constitution it is stated that a Council of Traditional Leaders shall be established. However, the function of this council is limited “to advise the President on the control and utilization of communal land”.114 A Traditional Authorities Act is formulated “[t]o provide for the establishment of traditional authorities”.115 The Traditional Authorities Act describes, however, the relationship between traditional authorities and organs of government: “A traditional authority shall … give support to the policies of the government, regional councils and local authority and refrain from any act which undermines the authority of those institutions”.116 With other words, the traditional authority is inferior to the government.117

The constitution guarantees the same right for all people and recognizes all citizens’ right to practice their culture. However, according to Daniels this is difficult and sometimes impossible to implement in practice. Many communities and individuals do not know how to use the common law effectively and thus equal justice for all often remain principles on paper.118 Also Fosse argues that channels of influence in the nation continue to be extremely unevenly distributed in practice although the political system in theory allows equal rights on a democratic basis. Fosse describes the Namibian democracy as fragile with a weak organised civil society. For example trade unions and student unions have not yet defined their role independently of political parties and except for the churches almost all organisations are ethnically orientated. With independence many Namibians had hoped for a change regarding the structured inequality – a non-racial social order was wanted. Instead a new elite has grown strong. Today this elite comprises the (already before independence existing) elite of white settlers together with senior black politicians, administrators and businessmen.119

SWAPO plays a dominant role in Namibia from a political and nationalistic perspective. According to Berg, the majority of the Namibians strongly supports the party and has supported it for a long period of time. SWAPO is by many associated with the liberation struggle, independence and founding of the nation. However, Berg states, the strong support from the
majority of the people and the party’s vision about national unity can be described as highly contradictory – this because of the ethnic connection to the popular support; it is mainly the Owambo people that supports the party.120

The nation’s white minority remains in control of most of the strategic positions in the commercial sector, such as commercial farming, fisheries, mining and industry, which make up the bulk of the national income.121

Earlier Research

With the discussion about the Namibian nation-building process as background, let us now narrow down and turn to the living situation of one of the ethnic groups in contemporary Namibia: the San.

San

The San comprise less than two per cent of the national population in Namibia.122 I have chosen to use the term “San” since it was adopted as the preferred term by San representatives in a meeting in Namibia in 1996123 and is the most commonly used collective label for the group of people also known as “Bushmen” (or “Basarwa” in Botswana), according to Becker.124

It is of importance to keep in mind that the term “San” does not refer to one homogenous group. The San form a number of linguistically, culturally and economically diverse communities, each with different cultural practices. Within Namibia the between 30 000 and 38 000125 San consist of three major language groups; Khoe, !Kung and !Xo, and each of them shape several sub-communities; Hai//om, Ju'/hoansi, !Kung, Naro and !Xoo. What do identify the San collectively, according to African studies scholar James Suzman, are firstly their dependence on hunting and gathering in the past, secondly their history of marginalisation as a result of the Bantu-speaking and white settlers (I will come back to this in the next section: history of the San), and thirdly their marginalised status today.126

120 Berg (2004), p. 256
121 Fosse (1996), p. 61
122 Suzman (2001), p. 1
123 Saugestad (2001), p. 28
124 The term “San” has been adopted by WIMSA, SASI and other organisations working with advocacy and empowerment. Heike Becker (2003) ”The Least Sexist Society? Perspectives on Gender, Change and Violence among southern African San” (Journal of Southern African Studies), p. 5f
126 Suzman (2002), p. 21
History of the San

“The past in the present” is a useful viewpoint when trying to understand processes behind contemporary situations. The ancestors of today’s Namibian San people were once the first population of the region in southern Africa. They lived a highly mobile life in scattered, flexible, small groups and survived through gathering and hunting and occasionally trading in some of the harshest desert conditions in the world. Around five hundred years ago (in the 16th century) Bantu speaking cattle herders – and around hundred years ago (in the end of the 19th century) white colonialists – arrived to the area that we today call Namibia. These new arrivals spread out over the northern half of the country, displaced and drove away the majority of the San from their land which still today has an impact on the relationship between San and other Namibian ethnic groups. Even though San also were treated brutally by the German colonialists the Namibian ethnic groups Otjiherero and Nama suffered the most during this time. After South Africa took over the administration of what at the time was called South West Africa (today’s Namibia) the conditions worsened for the San. The racist South African colonial policy of organizing the native societies by dividing them into different Bantustans, which was mentioned earlier, decided to what reality an individual was included and excluded. Former ”Bushmanland” for the San was constituted on the edge of the Kalahari desert but was never given self-governing status. The San were understood by the colonialists to be nomads who could not own land. Farms were allocated in areas where San lived and some of the San were forced into long-term workforce on the farms. During the colonial period San became dependent on “white” and communal-area farmers as well as military salaries. San-workers were paid low wages and given poor housing (if paid or housed at all) since it was argued that the San did not understand the meaning of materials of “civilisation” such as money or house. By the mid 1970s only less than three per cent of the San retained rights to land and natural resources. 66 per cent lived within commercial farming areas and 31 per cent in native reserves run by other ethnical group’s traditional authorities. This process forced San to gradually leave their economic and political autonomy and enter economic relationships with their neighbour’s. In the war for Namibian independence many San worked as trackers and soldiers for the South African armed forces, fighting against the SWAPO-liberation movement. By 1990 and Namibian independence the San were not only extremely poor, marginalised and dependent on others, but also “on the losing side” of a bitter war. With independence a vision about reconciliation and a determination to build a new social order was brought though. SWAPO announced a policy of land reform and redistribution but, according to earlier research, very little land reform has been achieved since independence. The majority of the black part of the Namibian population still today live in their former Bantustans (which today are called “communal lands”). Between three and four thousand white Namibians occupy almost half of the country’s farmland and over one million black Namibians occupy the other half. Since independence thousands of black Namibians have moved from the communal lands (the former Bantustans) into informal settlements on the city-

---

127 Saugestad (2001), p. 96
edges. In order to increase San’s status in commercial farming new legislation dealing with labour was introduced after independence. The result of this was that many farmers dismissed the San-workers, who were left homeless and gathered on the peripheries of towns and villages. Few San have, according to Suzman, had the opportunity to develop a connection to participate in the Namibian political economy. San’s marginalised status in today’s Namibia can largely be seen as a product of their treatment during the colonial era.\textsuperscript{128}

Although SWAPO assured commitment to the situation of the San soon after independence by showing willingness to resolve issues and problems related to San (such as land rights, education and welfare) the government has failed, according to Suzman, to realize policies and programmes of for example access to land or improving San’s economic status, which is necessary to change their living conditions.\textsuperscript{129}

**The Construction of the “Bushman Myth”**

Suzman argues that the marginal status of San is not first and foremost a consequence of their previous spatial, cultural, racial and social isolation from others.\textsuperscript{130} The identity and status of the San is more a question of social construction through mythologies, politics and power.\textsuperscript{131} The popular image of San living as hunters and gatherers was constructed by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1980s but\textsuperscript{132} “[c]olonialists, settler farmers, Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists, postcolonial southern African governments, international donors, NGOs … have each created their own version of the ‘Bushman Myth’ …”\textsuperscript{133}, social anthropologist Heike Becker writes. Anthropological studies, for example Lee (1976) and Marshall (1976), focused on a minority of the San that at that time still relied on hunting and gathering. These studies hide the complexity of San’s history that, according to Suzman, primarily shaped the living situation for the majority of the 20th century’s San in Namibia. This history is filled with European narratives of social Darwinism, describing San as “the ‘lowest’ expression of humanity”, and was brought to the area (today’s Namibia) by white colonialists.\textsuperscript{134}

I would like to add today’s tourism as a possible factor of reproduction of the popular image of the San population. According to social anthropologist Renée Sylvain tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in Namibia. Many white farmers have expanded into the tourism sector and established guest farms. Commercial tourism operators cooperate with San communities and

\textsuperscript{129} Suzman in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 131 and Suzman (2001), p. 21
\textsuperscript{130} Suzman in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 126
\textsuperscript{131} Suzman in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 126
\textsuperscript{132} Suzman in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 126
\textsuperscript{134} Suzman in Winterfeldt et. al. (eds.) (2002), p. 126f
according to Suzman and Sylvain many of the guest farms use the popular image of the San and its stereotype “Bushmen foraging identity” for marketing to attract tourists. Members of San become the “Bushman attraction” and medicine dances among other things turn into commercial activities. Because of this the mythology of San remains a reality for many tourists that visit the country, Suzman writes. Often the members of the San are employed as farm workers and are not paid extra for their performances.135

**Living Conditions and Employment**

For the majority of Namibia’s inhabitants living conditions have improved since independence. San communities have made very little progress though.136 From a socio-economic perspective the San are the most disadvantaged group in the Namibian society today with little access to existing political and economic institutions.137 Suzman maintains that the majority of the San are trapped in a cycle of marginalisation due to extreme poverty, landlessness, lack of education, high mobility, dependency, social discrimination and stigmatisation – and that the status of San in Namibia has worsened since the country won its independence.138 Food security and hunger are major problems in many San communities. Seventy per cent of San in Namibia rely on food-aid programmes run by the state (that are only delivered sporadically). A large number of San households depend on pensions and others on piecemeal work, often paid with food or alcohol, sometimes not paid at all. No San in Namibia depend completely on hunting and gathering today.139

San’s marginalisation in the Namibian society is, according to Suzman, reproduced by economic dependency, political marginalisation, low self-esteem, conflict with culturally adaptation and poverty. The majority of Namibian San are dependent on cheap labour exchange. This is problematic since employment in agriculture is reducing and other employment for unskilled workers in rural areas are few.140 The majority of the San has no work but the ones that have work as farm labour, often in extremely poor and unstable conditions.141 According to Sylvain San-employees on white farms are paid less than half of the wages of non-San and they are the first to get fired when the farm suffers from drought or bad market conditions. Thus many San are constantly travelling from farm to farm, searching for employment.142 To live on a farm is coupled to employment which first and foremost is limited to men. Only women that are

---

136 Suzman (2001), p. 6
140 Suzman (2001), p. 6
141 LAC (2006), p. 2
142 Sylvain (2005), p. 359
family to male-employees are allowed to stay at the farms. The women are sometimes offered work that is defined as “left overs”.143

Resettlement

The majority of San in Namibia live in commercial farming areas and communal areas144 in the northern and eastern part of the country.145 The living and working conditions for San that live on farms have improved since apartheid but are still extremely harsh.146 San that live in communal areas rely more on the Namibian welfare and are often worse off than the San that live on farms from a material and social perspective. Only around ten per cent of the Namibian San population live in the area that in the past was known as “Bushmanland”.147 This area is the only area in Namibia where San are granted “customary rights” to land under existing law.148 The interpreter (who visited the resettlement camp with me) and I discussed why not more than ten per cent of the Namibian San live in former “Bushmanland. According to her the region’s location is too distanced for the San from other regions to move to since their relatives have been buried in other parts of the country and visiting the graves would be too difficult. Another, crucial, reason is that many San have not heard about their rights of living in former “Bushmanland”, according to the interpreter.149 Less than fifteen per cent of today’s San in Namibia access right to land. This minority is better off than the majority of the San that has no land rights.150 The consequences of the landlessness of the majority of the San are that they remain mobile, economically insecure and dependent.151

Literacy and Health

Only about twenty per cent of Namibian San are literate today, partly as a result of their very limited opportunity to education during apartheid, partly because of their high mobility and economic insecurity. The number of San children attending school is below half of the national average. A very small proportion of San have attended and completed formal education. Although the language policy of Namibia provides mother tongue education during the first three years of school, only one language group of the San (the Ju/'hoan) have access to this

144 Communal land is state-owned, which means that the majority of Namibians do not own the land they have been living on for centuries. Daniels in Melber (ed.) (2003), p. 58
145 Suzman (2001), p. xvii
146 Suzman (2001), p. xvii-xviii
147 The Tsumkwe District of the Otjozondjupa Region. Suzman (2001), p. xviii
148 Suzman (2001), p. xviii
149 Discussion with interpreter, 18th of March, 2009
150 Suzman (2001), p. xix
151 Suzman (2002), p. 23
opportunity. No mother tongue education materials are available for any other San language in Namibia.\textsuperscript{152} According to Sheila, the informant working as an NGO-volunteer, “the amount of San children that go into the education system is so small, it’s ridiculous. Of all the tribes it’s the lowest and the drop out rates are the highest”.\textsuperscript{153}

Life expectancy among San is twenty-two per cent lower than the national average. This indicates poor nutrition and healthcare. Alcohol abuse, crime, depression and domestic violence are social problems that have arisen in many San communities.\textsuperscript{154} AIDS is a fast-spreading endemic in Namibia and approximately twenty per cent of the population is infected by HIV. Until today the San have been less affected by HIV/AIDS. This situation is likely to change though, according to Daniels. The combination of poverty, alcohol abuse, casual sex, rape, prostitution and an increased interaction with individuals outside the San communities have put the San at serious risk of being infected by HIV.\textsuperscript{155}

\textbf{GRN, NGOs and CBOs}

According to Suzman the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) has failed to deliver empowerment and participation among the San communities because of an approach of top-down, non-consultative and non-participatory to San development projects. Many San feel, according to Suzman, that they have little influence regarding their own future. The connection between ethnic identity and socio-economic class is very present in the nation. Another reason of GRN-run project’s failure could be that the Namibian state prioritises the process of nation-building rather than focusing on ethnic identities, which were strengthened by the apartheid system. San are expected to conform to GRN’s visions of development rather than their own. At the same time the majority of the San has not benefited from the GRN-run projects and has therefore not seen improvements in quality of life. Suzman suggests that GRN should focus on creating jobs, encouraging micro-economic growth in rural areas and making it possible for the people to survive on agriculture by facilitate better conditions.\textsuperscript{156} Suzman writes that “others continue to have a largely negative image of San” and vice versa which holds back the GRN-run nation-building process. Many San feel, according to Suzman, that the Namibian state has little concern for San’s welfare.\textsuperscript{157}

Unlike the GRN short-term projects seeking for quantifiable results, as Suzman puts it, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focus on long-term community development. The two most well-known NGOs working with San development and empowerment in Namibia are the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDFN) and the Working Group of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{153} Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009
\textsuperscript{154} Suzman (2002), p. 22
\textsuperscript{155} Daniels in Melber (ed.) (2003), p. 65f
\textsuperscript{156} Suzman (2002), p. 22 and Suzman (2001), p. xx, 2f, 70f, 74, 76f
\textsuperscript{157} Suzman (2001), p. 9
\end{flushright}
Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA). These NGOs focus on community participation, capacity-building, empowerment, networking and establishing regional bodies for better San representation.\footnote{Suzman (2001), p. xx, 78, 80}

Although the NGOs have been more successful, according to Suzman, than the GRN-run projects the NGO involvement in San empowerment has been limited. Due to that, combined with a lack of GRN support, San have formed their own community-based organisations (CBOs) during the last few years. This has been done without any direct assistance from “the outside environment” which, according to Suzman, illustrates a growing desire and capacity among San to take control over their own situation.\footnote{Suzman (2001), p. 79}

**Traditional Leadership**

The South African colonial regime installed and removed many of the traditional leaders in Namibia without further considerations. In contemporary Namibia this action has left many traditional leaders without legitimacy within their own populations.\footnote{Sparks & Green (1992), referred to in Fosse (1996), p. 232} According to the earlier discussed *Traditional Authorities Act* “every traditional community shall be entitled to have a traditional authority” and the traditional authorities are required to apply for recognition to the state. The Namibian government has only granted official recognition to two\footnote{The Ju/'hoan and the !Kung} of the six San traditional authorities in Namibia. The San demand recognition of all their traditional leaders and argue that they have no leaders of their own who can express their concerns in the central government and therefore are left outside the process of development. According to Daniels the failure to recognise all San traditional authorities creates marginalisation, poverty and opportunities for other communities to oppress San communities. Unlike many of the other traditional leaders recognised by the state, San leaders are very poor and depend on food aid and food-for-work to survive. This situation makes it impossible for the San-leaders to focus on their communities’ development and well-being.\footnote{Daniels in Melber (ed.) (2003), p. 56f, Suzman (2001), p. xxi, 104, 106, 111, Suzman (2002), p. 23 and Martin (1995), referred to in Fosse (1996), p. 233}

To achieve participation among all groups in the society minority groups must be recognized and accepted as “different from but equal in value” by the majority culture, Saugestad stresses.\footnote{Saugestad (2001), p. 64}

**Representation, Alienation and Rights**

One of Namibia’s greatest concerns, according to Daniels, is to secure social and economic rights and justice for all Namibians. All citizens’ participation is essential to maintain and nurture
Namibia’s newly established democracy. “Few San are convinced of the virtues of democracy or its ability to protect their interests. Many complain that it does not matter for whom they vote since no parties … are concerned with San”, Suzman writes. The San are under-represented in Namibian regional and national government structures. This has left many San with the feeling of alienation and exclusion in “the new Namibia” with little or no influence on national issues, according to Suzman and Daniels. Because of the poor representation San are unable to make their voice heard or ensure that they are taken into consideration when political decisions are taken. According to both Suzman and Daniels the overwhelming majority of the San neither understand, are aware of nor have the possibility to practice their rights (or obligations for that matter) as Namibian citizens because of dependency, mobility, economic insecurity and landlessness and there is a clear gap between San and other Namibian ethnic groups. Since independence the status of San has been defined as “underdeveloped and primitive” as a result of their hunting and gathering culture and “wrong” sort of knowledge. San are assumed to be responsible for their own misfortune. Suzman suggests empowerment and development among San through local and regional representation, education and access to land. He clarifies that top-down development will only disempower the San and result in more welfare dependency. Grassroots empowerment could be achieved through capacity-building and enabling San communities to define their own development visions, he suggests.

In a long-term perspective action should be taken within areas such as poverty, land- and natural resources access, historical marginalisation, social prejudice, social identity, radical cultural change and political rights, according to Suzman.

Analysis

I arrive in the resettlement camp in one of Namibia’s eastern rural areas together with an interpreter, who grew up and lives in the local area, her four years old daughter, and my Zimbabwean friend Charles, in the early afternoon. I was supposed to get here together with the interpreter in the morning. Because of the bus breaking down shortly after leaving Windhoek and a while of waiting for Charles, who kindly offered to drive me as I called him from the side of the road and explained my situation, the sun already gaze from the middle of the sky telling me the time is already past noon. I see children dressed in school uniforms walking along the gravel road in the same direction as we are heading. The region is quite dry and plain. We reach the fenced resettlement camp which consists of a by the interpreter estimated number of two hundred smaller houses. People in all ages sit in groups in front of the smaller houses, talking quietly.

---

164 Daniels in Melber (ed.) (2003), p. 55, 65
165 Suzman (2001), p. 105
168 Suzman (2002), p. 25
Several wagons pulled by donkeys pass through the area and seems to be the main means of transportation. The atmosphere is peaceful and welcoming. Once we get out of the car the interpreter turns to me and says; “Let’s see what this visit brings us. We might have to come back tomorrow instead.” I look at her and probably because of the question mark written in my face she answers with a smile; “You normally don’t make appointments with San after lunch time. They have already started drinking now.”

The purpose of this analysis is to picture the context of a group of people that I met for the limited time of two days. My attempt is to illustrate firstly how these San-members experience their living situation, secondly probable mechanisms that has had – and still has – an impact on why their living situation looks like it does, and thirdly what consequences this might bring for the San as individuals. I end the analysis with possible factors that might be able to create a difference.

**Contradictive Optimism**

One of the strongest patterns throughout all interviews pictures a spirit of will and motivation among the San that I meet. A will to be educated, a will to work (and if someone already has an employment sh/e is aiming for a better, more well-paid job) and a will to improve ones living standard. A motivation to earn ones own living. To move forward. To be independent – especially independent from the government. There is a strong wish about getting hold of cattle and a vision about how these animals can be used for business and an income.

One of the informants, Lena, is a twenty five year old woman who identifies herself as a married woman, a housewife with a husband and their children. Her opinion is that “we want our kids to be educated, we don’t want our kids to be like us, so they can get better work”.169 Most of the interviews illustrate an optimism and confidence about the future, especially concerning the younger generation. Often education is associated with better job opportunities and improved living standards.

Formally, Namibian nation-building policies are giving an image of being universalistic, demonstrated for example in the popular slogan “One Namibia – One Nation”, which has been discussed earlier. More than often this picture is also given in the interviews. Erastus, who is an older man and the resettlement’s former traditional chief, expresses that “all of us who are living in Namibia are Namibians.”170 The picture of oneself being included as a San in Namibia is strongly contradicting with the image of San’s reality that is expressed in the interviews and to be read in earlier research. This leaves me with a reflection saying that the picture the informants are giving about being included in the nation is more a matter of hoping for and dreaming about being included than what the actual reality looks like.

169 Interview with Lena, 18th of March, 2009
170 Interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
Functionally, both earlier research and my fieldwork can tell, San is collectively disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded from the Namibian society.

**Social Problems and Low Self-esteem**

I ask Dina, an older woman who introduces herself as uneducated and therefore doesn’t know her age, how her everyday life looks like. She answers: “I stay alive, it’s what I do”.

The earlier mentioned optimism dies very quickly once the interviews’ discussions turn into today’s living situation for the informants, their families and neighbours. Not only are they facing daily problems concerning lack of water, food and housing. They are also struggling with social problems like alcoholism, depression, domestic violence, prostitution, child trafficking, rape and other crimes, and poor nutrition and healthcare. The community is also facing problems with motivating the youth attending school which has resulted in a high number of school drop outs. The interviews are pointing to that uneducated San are left with small chances of competing with other ethnic groups for employment. These circumstances reduce an already collectively low feeling of confidence, self-esteem and pride, the interviews reveal.

A matter of ethnic dominance and power of other ethnic groups, especially “the black people” as the informants put it, is often expressed in the interviews. This, together with the landlessness which has been discussed earlier, has created a feeling of not belonging anywhere, and to that the feeling of being inferior other groups with nowhere to turn.

**Ethnic Limitation**

Willem is an older man who identifies himself with “having cancer” and therefore living in a plastic house, which he is constantly repairing when it is raining. I ask him who he considers being a Namibian.

Willem: Black or white or San or other tribe, all of us we are Namibia. We are supposed to join hands, to work together. But since it’s not like that.

Me: It’s not like that? How is it?

Willem: People don’t work with us. We always work under them. So it’s not like we are working together.

It seems to me like the gap between the reality of today’s San – which has been illustrated with harsh living conditions and various social problems but still a spirit of hope and motivation of being independent – and a collectively improved living situation might be a matter of ethnic limitation. Earlier research has illuminated that the failure of not recognising all San traditional authorities creates opportunities for other ethnic communities to oppress and take advantage of the San.

---

171 Interview with Dina, 18th of March, 2009
172 Interview with Willem, 18th of March, 2009
Erastus: The nation was supposed to be for all of us but, like we, the San people, we are under pressure every time. … The black people always want us to work under them. … There is no San person who is going to [be] managing the project. … The black people are always the ones managing it and we have to work under the black people.173

Dina: We will always be pushed by the black people, pushed down by the black people. But all of us we have to be free, move free. But other people always press us down. … They get the work and we don’t.

Me: Who are “they”?

Dina: The black, the other tribes.174

The feeling of being oppressed by other ethnic groups is strongly experienced among the informants as the quotes are illustrating.

Lack of Trust

The situation of the San today can also be approached by looking into the matter of trust that the informants picture – or in fact the lack of trust towards politicians, non-governmental organisations, scholars and other ethnic groups. I ask Willem when the next election takes place in Namibia.

Willem: Most of the people who are elected, who are having the power, are the black people. And the San people they don’t have that power so I don’t think I will take part in the elections. … Years and years I was voting but things … don’t change. It’s just still staying the same way. … The government promised us to give [us] cows and goats and also proper houses. … People keep promising things but they never come back to us.175

This lack of trust seems to be fed by four mechanisms. Firstly the fact that small (or no) changes regarding material standard has been achieved for the San since the nation’s independence. Secondly it seems like it is a matter of few representatives for the San population in politics which results in a feeling of not being taken into consideration and an inability of making ones voice heard. The experiences of the informants state that only “the black people” hold political power in the nation. For this reason the informants see no motive to participate in the national elections and that voting does not benefit the San.

This brings us to the third factor that seems to feed San’s lack of trust towards “others”; a misused trust. A misuse of the election processes and unfulfilled promises is pictured by Daniel, a man in his thirties I estimate, who introduces himself as the cleaner of the resettlement’s school which is situated nearby.

173 Interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
174 Interview with Dina, 18th of March, 2009
175 Interview with Willem, 18th of March, 2009
Daniel: They [politicians] always promise that they will buy for us; cows and goats. But it never happened. When the election is near then they always come. “You have to elect our party! We do this for you! We do this for you!” But after the elections then it’s just quiet. … If they [the politicians] first bought the cows, what they promised, that is when I will change my mind to elect. Before that I am not going to elect.

Frieda, an older lady and the resettlement’s traditional chief, expresses a similar picture:

Frieda: Me I don't like politics. … They promise they are going to build some houses and it never happened up to now. We want them, if they promise something than they have to do it.

The fourth reason for San’s mistrust towards “others” seems to be a matter of experiencing that San as a group is not prioritised.

However, once again a contradiction is to be found. Although few positive words are being said about processes of politics there is a huge support for SWAPO based on the liberation struggle and achieved independence. Does this contradiction reveal a matter of hope for what SWAPO could accomplish rather than how the actual reality looks like? At the same time as SWAPO is being cherished the political discussions tend to point to a dissatisfaction regarding how little change has been done for the San by SWAPO since independence. Earlier research, that has been discussed above, confirms this by stating that a nationalism based on a liberation struggle might be too abstract in today’s society, especially among the younger generation that has not in person experienced the struggle and is rather searching for an improved material standard.

The general lack of trust towards the state points to the fact that it (the lack of trust) seems to have generated the feeling of a greater reliance towards ones own ethnic community rather than towards the nation and its national identity. I will come back to this statement later.

**Lack of Awareness**

Another factor that seems to contribute to San’s disadvantaged position in the Namibian society is the experienced lack of awareness among “others” about the individuals that are categorized as San. This lack of awareness is experienced as a great factor of producing and reproducing stereotypes about and negative attitude towards the San, which might cause barriers for the San to improve their situation and increase the earlier mentioned ethnic limitation. The lack of awareness can be related to the previous defined process of assimilation, which can arise from a lack of interest about minority groups in a majority society. The danger in this case might be that individuals from the San population assimilate to become “Namibian” in order to increase their opportunities for a better life.

Assimilation can then become the future potential consequence of the informants’ experienced state-run national policies, which are described as top-down, non-consultative and non-
participatory. The discussions tend to point to that San are expected to conform to the government’s vision of development. There are also experiences revealing a lack of distribution between urban and rural areas in the country. This is defined as a problem of priority, and a lack of communication with and awareness about the San communities.

This turns us to the third contradiction of this analysis. All the San that I meet ask me for something; a cow, a goat, a car or a piece of land. This can perhaps be understood as an act of expecting support and help from “others”. This assumed understanding can of course boost negative stereotypes in the society about the San. NGO-employed Sheila gives her opinion.

Sheila: I have sat in meetings where people have talked about “Why aren't the San helping themselves? Why are they not working? Why are they drinking?” And you wonder, you know, how much that affects the San. But then you also think; why are you still saying these things, because you know that these are stereotypes and they are not helpful. And also the things they [people in meetings] talk about is often a result of the treatment they [the San] have had from these people. So, for example white farmers and black farmers have paid them [the San] in the past in alcohol, that’s why they [the San] have a lot of alcohol problems. I think it’s a lack of awareness amongst Namibian society.178

If we add the will and motivation that we discovered in the analysis’s first section we might discover that this is not a question of San expecting support and help from “others”. This might instead be a matter of asking for a contribution to reduce exactly that gap that keeps the San from developing into independent communities, earning their own living. This issue could maybe be approached by an increased communication between the government and the San communities.

Before finishing the interview with Erastus I ask if he wants to add something to our conversation. He smiles and answers that he wants me to buy him a car. The talk continues with:

Me: What would you do with the car?

Erastus: I am going to make a business with the car. Because the San people we are very poor … we struggle too much so I am going to make a transport.179

**Ethnic Community Stronger than National Unity**

Earlier I mentioned the lack of trust towards the government as a potential reason for the San to develop a greater trust towards their own ethnic community rather than towards the nation and its national identity. Another reason for the San to prefer to rely on their ethnic community could, according to the interviews, be the irregularity of the GRN-supplies. The experience of the GRN-supplies, “sometimes we get, sometimes we don’t”180, as Erastus puts it, leaves the communities no guarantees for basic needs such as food and water. This situation has left the

---

178 Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009
179 Interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
180 Interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
community members with no other choice than relying on each other. A greater trust towards the ethnic community has, thus, developed rather than towards the nation and its government.

One could perhaps see the trust towards the ethnic community as a symbol of preference to contribute to once community rather than to participate in the national unity. In the following quotation Lena and I are discussing who is important in her life.

Lena: People who I am staying with they are [more] important than people who are not living with me.

Me: Why?

Lena: Because these people who are living here, if you are having a problem, or if you don’t have anything, you can ask them. If they have they will help you. … The other people they are not always here, they are in Windhoek … they are far away from us so I think the people who I’m living with they are [more] important for me.181

Empowerment instead of Participation?

I believe we have come to the point where I am about to say that it might be problematic – maybe even impossible? – to apply the concept of participation on the Namibian San context, at least if the concept is defined with an individualism that I am familiar with from the Scandinavian context, where a participatory democracy with its rights and obligations towards the nation-state stands high on the agenda. My impression of the experiences of the San I talk to tells me that San are very much interested in participation. This participation is, however, very differently defined from my description. This participation does not in the first hand, or at all?, consider the well-being of the national unity through for example national elections. This participation is strongly focused on the closest neighbourhood, community projects and how to survive. Material standard seems to be of a bigger concern than contributing to a nation with a government that is not, according to the informants, to be trusted. Perhaps, therefore, a concept of empowerment would be more applicable.

What makes a Difference?

Community Projects

Participation – or should we better name it empowerment? – is constantly associated with community projects in the interviews. More than often the informants strongly identify themselves through these community projects that they are participating in, or that they have participated in earlier. I find that all interviews point to a direction which is illustrating community projects as one factor that does make a difference in the living situation of many San, regarding both income and material standard and identification. It seems like the community

181 Interview with Lena, 18th of March, 2009
projects tend to strengthen one’s confidence, self-esteem and pride through the feeling of having a duty with responsibility – an employment – and through that being important. In a long run these projects might get an even more important meaning than a temporarily income. The employee’s of the projects might be seen by the youth as role models whom can trigger the motivation of not dropping out of school in early ages. Perhaps the projects can even lower the amount of alcoholism in the communities. But these are only my speculations.

Multiple Identities

Another aspect that can be of importance in the discussion about what factors might make a difference for San communities is the earlier discussed implementation of multiple identities. Why hold back the growth of ethnic identities when they all can take part of forming the national identity? Why suppress ethnic identities when they so obviously play a significant role in the majority of the Namibians’ everyday practices?

“A Chain of Social Workers”

In an attempt to keep the focus on factors that might make a difference for the San communities I quote Sheila:

I think we could do like a chain of social workers across all the San settlements rather than maybe focusing on just general health issues. … There is this gap, I think, in the middle that is not being covered. … There are so many issues, like domestic violence, that needs tackling. Child abuse, child prostitution and alcoholism. I just don’t see anyone who is particularly tackling those things. … The health organisations focus on TB and HIV and then in between it just doesn’t seem to be anybody who is tackling all these social problems. I don’t hear of anyone … setting up rehabilitation centres … which is clearly something that is needed. … You think about things like gender violence and rape reporting. The process is so kind of impersonal. You know, in the west you would go through counselling and support services after you report an incident like that, and it just doesn’t happen here. Unless you are actually in a centre where there is a clinic and a police station and what what. And most of the San live out in remote rural areas. So they might report that crime but they would never get any kind of back up support, or they would never be given any kind of counselling afterwards. It seems like an epic gap that is missing.182

Bearing in mind the earlier discussed high level of different social problems I consider the idea of “a chain of social workers” and other forms of concrete social support of greatest importance in the discussion of what can make a difference in the San communities.

182 Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009
A Re-built Trust

These three factors; the increase of community projects, the implementation of multiple identities in the nation-building policies and an establishment of social support, do all influence my last suggestion of mechanisms that might make a difference in San communities; a re-built trust among San towards “others”.

Mechanisms such as economic dependency, social discrimination and political marginalisation seem to have brought the San to their experienced inferior position – and seem to still maintain the San in this position. A feeling of re-built trust might be reachable through firstly the experience of being more independent through the increase of community projects, secondly the experience of being included, accepted and not being forced to chose between different identities through multiple identities, and thirdly the experience of being prioritised and significant through concrete social support.

I would like to bring this analysing section to an end with a quote from Kalahari RainSong, Belinda Kruiper’s story about her experienced reality of the South African San community #Khomani, of which she is a member.

I started listening more carefully when they talked, paying closer attention to the stories they told me. The more I heard, the more I realised how deep the psychic damage goes. Until those wounds are addressed, until that damage is healed, nothing can work for the Bushmen. Until the internal work has been completed no amount of land grants, no amount of development projects, can change anything. Healing has to come from the spirit first. The Kruipers [the name of Belinda’s family] have to find their self-respect again, to recover their humanity and their pride as a people. Only then will they be ready to move forward from the past that shackles them.183

In the following concluding chapter I aim to put together the pieces from the theoretical discussion, the presented earlier research and the results from the analysis of the empirical data in an attempt to illustrate a more general overall image of the Namibian nation-building context.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has two purposes. The first purpose has been to examine the experience of participation in the multiethnic nation Namibia among members of San communities in rural areas. I believe I have come to the conclusion that the concept of participation – if defined with a by me experienced Scandinavian individualism and a participatory democracy with rights and obligations towards the nation-state – seem to be difficult or perhaps even impossible to apply on the Namibian San context. It might be applicable if defined as a concept that focuses on the well-being and improvement of the closest neighbourhood through for example community projects rather than national unity through for example national elections. Thus, it is perhaps better if we talk about empowerment instead of participation. Empowerment seems to be highly valued among

183 Elana Bregin and Belinda Kruiper (2004) Kalahari RainSong (Scottsville), p. 51
the San communities and the motivation and will of moving forward and improving one's living situation is strong. This motivation is, however, often crushed when the will faces a reality of economical dependency, political marginalisation and social discrimination.

It appears like the main factors that seem to have an impact for the San on the feeling of national belonging and the feeling of being included in the nation are related to first the social construction of the San identity through the power of politics and tourism, secondly the lack of knowledge and awareness about the San among “others”, thirdly the lack of trust among San towards “others”, fourthly the harsh living conditions and a collectively low self-esteem among San, and last the lack of official recognition of four (of six) traditional San leaders. And – maybe foremost – the fact that the San rather seem to identify themselves with their ethnic group or community than with the national unity, even though the government since independence is trying to propagate a national identity by for example the creation of national symbols.

The second purpose of the study has been to relate the experiences of empowerment (a concept that we by now have exchanged participation with) to the ongoing official nation-building process. This purpose might be possible to reflect upon by inquiring what possibilities there are in Namibia to create a unified nation, what could unify the Namibians today, what barriers there are in Namibia to create a unified nation, what risks we may encounter in the Namibian nation-building process and how Namibia as a nation can be constructed in a different way.

But first I would like to look into if it is possible to apply the widespread established theories of nations – the civic nation where people are united around a common political membership regardless of ethnic belonging and the ethnic nation where people only hold one ethnic identity and are united by this one – on the Namibian society. In this study I argue that it is difficult or even impossible. In practice the majority of the population seems to identify themselves through different kinships and ethnicities rather than through a national identity based on a common political membership. The theory of civic nation seems to be applicable, however, if we discuss the imagined idea of a universalistic Namibian nation, created by the educated and political elite in the country.

So, what possibilities are there in Namibia to create a unified nation? On the one hand one could argue that there are sufficient conditions for a successful nation-building process because of the unifying common destiny regarding a past of colonialism, apartheid and later on the liberation struggle. This, however, seems to become more and more difficult as the time passes by. As has been illustrated earlier in this study it looks like as if the liberation struggle, as only source of legitimizing the national unity, is becoming too abstract for today’s youth. On the other hand one could argue that the conditions for a successful nation-building process are poor since there is no such thing as a common destiny of the Namibians regarding the past, in view of the fact that each and every ethnic group or community has experienced colonialism, apartheid and the liberation struggle differently. This can be exemplified by the involuntary experience of the San as trackers and soldiers for the South African armed forces fighting the SWAPO-liberation movement, which left the San in a position of being “on the losing side” of a bitter war by independence.
The ongoing construction of a national identity can be seen as a strategy to unite the Namibians around one common destiny by redefining ethnic related incidents and traditional leaders from the past and turning them into national concerns, as has been discussed earlier. In the process of discouraging ethnic identities and promoting a national identity via the implementation of national symbols ethnicity turns into an instrument. This instrument can be seen as being used by the government in the construction of the nation and its national identity – a national identity that is defined by the political SWAPO-elite which is strongly dominated and represented by the majority ethnic group Owambo.

The action of creating a national identity might contribute to assimilation among the minority groups – the San among others – since the national identity is fabricated as an element that allows an individual in Namibia to increase her or his opportunities for a better life. As a result of the process of assimilation the minority groups might lose their own cultural distinctness. So, what could unify the Namibians today and in the future without risking the consequences of assimilation? What I have suggested earlier in this study as alternative to the creation of a national identity as a unifying pillar is an implementation of encouraging multiple identities in the national policies. This means allowing an individual to identify her- or himself as for example both San and Namibian. A unity through diversity – that is truly put into action – could perhaps develop a feeling of being included in the nation-building process, which maybe could build up that lack of self-esteem and confidence that has been described among San in the analysis.

The next question might then be; what barriers are there in Namibia to create a unified nation? As has been discussed earlier SWAPO seem to consider ethnicity as a great barrier for unifying the people. I see the reality as the greatest barrier. A reality of unequal distribution of the nation’s wealth and natural resources. A reality of unequal income distribution related to ethnic belonging. A reality of negative attitudes, stereotypes and discrimination towards minority groups. A reality where a civil society is partly lacking. A reality where ones ethnic identity is often lacking to be represented and included in public institutions and other social contexts. SWAPO's Owambo dominance could perhaps be seen as a reason for other ethnic groups to some extent being excluded from the civil society. As has been discussed earlier most organisations in Namibia are ethnically related, except for the churches, and many trade unions and student unions have not yet defined their role independently of political parties.

What risks may we then encounter with the creation of the Namibian nation-building process? As has been discussed above, a new elite has grown strong in contemporary Namibia. This elite consists of the (already before independence existing) elite of white settlers together with senior black politicians, administrators and businessmen. Perhaps – or maybe even likely as far as I can judge – we ought to face an even more elitist and unequal society in the future.

This leaves us with the important – and very complex – question of how Namibia as a nation can be constructed in a different way. I can of course not give any answer to this question. What I do can say is that I believe that it is crucial for today’s and tomorrow’s Namibia to not only rely on the memory of the liberation struggle and its won independence but also to look forward. I suggest a greater recognition of all individuals, groups and communities regardless of ethnic
belonging. I believe a popular adult education would be fruitful to rise the awareness among the
different ethnic groups of the nation for the purpose of reducing stereotypes and thereby
discrimination. The public space, with its government-run institutions, must be opened up for –
and in that way commence to include – all ethnic groups of Namibia. With other words, a greater
representation among all ethnicities is needed.

A Swedish Parallel

370 million people in seventy nations are classified as indigenous peoples by the United Nations
(UN). These indigenous peoples often constitute the minorities in territories with national
boarders outlined by other people than themselves. In conclusion of this study I would like to
point out some similarities between the Namibian San context and the situation of the Sami in
Sweden.

Around hundred years ago the Sami were classified as nomads by the Swedish state, whose
lifestyle was understood as impossible to unify with the “civilised” way of life of the rest of the
Swedes. The Sami were separated from the Swedish majority society with the explanation of
making it possible for the Sami to preserve their own culture without being influenced by the
Swedish majority culture. One example is how school-children were divided into different
schools depending on their ethnic belonging to the Sami or not. This is as close to apartheid
one can come, as far as I can judge.

From the end of the 1970s the Swedish state refers to the Sami as indigenous people and a
national minority. Ones origin, relation to the language of the Sami (Sami) and ones feeling of
belonging to the Sami or not are the main factors that define who is Sami in today’s Sweden.

Bearing in mind that the Namibian Traditional Authorities Act with its customary law is inferior
to the constitutional common law of Namibia one might realize that the political situation of the
Namibian San described in this study is not very distanced from the Sami in Sweden. It exists a
Sami Parliament which is an authority elected by the people but governed and thereby controlled
by the Swedish government. There is no political representative of the Sami in the Swedish
parliament and the Swedish state has not approved the UN-related ILO-convention 169, which is
formulated to ensure indigenous peoples’ rights.

From time to time Sweden receives international criticism, among others from the UN-related
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), because of how the issues
regarding the Sami are handled. The Swedish Ombudsman for ethnic discrimination’s report from 2008
about how Sami experience their living situation illustrates many similarities with the issues that

---

184 The Sami Parliament in Sweden "FN och urfolken" www.sametinget.se/1137 7th of June, 2009
185 The Sami Information Centre "David mot Goliat" www.samer.se/1098 7th of June, 2009
186 The Sami Information Centre "David mot Goliat" www.samer.se/1098 7th of June, 2009
187 The Sami Information Centre "David mot Goliat" www.samer.se/1098 7th of June, 2009,
The Sami Parliament in Sweden "FN och urfolken" www.sametinget.se/1137 7th of June, 2009
the Namibian San experience according to this study. The report illustrates among other things that the Sami experience that their culture and traditions are being utilized by municipalities for marketing at the same time as their rights are put aside, and that policies of assimilation, negative attitudes and stereotypes about themselves circulate in the national and regional authorities.\footnote{The Sami Parliament in Sweden "Etnisk diskriminering" www.sametinget.se/4796 7th of June, 2009}

As a Swede, one does not have to go very far to face the complexity between minority groups and nation-states.
Summary

Today’s Namibia was named Deutsch Südwestafrika in 1884 and governed by the German colonial power until the South African regime invaded the area in 1915. The apartheid system was put into practice in the country so that the ethnic groups in the country could develop culturally and traditionally one by one without influencing each other, it was said. The actual reason for apartheid was the construction of a powerless labour. With time a national, anti-colonial resistance against the South African oppressors grew strong and Namibia won its independence in 1990.

The purpose of this study is firstly to examine the experience of participation in the multiethnic nation Namibia among members of San communities in rural areas, and secondly to relate these experiences to the ongoing official nation-building process.

The method used is qualitative interviews which are analysed with inspiration of Grounded Theory and related to literature-based discussions. I argue that it is difficult to apply the traditional established Western theories of a civic and ethnic nation on the Namibian context. The analysis requires a different approach because of Namibia’s dual structure of both modernity and tradition. In practice the majority of the population seems to identify themselves through different kinships and ethnicities rather than through a national identity based on a common political membership, which identifies the civic nation. The theory of civic nation seems to be applicable, however, if we are discussing the imagined idea of a universalistic Namibian nation, created by the educated and political elite in the country. I present nationalism as an imagining of a new community and ethnicity as a product of social situations, which makes it possible to utilize ethnicity as an instrument for the use of the power and legitimation of politics.

Since the Namibian independence a nation-building process is taking place “in a field of tension between a nationalistic, political elite and relatively strong ethnic identifications”.

SWAPO and its vision of a unified nation is strongly supported by the majority of the Namibians and often associated with the founding of the nation. Earlier research suggests that the ongoing Namibian nation-building process is creating a national identity through national symbols to accelerate national unity and producing a non-ethnic identity. The national identity is defined through a common political ideology by the SWAPO-elite which is strongly dominated and represented by the majority ethnic group Ovambo. At the same time the ethnic identities are discouraged although they in fact play a very important role concerning redistribution of wealth and national resources. In this study I put forward that the Namibian nation-building process with its popular slogan “One Namibia, One Nation” does not include the majority of the population who is economically and politically marginalised and still relate to one and another through kinship and ethnicity. I suggest an implementation of multiple identities in the nation-

---

building policies allowing individuals to identify her- or himself as for example both San and Namibian – a unity through diversity that is truly put into action.

The ancestors of today’s San were once the first population of the region that we at present call Namibia. San constitute less than two per cent of the national population today and struggle with social problems, dependency, poverty and political alienation. There is a clear gap between San and other Namibian ethnic groups and from a socio-economic perspective San is the most disadvantaged ethnic group of contemporary Namibia.

This study suggests that the main factors that seem to have an impact for the San on the feeling of being included in the nation are related to firstly the social construction of the San identity through the power of politics and tourism, secondly the lack of knowledge and awareness about the San among “others”, thirdly the lack of trust among San towards “others”, fourthly the harsh living conditions and a collectively low self-esteem among San, and last the lack of official recognition of four (of six) traditional San leaders. And – maybe foremost – the fact that the San rather seem to identify themselves with their ethnic group or community than with the national unity.

I have come to the conclusion that the concept of participation seem to be difficult to apply on the Namibian San context and suggest instead a discussion about empowerment which seems to be highly valued among the San communities where the motivation of moving forward is strong. This motivation is, however, often crushed when the motivation faces a reality of economical dependency, political marginalisation and social discrimination.

The risk with the Namibian nation building process might result in a even more unequal society and elitism. The gap and income difference between the rich and the poor is in fact growing in Namibia. It has been estimated that five per cent of the population earn more than seventy per cent of the national income. Figures point to a strong language-related poverty in the nation. This might be possible to prevent by creating a nation-building process that not only relies on the memory of the liberation struggle and its won independence but also is looking forward; recognising all groups and communities regardless of ethnicity; increasing the awareness among the ethnic groups and thereby reducing stereotypes through for example popular adult education; and opening up the public area for all ethnicities and thereby creating a more ethnic balanced representation.
References

Published Material


Fosse, Leif John (1996) *Negotiating the nation in local terms. Ethnicity and nationalism in Eastern Caprivi, Namibia* (Oslo: Department and Museum of Anthropology)


Legal Assistance Centre (2006) “Our land they took”. *San land rights under threat in Namibia* (Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre)


Suzman, James (2001) *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia* (Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre)


**Articles**


**Internet**

*The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia*

*The Traditional Authorities Act* (2000)

*The Sami Parliament in Sweden* “FN och urfolken”
www.sametinget.se/1137 7th of June, 2009

*The Sami Parliament in Sweden* “Etnisk diskriminering”
www.sametinget.se/4796 7th of June, 2009

*The Sami Information Centre* “David mot Goliat”
www.samer.se/1098 7th of June, 2009

**Other Material**

Transcribed notes from the field work and transcribed data from the interviews, in possession of the author:

Interview with Daniel, 18th of March, 2009
Interview with Dina, 18th of March, 2009
Interview with Erastus, 17th of March, 2009
Interview with Frieda, 17th of March, 2009
Interview with Lena, 18th of March, 2009
Interview with Sheila, 2nd of April, 2009
Interview with Sofia, 17th of March, 2009
Interview with Willem, 18th of March, 2009
Annex

About Namibia

Country name: Republic of Namibia
Independence: 21st of March, 1990
Area: 824,116 km² (Coastline: 1,572 km)
Population density: 2.1 persons per km²

People

Population: 2,200,000 (2008 estimate)
Females: 51%
Males: 49%
In urban areas: 33%
In rural areas: 67%
Population growth rate: 2.7% (1975-2005)
Age composition: Under 5 years: 13%, 5-14 years: 26%, 15-59 years: 52%, 60 plus: 7%
Life expectancy at birth: 51.6 years (2005)
People living below US$1 a day: 34.9%
People living below US$2 a day: 55.8%
Literacy rate: 85% (People aged over 15 who can read and write in any language) (2005)
Children aged 6-15 attending school: Girls: 84%, Boys: 80%
Religion: Christian 80-90% (over 50% Lutheran)
Unemployed: 36.7% (2004)
Population of Windhoek (capital): 251,545

Language

Official language: English
Other languages: Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Nama/Damara, Afrikaans, Rukwangali, Tswana, SiLozi, German, San languages
Languages spoken at home (percentage of households): Oshiwambo 48%, Nama/Damara 11%, Afrikaans 11%, Kavango (Rukwangali) 10%, Otjiherero 8%. (Other languages not listed in 2001 Census)

Economy

Currency: Namibia dollar (linked: 1:1 with South African rand)
Major industries: Mining (diamonds, zinc, lead, uranium, copper, fluorspar, gold), fisheries, dairy products, beer, meat products, millet, sorghum, livestock, and tourism.
GDP growth rate: 4.0% a year (1995-2004)
GDP: N$44.5 billion (2006)
GDP per capita: N$22,323 (2006)
Average annual inflation rate: 6.1% (2006)

---

Chronology of the Namibian History

27,000 BC Oldest known rock paintings in Namibia date back to this period.

Around 1485-1487 Portuguese mariner Diogo Cao lands at Cape Cross, close to today’s Swakopmund, and erects a cross. Portuguese Bartolomeu Diaz (who was the first European to sail around the southern end of Africa) visits Angra Pequena, close to today’s Lüderitz, and also erects a cross.

The second half of the 16th Century Ovambo groups immigrate to today’s northern part of Namibia. The country is since a long time inhabited by San and Khoi groups.

The end of the 18th Century A few Boer farmers from Kap arrive to Namibia.

The beginning of the 19th Century British missionaries arrive to the southern part of Namibia. Orlam Afrikaners immigrate to Namibia from the south, led by Jonker Afrikaner, and settle in Windhoek area.

Around 1869-1870 The Basters arrive to Namibia and settle at Rehoboth.

1870 Finnish missionaries arrive to the northern part of Namibia.

Around 1876-1878 Great Britain annexes Walvis Bay on behalf of the Cape Colony.

Around 1884-1890 Africa is divided into European colonies and Germany annexes today’s Namibia as German South West Africa (SWA). Caprivi Strip becomes part of SWA in 1890.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century German troops first defeat Herero chief Maharero and later on Nama chief Hendrik Witbooi. It has been estimated that some eighty percent of the Herero group and fifty percent of the Nama group have been killed during this period.

1915 German forces surrender to South African army during World War I. South Africa takes over the territory (today’s Namibia).

1917 The king of the Ovamboland Kwanyama, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, is killed by South African troops.

Around 1920-1921 League of Nations (later United Nations (UN) grants South Africa (through Great Britain) mandate to govern SWA.

Around 1946-1949 UN refuses to allow South Africa to annex SWA. South Africa refuses to place SWA under UN trusteeship. Namibians, inspired by Herero chief Hosea Kutako, demand an end of the South African colonialism.


**Around 1963-1964** The Odendaal Report recommends that SWA should be divided into ethnic homelands (“Bantustans”).

1966 First clash of armed struggle between South African military and SWAPO-troops takes place in Owamboland. UN General Assembly formally invalidates South Africa’s mandate to rule SWA.

1968 UN accepts “Namibia” as name of country.

1971 South Africa’s occupation of SWA is declared as illegal by the International Court of Justice.

1974 Thousands of SWAPO supporters leave for exile.

1975 Internal parties, excluding SWAPO, attend Turnhalle constitutional conference in Windhoek. The conference is an initiative of South Africa with the purpose of decolonization of Namibia, but on South African conditions.

**Around 1976-1977** UN General Assembly recognizes SWAPO as “sole and authentic” representative of the Namibian people.

1978 South African troops attack SWAPO’s refugee camp Cassinga in Angola, killing over six hundred people. UN Security Council passes Resolution 435 concerning free elections in Namibia.

1989 Over 40,000 refugees return to Namibia. SWAPO wins the UN-supervised elections with 57.3 percent.

1990 Namibia is declared independent, Sam Nujoma is sworn in as President and the constitution is adopted.

1992 First local and regional elections are held.

1994 Walvis Bay is returned to Namibia from South Africa. SWAPO wins National Assembly elections with two-thirds majority. Sam Nujoma wins the first Presidential elections.

1998 The constitution is changed to allow Sam Nujoma to run for a third term.

1999 SWAPO increases majority in the National Assembly elections and Sam Nujoma is re-elected with 77 percent support.

2004 SWAPO maintains two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Hifikepune Pohamba is elected president with 76 percent of vote.

2005 Hifikepune Pohamba is sworn in as President.
Map of Namibia

Anders Wepsäläinen/Animagica in Berg (2004), p. 6
Map of Namibia during the Apartheid Era

Interview Guides

I began all interviews with giving the following information to the informant:
My name is Jenny. I am a student at University of Namibia in Windhoek but originally come
from Sweden. I am doing a study and am interested in your opinion and experience. You
participate in this interview voluntarily, which means that you do not have to answer any
questions. If you do want to participate but there are some questions you do not want to answer,
you just tell me and then we move on to other questions. Everything you say will be kept
anonymous, no one will know that you are the person telling me these things.

Interview Guide for the Informants in the Resettlement Camp

- Who are you?
  - Can you please tell me little bit about your life?
  - What does your everyday life look like?
- Do you listen to radio? Why/why not?
  - What do you listen to on the radio?
- Where do you come from originally?
  - How long time have you lived here?
  - (If the person has moved here from another place: Why did you move?)
  - Where is your home? Why is that your home?
- Have you travelled? Where and why/why not?
- If something bad happens to you, what do you do? With whom do you talk?
  - What do you do if you get sick/injured?
  - What do you do if you do not have enough food or water?
- What languages do you speak?
  - Is that language/are those languages useful to you? In what way?
  - What is the language of Namibia? What do you think about that language?
- Did you go to school? Why/why not?
  - If yes: Until which grade? What do you remember from your time in school? Is
    your education useful for you in your everyday life? If yes: In what way? If no: Why
    not?
  - If no: Would you have liked to go to school? What do you think education could
    have given you in your everyday life?
- What does Namibia mean to you?
  - Who is Namibian? Who live in Namibia?
- What makes a San a San? Who is San?
- What is a nation? Is Namibia a nation? Why/why not?
- What does “human rights” mean to you?
  - What are your rights in Namibia? Are they fulfilled?
  - What are your duties in Namibia? Do you fulfil them?
  - What does “freedom” mean to you?
- Do you know any person or organisation that looks after your needs and interests?
  - Who/which organization? What does s/he/it do? What do you think about that?
  - What could be made differently? Could this person/organisation work in a
different way? How?
- How are decisions made here? What do you think about that?
- Who is the most powerful person you know?
  - What kind of power does that person have?
What does “participation” mean to you?

Do you have any interest in politics? Why/why not?
  o  Have you ever met a politician?
  o  When is the next election? What is then elected? Will you vote? Why/why not?

If you could change anything in your life, what would that be?
  o  What do you wish for the future?
  o  What makes you happy/angry?
  o  What is important in your life?

Would you like to include something to this conversation?

Interview Guide for the NGO-employee

Can you tell me a little bit about your work; the organisation, what people you meet, how a working day looks like?
  o  Do you meet any challenges when you work? What challenges?

How is diversity seen upon in Namibia? In politics? In the civil society?

How would you describe the situation of the San group in Namibia today?
  o  Why do you think their situation is like that?

In what way, do you think, does it influence the San that Namibia is a multietnic nation?

What is your experience of the relationship between the San and other Namibian ethnic groups? What is the attitude towards the San from other Namibian ethnic groups?

According to your experience, how does the government of Namibia approach the fact that the San is the most disadvantaged group of Namibia?
  o  In what way does - or does not - the Namibian government improve the status and living conditions of the San? What could be done differently?

Would you say that all Namibian ethnic groups are included in the nation on the same level with the same conditions? Why/why not?
  o  Do you think the San that you meet feel included in the Namibian society? Why/why not? What could change this feeling, you think?

Do you meet any challenges because you are working for the needs and interest of a San community?
  o  What attitudes do you meet from the people you face in your work (outside the San community)? Why do you think you meet these attitudes?

Is it challenging working together with a San community? In what way/why not?

Why/in what way do you think that the people I have talked to feel that they are under pressure from the “black people”?
  o  Who are these “black people”?
  o  How could this situation be changed in your opinion?

How/in what way do the people you meet from the San-communities usually want to improve their living standards?
  o  What is the attitude towards governmental support?

How is the structure within the san community that you work with?
  o  How are decisions made?
  o  Is this San community’s traditional leader recognized by the government? Why/Why not? What do you think about that?
  o  Does the community follow the Namibian constitutional common law or a customary traditional law? What do you think about that?

Do you think NGOs in general could work differently to better improve the situation of many San’s living conditions? How? In what way?

Would you like to include something to this conversation?