Heirs Together: Church Unification and National Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid Namibia

Heirs Together: Church Unification and National Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid Namibia

Lorima Cook

A Thesis in the Field of International Relations

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2019

Abstract

The transformation of Christianity in Namibia, from a colonial power to a liberating force, saw the church play a significant role in the fight for independence. As a result of this historical presence, it was expected that the church would take a proactive role in the reconciliation of the Namibian people in the new independent country. However, efforts toward church-led reconciliation were quickly quashed by a weakening of ecumenical bonds concerning social and political issues. Ecumenism was essential for church-led reconciliation.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to those whose input made this work a reality:

– My colleagues at the House of Democracy, Windhoek, who fueled my work with endless birthday cakes;
– My community at Every Nation Church, Windhoek; who shared their country with me that I might love it as they do;
– Clem and Ludwig, at CCN Namibia, who offered their stories;
– My thesis director Professor Olupona, and thesis advisor Doug Bond, both of whom enthusiastically answered endless questions;
– My parents who empowered me to study;
– Emma, Nate, Kate, Rachelle, and Drew, who patiently listened to my "Namibs ramblings"; and
– Professor Rees, who first encouraged me to study religion and politics.

Without each of you, this work might never have seen the light of day.

Table of Contents

Glossary of Acronyms

ACN	Anglican Church of Namibia
AMEC	African Methodist Episcopal Church
BWS	Breaking the Wall of Silence [Committee]
CAFO	Church Alliance for Orphans
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
ELCAP	Evangelical Lutheran Church [in the Republic of Namibia] AIDS Programme
ELCIN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCIN-GELC	German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
FBO	Faith Based Organization
GELC	German Evangelical Lutheran Church
HUP	Homogenous Unit Principle
ICC	International Criminal Court
IO	International Organization
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SWA	South West Africa

SWAPO	South West African People's Organization
UELCSWA	United Evangelical Lutheran Church of South West Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WCC	World Council of Churches
WLF	World Lutheran Federation

Chapter 1

Introduction

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles
are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and
fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 3:6

Namibia was a deeply fragmented country when it finally became united under a majority government on March 21, 1990—a welcome occurrence, after 23 years of fighting and over 100 years of colonization. The nation's first Prime Minister, now President, Hage Geingob, said this about the decision:

> When SWAPO decided to promote reconciliation, its primary objective was to lay the groundwork for peace and harmony in a country that was ravaged by long years of war. It was an attempt to heal the wounds created by hatred between blacks and whites, between father and son, between families. Many of you will recall it was not unusual for one person of the family to be a member of Koevoet and the other a fighter with the liberation movement. Only an attempt at reconciliation could restore peace and harmony at various levels of our society. We saw no alternative.[1]

As both Christianity and its church have been a defining force in race relations for the past 200 years of Namibian history, it could be presumed that their influence would continue with the advent of independent rule.

The expectation that the church would lead the reconciliation charge ran deeply in the Namibian psyche of the time. Historically the church had been a striking force against

[1] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia, the Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (New Delhi: Hammer, 1995), 178.

apartheid rule, especially given the passionate theological belief in the heresy of racism. But that theology, brought by missionaries in the nineteenth century and championed by colonial powers in Namibia, was largely replaced with a new school of thought in churches during the mid-twentieth century. It became known as Black Liberation theology, and it arose as a primary Christian teaching.

Over the course of the struggle for independence, church congregations previously at odds were drawn together against the shared enemy of institutionalized racism. As colonial rule fell, and state-mandated segregation was no longer enforced, the Namibian church finally began to draw together in unity. It would be an incredibly powerful political, social, and economic force. However, the lived reality of the church in the new free nation proved to be very different from the expectations set at the time of independence. As the dust from the war settled, Namibia and its church set new patterns—and they were still defined by institutional divisions.

Definition of Terms

The Church: In Christian theology The Church is synonymous with "the Body of Christ" as identified in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Ephesians 4:1-16. The Church refers to the building together of believers across nations and generations. Christian theology teaches that The Church, in its God-ordained form, is a single body with Christ as its head. To give clarity, individual church communities will be referred to as "congregations" and larger bodies as "denominations."

Church Unification: Bringing The Church together as one body. This does not require a fusing of congregations and denominations but rather a shared cooperation,

mission, and doctrine. Unification of The Church is a goal of Christianity as it seeks to bring about "the will of God."

Colonial Theology: The theology taught and used as a political tool by missionaries in the early 1800s through the 1970s. Generally racially charged and heavily focused on biblical commands to submit to authority. Although this framework is less commonly taught today in Namibian congregations, it lingers in social memory and practice.

Council of Churches Namibia (CCN): The umbrella group comprised of all major congregations, representing 18 denominations. Its primary mission is the reconciling and healing of the Christian churches in Namibia. The CCN is the forerunner of church reunification efforts and a leader in the united Christian effort toward racial reconciliation.

Faith-Based Organisation (FBO): Includes but is not limited to congregations, NGOs, international organizations, and projects rooted in religious tradition. Christian FBOs fit into the Christian understanding as part of The Church body despite not being a congregation-based group.

Forgiveness: An act of will by a single party in a conflict. Whereas forgiveness, involves a considerable degree of sacrifice and forgetting, reconciliation often has connotations of evening a score.

Post-Colonial Theology: Liberal theology focused on freedom and justice. Usually implemented through grass-roots organisation, it became increasingly popular during the 1970s in Namibia despite remaining under colonial control.

Reconciliation: In a political context, efforts toward restoration or reparation for injustices. The concept has roots in theological ideas of unity, but has been largely transformed in the political context to mean peace-building efforts.

Methodology

Research for this thesis was undertaken in three parts, corresponding with the three research questions to be answered:

1) *How has the Namibian Church's stance changed in the years since independence was declared?*

My research primarily focused on congregation-distributed media such as sermons and bulletins. There is also considerable content from inter-denominational meetings, CCN assemblies, and WCC publications. In 1990 the CCN hosted a consultation of congregation leaders and academics from several traditions named 'Mission of the Church: Reconciliation and Nation-building in independent Namibia". In this conference all of the frameworks for Church reunification efforts were laid out. I assess the manner in which these were carried out. I also followed the progress of the new government as it was set up. Inter-denominational conferences were well documented, and plenaries are usually available for public access via podcast (transcribed).

2) *Has The Church acted in accordance with its professed stance?*

Research to answer this question focused on exploring programs run by denominations and congregations. Lutheran, Catholic, and Pentecostal denominations offer online access to their program proposals and project reports. This gave considerable insight into efforts put forward and perceived notions of success.

3) *What is the nature of racial reconciliation and church unification?*

Determining answers to this question involved tracking relationships throughout the last 100 years. Extant academic research has followed this relationship through

numerous major events before the 1990s, and this period has been assessed and described by many researchers. In turn, I drew on methods used by academics who addressed these events and timeframes, namely, examining how secular and religious parties discuss their connections.

Research Limitations

All official documentation in Namibia is in English. German and Afrikaans are Namibia's secondary languages, and I am not facile in either. However, I also do not see this to be a point of concern.

In contrast to Lutheran, Catholic, and Pentecostal denominations that offer online access to their program proposals and project reports, other congregations and faith-based organizations have released little information online concerning their programs.

Although there is less academic research into contemporary church-state relations, there are a number of prominent researchers in Namibia who are examining the history of these relationships. An array of projects follow a similar path vis-à-vis South African post-apartheid church dynamics.

It is difficult to measure the success of social influence efforts. I have not commented on the productivity of The Church's labors, but I do explore their nature and potential.

Chapter II

The Historical Role of the Church

The potential for religious groups to be social forces emanates largely from their positions within communities and the strength of their influence on congregants. This is clearly apparent in Namibia due to the prominence of the church. Ninety percent of Namibians identify as practicing Christians, and the majority regularly attend church services and are active participants in congregational communities.[2] It is from this platform that the Christian church has the social command to lead ideological shifts that define the direction of the country and its people. This is clearly seen in the proactive role of the corporate church in the struggle against South African rule and for independence.

Although at one point supported by the white church, the construction of apartheid was now unanimously deemed to be in direct opposition to biblical command.[3] New black theologians rose to prominence preaching a liberation theology based on two main themes:

1. As identified by Peter Katjavivi, *denial of equal dignity to the "children of God."* The great commandment, found in Matthew 22:37-40, calls for Christians to "love one another" in mirroring of the love of Christ. The theme of sacrificial love

[2] Christo Lombard, "The Role of Religion in the Reconstruction of Namibian Society: The Churches, the New Kairos and Visons of Despair and Jope," *Journal of Religion and Theology in Namibia* 1 (1999): 38-87.

[3] Peter Walshe, "Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice Within Divided Churches." Chapter 25. In: Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds., *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

for the marginalized and the enemy is recurrent throughout the New Testament. It is also in direct opposition to the oppressive legislation placed on coloured and black communities under apartheid.[4]

2. *A biblical call for unity amidst diversity*. Unlike many theological schools practicing in Namibia, church unification is accepted across cultural and racial groups as a biblical command and objective. Rev. Nyameko Barney Pityana referred to a distinctive theology of Namibia emerging in the independence era of unity amidst diversity.[5] This breed of theology tracked a narrative throughout all four Gospels follows with that with the coming of Christ, all barriers dividing human kind were destroyed, allowing the reuniting of God with his people. This church body is expected to be diverse in nature, not merely as a gift or duty but as a condition.

This disconnect between theology and government policy called for throwing off the traditional barriers between church and state. The church in Namibia quickly became an active agent against the minority government in Namibia. But the transition was slow, beginning first with individual members stepping forth, spurred by their faith to intervene.

One of the first voices, most unexpected and perhaps most powerful, was an Anglican priest who had visited South West Africa (SWA) briefly only four times. In 1949, 27 years after the Native Reserves Commission allocated only 10% of Namibia's land for Africans despite their majority position as 90% of the population, Reverend

---

[4] Peter H. Katjavivi, *Church and Liberation in Namibia* (UK: Pluto Press, 1989), 6.

[5] Paul Trewhela, "SWAPO and the Churches: An International Scandal," *Searchlight South Africa* 2, no. 3 (1991): 67.

Michael Scott petitioned the United Nations, on behalf of Chief Hosea Kutaku, to replace South Africa as the trustee for Namibia. The petition was finally responded to in 1966 when the United Nations General Assembly terminated South Africa's mandate on SWA and claimed direct responsibility for administering Namibia. But that decision came two years after apartheid was officially extended to Namibia. As South Africa remained unresponsive to international pressure to stop imposing apartheid, SWAPO arose to lead the Namibian people's fight against colonialism. Thus began the 27-year armed struggle between independence groups and South Africa.

The following year the UN set a hopeful but unrealistic goal of SWA independence by June 1968. When the date passed with no change in SWA, the UN Security Council declared its opposition and terminated South Africa's mandate. In 1971, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled the occupation of SWA illegal. The ruling came after a claim by South Africa that its rule was both peaceful and democratic. It was at this point, stirred by theological opposition and frustrated by the slow movement of the government, that the church found its voice.

A group of students at the Paulinum Seminary saw great spiritual implications in the ICC ruling. Traditionally, Romans 13 had been used to justify apartheid: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instated by God."[6] Whereas in the past obedience to the governing authorities meant accepting suppression, a new theology began to arise. One of the students, Zephania Kameeta, began to wrestle with biblical commandments that she believed were relevant to the space being occupied.

---

[6] *Holy Bible*, Romans 13:1.

The question of the church's response to South African occupation in light of the biblical commands to fight for justice was quickly taken to the boards of the two congregations attached to the seminary. Bishop Leonard Auala of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Namibia proposed an open letter be sent to the prime minister of South Africa on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In strikingly respectful language, the letter called for a series of reforms in South African rule, asking that it comply with the United Nations charter of 1948. The letter argued that the colonization of Namibia had seen violations of safety, free speech, free movement, and democracy. Likewise, the imposition of apartheid had divided the Namibian population, tribes, and families. The letter concluded: "Our urgent wish is that your government will cooperate with the United Nations, . . . and will see it that the Human Rights [charter] be put into operation, that South West Africa may be a self-sufficient and independent state." Quite a simple act of opposition was revolutionary, but by choosing to politically engage by overriding the doctrine of the two nations, the Lutheran Church was radical.[7]

Along with copies of the Open Letter, the boards of the two churches sent on the same day a Letter to the Congregations explaining their actions and rationale. That letter pointed to issues of church disunity, oppressive governance, and human rights abuses. The Open Letter, together with the Letter to the Congregations, served as notice of a new day dawning. The Evangelical Lutheran Church had for years maintained a posture of obedience inherited from its early missionaries. Finally, the call for a clear and unequivocal stand on the part of the church against the oppression facing Namibia was to be answered. The black church had found its voice and was prepared to speak on behalf

[7] Julius Nghistivali Mtuleni, "Á Christian Attitude Towards Violence and Resistance: A Theological Appraisal of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms with Reference to the Namibian Situation." Ph.D. diss., Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1987: 2.

of its people, and alongside stood their traditionally estranged brothers in the Anglican, Lutheran, and Catholic denominations.

In 1972, congregations of the black Lutheran church came together to be known as the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of South West Africa (UELCSWA). Two years later they joined forces with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Congregational denominations to form the Christian Center in Windhoek. The Christian Center was the first sign of ecumenism in the Namibian church. Moreover, the social influence of the church was being slowly discovered as partnerships and bonds began to form between previously divided communities. The Christian Center hosted educational and cultural events. Mostly, though, it was a forum for the exchange of ideas and debate about how and why the church should join the struggle for independence.

In April 1973, the Lutheran bishops submitted a list of 37 names to South African Prime Minister John Vorster. Each person listed testified to being tortured by South African officials in Namibia. The Prime Minister denied all of the charges. After considerable further pressure, the Namibian church charged that torture had simply become "standard practice" by the South African police.[8] At that point, the church continued to disseminate legal advice and religious guidance while partnering with liberation groups despite their violent activities and rallying the international church body to come to its aid.

In 1975, a gathering of the new ecumenical Lutheran community drafted an open letter to the international Lutheran church: "The Appeal to Lutheran Christians." Unlike the Open Letter of 1971, this letter was an authoritative address within the Lutheran

[8] Alfred T. Moleah, "Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation (Wilmington, NC: Disa Press, 1983), 61.

community.[9] The "Appeal" signified something new. The ecumenism inspired by the struggle for Namibia extended past the nation's border and into the world. It signified the beginning of a new partnership between independence forces and the international Lutheran Church (headed by the World Lutheran Federation (WLF)).

Namibia quickly became the Lutheran community's most visible cause. A few years later the WLF declared Namibia a status confession: "This means that on the basis of faith, and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publically and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system."[10] (In 1984, the Afrikaans Lutheran Church membership in the WLF was withdrawn due to their openly racist attitudes.)

In a similar vein, the World Council of Churches (WCC), as part of a campaign against racism running from 1970 to 1973, began to align with the Namibian cause. In a presentation in the mid-1970s at the International Christian Peace Conference held in Germany, it was recorded that the WCC had "achieved great support" for the struggle but the "divinity of the Namibian people was still being denied in South West Africa on a daily basis."[11] The WCC maintained its commitment to the liberation movement by sponsoring refugee settlements. It remained an active voice up until the late 1980s when it held hearings in Washington, DC, to hasten the implementation of independence plans by the UN Security Council. In 1973 the UN General Assembly declared SWAPO the

---

[9] Peter L. Kjeseth, "The Church and Politics in Namibia," *Africa Today* 36, no. 1 (1989): 7-22.

[10] Arne Sovik, ed. "Christ–A New Community," Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, June 13-25, 1977. (Geneva, Switzerland, The Lutheran World Federation, 1977), 179-180.

[11] Peter H. Katjavivi, *Church and Liberation in Namibia* (London: Pluto Press , 1989), 30.

"sole legitimate representative" of the Namibian people.[12] In accordance with Romans 13, which was the original trigger of the Open letter, the church aligned itself with SWAPO.

As the international church continued to put pressure on the UN, South Africa retaliated by attacking Namibian congregations. The first attempt was based on efforts to foster disunity: that is, a refusal of visas for clergy members, coupled with special treatment bestowed on "quiet" congregations. The attacks became progressively more violent, including a vicious arson attack on the Evangelical Lutheran church in May 1973, followed by violent torture of individual members. In 1974, the church took legal action in Windhoek High Court against South Africa's treatment of churches. All claims were denied, and the case was eventually dropped. But the persecution continued to escalate: in the months following the Windhoek trial, Bishop Wood was deported and Bishop Auala was threatened and scrutinized.

In 1976 the Christian Center evolved into a new body named the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). The CCN mirrored the structure of the World Council of Churches, the leading international ecumenical organisation. It consisted of five denominations: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), German Evangelical Lutheran Church (GELC), African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) and the Anglican Church of Namibia (ACN). Development of the CCN was a significant step for both church unity and the independence movement, for two reasons: (1) it allowed for a united church voice

[12] Randolph Vigne, "SWAPO of Namibia: A Movement in Exile," *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1987): 90.

to speak about the situation; and (2) that voice resided in and among members of SWAPO.

In July 1978, delegates of the ACN, meeting with their exiled bishop Colin Winter in Maseru, Lesotho, issued a declaration condemning the treatment of Namibians by South Africa at a refugee camp in Cassinga. The declaration called for the international church to become involved and to bring justice to Namibia: "Reconciliation will only come to Namibia when true justice is accorded to the oppressed. As we work for liberation we acclaim God the Holy Spirit who Himself has inspired all the oppressed with the freedom to be free."[13]

A few months later, in September 1978, the UN adopted Resolution 435 calling for the "withdrawal of South Africa's illegal administration from Namibia and the transfer of power to the people."[14] Unfortunately, the oppression continued to worsen, and in 1979 South Africa placed 80% of the population under martial law and arrested all SWAPO leaders inside Namibia.

In February 1983 the CCN published another open letter, this time to the governments of Canada, France, West Germany, UK, and US, calling for immediate involvement in the South Africa situation. The following year, an open letter of a much different tone was addressed to the churches in Europe and North America. It laid out the issues occurring in Namibia and asked for the international church to continue with its prayers and petitions to respective governments. The CCN's pace quickened significantly

---

[13] "The Freedom to be Free: The Maseru Declaration," July 1978: 3. http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-1571-84-Damaraland_fall_1978_opt.pdf. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

[14] UN Security Council Resolution 435. Adopted 29 September 1978. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_435. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

in the following years, with regularly published statements and appeals reaffirming the unbiblical nature of South African occupation and calling for international intervention.

In 1986 the CCN headquarters were burned down by rampaging South African forces. The arson came during a time of considerable pressure from the ecumenical body. In May that year a joint statement known as the "Ai-Gams Declaration"[15] was made by major denominations, political parties, and student groups at a CCN meeting in Namibia. In September a resolution was made by the CCN for mandatory sanctions.

Even as the Namibian cause continued to be largely ignored by Western powers, the international church persisted in demanding action. In November an inter-confessional consultation was called in Germany, notes of which were quickly distributed across Europe. A week later an appeal was made to the U.S. government demanding that it abandon all previous policies toward South Africa.

As the tenth anniversary of UN Resolution 435 drew near, attention toward South Africa also increased. Sanctions became common and were implemented in 66 countries. Pope John Paul II wrote on numerous occasions of his support for the Namibian cause and the ecumenism driving it. The international community finally began to move after decades of pressure from the church and SWAPO. However, it was not entirely productive. Paranoia about communism in Angola remained a problem, the U.S. prioritized its own trade routines over human rights, and the ecumenical approach adopted by various Namibian denominations did not extend to the international church.

In May 1988, a U.S.-led mediation team brought negotiators from Angola, Cuba, and South Africa together in London. Over seven months they reached agreements to

[15] Episcopal Churchpeople for a Free Southern Africa, "The AI-GAMS Declaration," April 30, 1986. http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-FF7. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

recognize and implement Resolution 435. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deployed a peacekeeping force called the Transitional Assistance Group to oversee elections. It began installing repatriation programs, and called upon the CCN—now a leading group in the region—to partner in dealing with returning refugees and disseminating information about elections.

After an eleven-month transition period, Namibia was pronounced independent. On March 21, 1990, after 23 years of fighting and more than 100 years of colonization, Namibia was granted official independence. South Africa withdrew from the country, 42,000 Namibian refugees returned home, and political prisoners were granted amnesty. In November 1989, 98% of registered voters turned out for Namibia's first democratic elections. SWAPO received 57% of the vote, narrowly missing the two-thirds majority required to make changes to the national constitution. As SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma stepped into his new role as the first President of Namibia, he declared a policy of unity aiming to bring peace after 42 years of apartheid:

> Taking the destiny of this country in our own hands means, among other things, making the great effort to forge national identity and unity. Our collective security and prosperity depends on our unity of purpose and action, Unity is a precondition for peace and development. Without peace, it is not possible for the best and talented citizens of our country to realize their potential.[16]

The Namibian people were unified for the first time. The new, democratic government signaled the dawning of a new day. But Namibia and the church would continue their furious and ceaseless fight against national division, this time not against apartheid, but in favor of healing.

---

[16] Sam Nujoma, Inaugural Speech, March 21, 1990. http://www.swapoparty.org/1990_inaugural_speech.html. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Chapter III

Post-Colonial Namibia

The new Namibia was not merely an effort of reconstruction but of redemption. SWAPO inherited a land and a people that were bruised and splintered by previous regimes. Now the new, majority-led SWAPO government would take responsibility for dismantling institutionalized racism, pursuing equality and a commitment to peace, and implementing the ecumenical theology of reconciliation agreed to by the Council of Churches in Nigeria (CCN). SWAPO did not rebuke the state but stood ready to proceed in partnership.

Theology of Denominational Unity

In the new country of Namibia, the mission of the CCN shifted. Instead of fighting against colonial oppression, the fight now focused on institutional division. The new mission for the CCN was one of unity; not merely organisational or doctrinal uniformity but rather an ecumenical movement toward shared cooperation, mission, and dogma. In alliance with the vision of the World Council of Churches, the unified Namibian church was deemed by CCN to be the ultimate and perfect state across the New Testament for drawing together a fragmented people toward their creator. This theology is best demonstrated in the February 1991 statement by the WCC, titled ‘The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling—The Canberra Statement” which was signed by representatives of the CCN. The Statement opens with the following:

> 1.1 The purpose of God according to Holy Scripture is to gather the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God (Eph. 1). The Church is the foretaste of this communion with God and with one another. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit enable the one Church to live as sign of the reign of God and servant of the reconciliation with God, promised and provided for the whole creation. The purpose of the Church is to unite people with Christ in the power of the Spirit, to manifest communion in prayer and action and thus to point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom.
>
> 1.2 The calling of the Church is to proclaim reconciliation and provide healing, to overcome divisions based on race, gender, age, culture, colour and to bring all people into communion with God. because of sin and the misunderstanding of the diverse gifts of the Spirit, the churches are painfully divided within themselves and among each other. The scandalous divisions damage the credibility of their witness to the world in worship and service. Moreover, they contradict not only the Church's witness but also its very nature.[17]

Issues of Reconciliation

The new nation of Namibia included a small group of anthropological communities that once existed as autonomous "nations," each with its own culture, structure, governance, and history. In the early nineteenth century, these small "nations" were tacked together by colonial adventurism. None perceived themselves as extensions of one another or groupings within a larger whole. The structures that informed how these nations engaged evolved over time during German colonialism until a central government was introduced under South African rule.

[17] World Council of Churches, "The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling—The Canberra Statement. 20 February 1991. https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-unity-of-the-church-gift-and-calling-the-canberra-statement. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Diversity

The installed mandate was a diversity management structure that by its nature avoided many of the complications attached to multicultural communities. Although the country remained fragmented along racial, social, political, and economic lines, being a part of the Christian church provided a shared identity for 97% of the population.[18] In every aspect apartheid was the antithesis of the biblical model set out by the church. Accordingly, in 1990 when the church was finally able to come together to recover from the scars of apartheid, it also had to build a new diversity management structure, one that was the opposite of what had been in place for most of the previous century.

National Identity

The diversity management plan constructed by SWAPO from its inception in 1960 was to introduce a shared nucleus. Throughout the fight for independence, all energy was centrally focused on freedom. As the new government arose, Sam Nujoma constructed a society in which he might be at the center, closely encircled by messianic freedom fighters.

The growth of Namibia is now the glue that once had been independence, and shared history has begun to lose its adhesion. In the new era, while Namibia slowly continues to intertwine, it needs a new nucleus that is accessible to the younger generations that do not share the pains of apartheid.

---

[18] Pew Research Center, Religion & Public Life Project, 2015. "Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050." http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/. (Accessed 22 Dec. 2018.)

Chapter IV

Namibia and SWAPO: Severing Church-State Ties

Emerging from apartheid and the war, the church in Namibia and the new democratic government appeared to be obvious partners in a move to construct and unify the country. More Namibians identified as Christian than identified with SWAPO, and the shared vision of both groups meant they did not have to compete for social influence but could instead share responsibility for building the new nation.

Apartheid brought not merely racial segregation but also regional, generational, tribal, and economic division. While the state sought to restore economic and geographic equality via socialist policies, the church was expected to heal tribal, generational, relational, and racial wounds. Instead, church leaders decided at independence to leave the civil sphere and return to the pre-war theologies of church-state separation. That separation was due largely to disagreements about how to discuss history in the post-independence climate.

Namibian history, like all histories, has been written by the victors. Just as pre-colonial sociology was defined by Germany, and the colonial legacy of German South West Africa was scripted by South Africa, so the narrative of colonialism and its downfall was written by SWAPO. It tells of an oppressed people, held apart by a heartless enemy, rallying together against all odds to fight for freedom. When freedom came our hero made the selfless and wise decision to forgive all, forget all, and step forward with a clean slate into an egalitarian and reunited state.

Unfortunately, SWAPO's narrative of saving Namibia and its people glosses over many of the finer details in favor of a linear arc. Strikingly simplified is the hero of the story: a unit of passionate men sworn to brotherhood in the name of freedom. Not offered is the possibility that these members of the resistance might have disagreements or distrust.[19]

This smooth depiction is not involuntary. Instead, it points to the possibility of some policy of "national amnesia" installed to avoid the skeletons in SWAPO's closet. At the heart of these secrets are former prisoners who accuse freedom fighters of widespread oppression of suspected dissenters during the struggle for liberation. The further Namibian society develops in its independence, the ramifications of such claims now extend past rehabilitation, drawing into question the SWAPO government's honesty and legitimacy.

Historical Account of SWAPO

In 1984, driven by paranoia and betrayal, SWAPO began to suspect its comrades of dissent. A secret intelligence service was developed to spy on members. Dungeons were set up in southern Angola, in which a considerable number of Namibians were held in captivity. Only a small fraction returned home at the end of the war.

Today, very little is known about activities in the Lubango dungeons. Lauren Dobell's assessment of conversations surrounding the Lubango dungeons a decade after they closed is strikingly relevant:

---

[19] André Du Pisani, "Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma–My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia," *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture* 1 (2007): 97.

> In common with other societies with a long history of repression, there continues to be a gulf in Namibia between what is widely known but not acknowledged, and what is acknowledged and thus officially "known." The distinction often appears to be drawn instinctively and absolutely, to the point that many individuals cast aside what they know in favour of the official version. For the majority of Namibians too, questions of acceptable truths are closely interwoven with questions of loyalty to SWAPO, or more precisely its leadership, which in turn is conflated with patriotism. Forged over decades of struggle against South African occupation, these do not yet admit of easy disaggregation.[20]

An early transition period report by Amnesty International told of detainees being held without trial for months or years, torture, forced false confessions, and inhumane living circumstances. The report was based on statements by the first 153 detainees who returned to Namibia under the UN independence plan. Typically, attacks were on young intellectuals or SWAPO members from tribes other than Ovambo.[21]

In the aftermath of this report, two issues emerged: first, prisoners were still being held during the transition phase, despite the UN mandate for a peaceful democratic transition, which required that all eligible voters be returned to safety. Second, the question of justice and healing fell outside of the UN mandate.

In September 1989, in an attempt to ease concerns, UN special representative Martti Ahtisaari commissioned a group of experts to examine SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia. Given full cooperation by SWAPO to investigate claims regarding 1,100 missing persons, the UN reported the number of missing persons actually stood at 211, and the experts saw no evidence of prisoners at the sites visited. However, the UN report

---

[20] Lauren Dobell, "Silence in Context: Truth and/or Reconciliation in Namibia," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 377.

[21] Gretchen Bauer, "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 33-55.

proved to be inconsistent with later findings, and figures related to the dungeons were endlessly vague. Indeed, SWAPO and its tactics continued on, un-scathed.

In October 1990, Jesus Solomon Hauala, the man in charge of the dungeons (nicknamed "the butcher of Lubango"). was appointed commander of the Namibian Army as part of "national reconciliation."[22] In 1992, the Red Cross compiled a report stating that 1,605 of 2,161 tracing requests could not be unaccounted for by SWAPO, while the previous South African government still had to account for 34 persons.[23]

In late 1994, SWAPO stifled a movement requesting the release of a promised official list of some 2,100 persons still unaccounted to enable the drafting of formal death certificates. Without such documentation, issues of legal guardianship, marriage, and inheritances could not be resolved. The motion was led by opposition politician and former detainee Eric Biwa.[24]

In 1996, domestic pressure on SWAPO finally led to publishing the long-promised list of Namibians who died or were killed while under SWAPO's care in exile. That list contained 7,792 names. Some names were given more than once; names of some living people were listed.[25] A striking number of deaths between 1988 and 1989 were labeled as "natural," fueling claims that hundreds of detainees were killed after the

---

[22] Paul Conway, "Truth and Reconciliation: The Road not Taken in Namibia," *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (2003): 66-76.

[23] Nico Horn,"Churches and Political Reconciliation In Post-Apartheid Namibia," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2010): 55-62.

[24] John S. Saul, and Colin Leys, "Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia." In Henning Melber, ed., *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence* (Nordic Africa Institute, 2003), 69.

[25] SWAPO Party, "Their blood waters our freedom: glory to the heroes and heroines of the Namibian liberation struggle," SWAPO Party, Windhoek, Namibia,1996.

transition and reconciliation process had begun. The list also proved substantially short of the 11,000 alleged by SWAPO in previous announcements.[26]

Church Response

Issues regarding detainee abuse by SWAPO were not a surprise to the Namibian church. In the mid-1970s, the CCN and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) had received reports of disappearances, detentions, and other misfortunes within SWAPO. Letters from Reverend Salatiel Ailonga, the first Namibian pastor-in-exile, told of having to flee to Zambia after upsetting SWAPO leaders by taking up the detention issue.[27] Like later responses, the approach was one of critique from within the fold rather than detach. Ailonga writes:

> What will the answer of the church be? I would say that in every leadership, church or state, the leaders have to be led and shown the truth without fear or partiality. That shows not enmity, but love for your leaders you correct, because you care about what he is doing.[28]

It was Siegfried Groth's book, *Namibia: The Wall of Silence*, that broke the church's public silence. Groth was a German Lutheran pastor with a long history of working with SWAPO and Namibians held in exile. In 1995 he published a narrated history of Namibia's liberation struggle, drawing on his own experiences and those of accused dissenters. Filled with biblical quotations and lacking academic research or hard facts, *Wall of Silence* was not written to provide a new history but to request a proper

---

[26] Dobell, *Silence in Context*, 382.

[27] Horn, "Churches and Political Reconciliation," 55-62.

[28] Ernst M. Conradie, ed., *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity.* Vol. 2. (African Sun Media, 2013), 121.

investigation into occurrences at Lubango dungeon. The hope was that ex-detainees might find mental and emotional freedom by sharing their experiences, first in the book and then in the conversations it might spur.[29]

In January 1996, the CCN received a formal request, signed by 42 ex-detainees, for a public launch of Groth's book. The following month the CCN executive committee issued a statement that they would not launch the book but would organise a national conference to discuss the claims of ex-detainees. The conference was eventually cancelled, and instead the CCN and its member churches launched a reconciliation program titled "Year of God's Grace." CNN was publically criticized for the program by President Nujoma and eventually the program was cancelled.

However, the book triggered the rise of a new organisation called Breaking the Wall of Silence Committee (BWS)—and that group organized a highly successful launch of Groth's book. English copies sold out in Namibia and soon the Ecumenical Institute of Namibia stepped in to translate it into Oshivambo and Afrikaans. The launch triggered international attention, with the BBC making in-depth broadcasts and German, British, South African, and American newspapers publishing related articles.

The most extraordinary and passionate response came from SWAPO leader and now Namibian President Sam Nujoma. He accused Christo Lombard, a theologian, renowned anti-apartheid activist, and defender of Groth's work, of being an "apostle of apartheid."[30] In a nationally televised program, BWS hosted an interview with members of its own committee and the General Secretary of the CCN, Ngeno Nakamhela. The

---

[29] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia, the Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (New Delhi: Hammer, 1995).

[30] Horn, "Churches and Political Reconciliation," 55-62.

following evening Nujoma appeared on television attacking Groth's book as "false history." Nujoma's rant included a personal attack on Groth and a threat that "Groth's agenda would only lead to bloodshed in our country."[31]

SWAPO leadership has always been allergic to reproach and known for being swift to marginalize and discredit critics. It quickly became evident that SWAPO's priorities were first and foremost protecting themselves and then preserving inner party unity. This was followed by maintaining party loyalty, avoiding attention, and quieting the nation.

Soon SWAPO's Secretary General Moses Garoeb declared war on "unpatriotic elements" and "foreign remnants of fascism"[32] that threatened national reconciliation by bringing the detainee issue into the open. Garoeb and other SWAPO officials argued that Groth's work and the issues it raised could incite a civil war in Namibia. The controversy quickly garnered international attention. The U.S. State Department's 1996 Human Rights Report addressed the detainee question and accordingly deemed Namibia as not fitting for its list of eight African countries said to have "respected" human rights.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

When encountering the legacies of apartheid—families and communities torn apart by immense suffering—Namibia and South Africa came to greatly different conclusions as to how to move forward. South Africa's Justice Minister Abdullah Omar said:

---

[31] Saul and Leys, "Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia," 69.

[32] Dobell, *Silence in Context*, 382.

> Reconciliation is not simply a question of indemnity or amnesty or letting bygones by bygones. If the wounds of the past are to be healed, . . . if the future violations of human rights are to be avoided, if we are successfully to initiate the building of a human rights culture, disclosure of the truth and acknowledgement is essential.[33]

In a conversation regarding the role of the CCN in leading reconciliation talks, ex-detainees (including Groth) demanded that "'reconciliation' should be used correctly, so that we should be given an opportunity to talk about what had happened and that the liberation movement should comment on it."[34] Overwhelmed by accusations from the ex-detainees, SWAPO representatives refused to take part in such talks.

South Africa's response—establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—was in no way a faultless restoration of the nation, but it did enable the process to begin. SWAPO's alternative approach—to ignore wounds in the hopes they would eventually be forgotten—did nothing to reach toward reconciliation.

It should be noted that there is no clear definition of "national reconciliation" in Namibia, largely because the concept of reconciliation in a political context only became popular in the last 50 years. Reconciliation in a political context has often come to mean efforts toward restoration or reparation for injustices. The concept has roots in theological ideas of unity, but has been largely transformed in the political context toward more peace-building efforts.

According to Nordquist, the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness primarily lies in reconciliation being a process (and a goal for the same process) requiring at least two actors, whereas forgiveness indicates an act of will by a single party in a

---

[33] Abdullah Omar, Speech to the South African Parliament introducing the bill "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation," 17 May 1995. Quote in Dobell, *Silence in Context*, 373.

[34] Groth, *Namibia*, 164.

conflict.[35] Whereas forgiveness involves a considerable degree of sacrifice and forgetting, reconciliation often has connotations of evening a score.

Degradation of the SWAPO/Church Relationship

The issue of detainees began to erode the church-state relationship, but the once-close groups soon began to be treated almost as enemies by the state. What disturbed SWAPO (or at least parts of its leadership) most was to be challenged from within. Thus, when the church began to question SWAPO's behavior, it caused great distress for President Nujoma.

In 2001, during a meeting with a group of farmers in the north, Nujoma said that the Constitution recognized freedom of worship, "but I don't care because it [Christianity] is artificial, it's a foreign philosophy." He suggested that Namibians return to their ancestral worship of the cattle deity known as *Kalunga ya Nangombe*.[36] Nujoma also tore at the CCN by labeling individual denominations as misleading. In a statement in Tzumeb, he argued that his government recognized only the Anglican, African Methodist Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical Lutheran churches.[37] The statement caused divisions among the 19 groups that were part of the CCN, and highlighted the government's lack of concern for the church's role in reconciliation.

It must be said, however, that Nujoma's obsession, although deconstructive and toxic, was based somewhat on a concerning pattern of public opinion. Having presented

---

[35] Nordquist, "Reconciliation as a Political Concept," 197.

[36] C. Maletsky, "Nujoma should be clear on 'misleading churches'," *CCN Economic News* 17 June 2004. https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=6365&page=archive-read. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

[37] Maletsky, 2004.

themselves as the faultless savior of Namibia, it has long been believed that discussions about SWAPO's messy past were the reason why it lost an expected two-thirds majority in the first elections of 1990.[38]

Moving Forward

In 2006, *Afrobarometer* asked the public what it thought about establishing a truth commission in the wake of the discovery of mass graves following the struggle for independence and the ensuing controversy. The results showed a slight majority (53%) in favour of a truth commission.[39]

In September 2017, Minister of Information and Communication Technology Tjekero Tweya rejected continuing efforts to reopen conversations: "By not opening the healing wounds, we have made it possible for Namibians to hold hands, to mould, and to unite this scarred nation into one Namibia."[40] This statement came only a few weeks after President Hage Geingob addressed the issue at a Heroes Day celebration on August 26, 2018, saying:

---

[38] John S. Saul, and Colin Leys, "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 351.

[39] Christiaan Keulder, "Afrobarometer Survey Findings: Summary of Results in Namibia," *Afrobarometer* (2006): 22. http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/nam_r3_sor.pdf. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

[40] "Tweya Rejects Dungeons Inquiry," *Namibian*, 3 September 2017. https://allafrica.com/stories/201709030146.html. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

> The policy of national reconciliation is there for a reason and trying to selectively open that painful chapter will open the floodgates of anger… The individualistic pursuits of a few should never be allowed to undermine the peace that Namibians have enjoyed since independence.[41]

The degradation of the relationship between church and state also saw the dissolution of CNN's internal unity. The Council increasingly encouraged the responsibility of individual member churches to define their response to the government —a change in manner that is most notably the result of ELCIN and ELCRN bishops who decided to prioritise their relationship with SWAPO over their mission to unite Namibia.

Reconciliation will never be possible without addressing past hurt, and the refusal to acknowledge this will continue causing the Namibian reconciliation process to deteriorate, even now almost 30 years later. While SWAPO pins its public support to the image of themselves as divine saviour, they alienate not only the church but any who dare to question them.

[41] Hage Geingob, Keynote Address, Heroes Day celebration, 26 August 2017. https://www.un.int/namibia/sites/www.un.int/files/Namibia/Statements/OtherStatements/keynote_addressed_by_h.e_dr._hage_geingob_on_the_commemoration_of_heroes_day.pdf. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Chapter V

Severing Ecumenical Ties

As the campaign that brought the nation together came to resolution, the churches quickly found that what held them together was no longer stronger than what kept them apart. The mostly linear unification of the Namibian church paused, right at the point where the church might have been finally, fully united. No longer joining together against the common enemy of oppressive colonialism, the Namibian churches quickly foundered on fragmented theologies as new priorities arose. The complicated realities of diversity within the church became quite apparent. Support for the church, both within Namibia and internationally, waned. It was in no position to address the problem of national disunity as the churches themselves were splintering.

Challenges to Church Unity

The first challenge was the complexity surrounding the sheer diversity of the Namibian church. Traditionally, there are considered to be twelve anthropological societies in Namibia, each hosting different histories, philosophies, structures, languages, and cultures. The communities that made up the Namibia church at independence found that in fact they all shared very little. The reality was just a few decades of shared nationality, vastly different memories of pre-independence society, and more often than not an identity as both Namibians and Christians. Bridging these barriers has proved not only difficult but often not the desire of the congregation.

A second challenge arises from the Namibian context, which is quite unique as a framework by which to unify the church. Apartheid's diversity management structure was based entirely on separating peoples into cultural subsets held apart by geography and legislation. This framework was racist, heretical, and a violation of countless human rights, but it also informs every part of the Namibian experience and will continue to do so for many generations.

Two other reasons have splintered the church in Namibia: (1) the split of denominations due to theological disagreements about race, and (2) the introduction of Christianity to different groups of people by different missionaries. While the first reason defines the history of the church, it is increasingly irrelevant in the post-apartheid state as more egalitarian approaches inform Namibian Christianity. The second reason, as seen in the partitioning of denominations, has evolved from simply different histories to now differing cultures. This cultural-denominational split is best seen in the Lutheran tradition. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), which grew out of the work of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, began in 1870 in the Ovambo and Kovango nations. Alternatively, Germany's Rhenish Missionary Society established the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) and the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC). In 2007 these three churches established the United Church Council of the Lutheran Churches in Namibia with the ultimate aim to become one church. The framework currently designed to promote unity between these three Lutheran segments focuses primarily on cooperation, avoiding shared regulation, and theological uniformity.

The Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP) is based on the notion that people prefer to associate with those most like themselves, also that churches are most effective when uniform. The notion is best summarized in Donald McGavran's classic statement, "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."[42] The HUP, although publicly rejected by most denominations in Namibia due to its theological faltering, still underlies many patterns evident on a congregational level. HUP is a tempting framework to utilize, largely because it occurs naturally. Homogenous churches in post-apartheid Namibia are not intentional racially segregated; rather, they are the product of significant cultural differences between groups. This is clearly seen in the Lutheran church, where theology and tradition bind together ELCIN, ELCRN, and ELCIN-GELC; it is culture that still holds them apart.

This phenomenon is in part due to the nominal nature of Christian identity within Namibia. Christianity in Namibia has not existed in a vacuum for the past 200 years. Tradition and practice of culture and religion have become so fused together as to be largely indistinguishable in many cases. Over the last 100 years the Namibian church has evolved from a Western force to an indigenous faith.[43] With this mingling, congregations have become not just a geographic clump of Christians but a cultural unit. Sunday services are not merely a religious experience as much as an expression of faith.

At the same time, unifying the church beyond cultural lines has proved to be difficult. Efforts to work past this are seen in the rise of English-speaking churches,

---

[42] Victor Hayward, and Donald McGavran, "Without Crossing Barriers? One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures," *Practical Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1974): 203-224.

[43] Masiiwa Ragies Gunda, "Changing Relations Between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century," *Exchange* 38, no. 2 (2009): 187-188.

especially in Windhoek. This framework hosts the same philosophy as the decision to introduce English as the primary language for education and government—it does not favor any of the 12 groups.[44] Culture and church, traditionally very intertwined, can now be seen to be divorced in the post-apartheid state in the name of congregational diversity. Such communities identify as "multi-cultural" or "multi-ethnic," and they commit to the practices of the majority. These congregations often have a mixed-race staff team and blend traditions throughout their services. In many cases such services abandon traditional and/or indigenous patterns for Western practices. Rather than singing hymns in Oshiwambo or Afrikaans, they sing English songs from international evangelical churches such as Hillsong.[45] Given the clear charge of the black church only 30 years ago—to decolonize theology and the church—the shift to Western patterns and practices as a pathway to common ground, is quite striking.

In the post-apartheid context, the choice seems to be between forcing congregations to be sans-culture in the name of unity, or continuing with cultural segregation in congregations, thereby sacrificing the unique capacity of the church to unify Namibians. Although culturally separate congregations working together does not actively negate the call for church unity, it ultimately does not fulfill the basis of the call for sanctification, complete unity, and throwing off worldly priorities.

---

[44] Jenna Frydman, "A Critical Analysis of Namibia's English-only Language Policy," Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics, 2011: 178-189.

[45] Simba Musvamhiri, "The Dynamics of Discipleship in a Multicultural Evangelical-Charismatic Church in Namibia." *God's Mission in Southern Africa: NETS Theological Research Papers.* Volume 1 (2011): 4.

Disagreements Over Other Church Issues

Beyond the culture issue, theological disagreements remain between denominations, many of which have arisen in the post-apartheid context. These disagreements have caused great division among denominations. While the majority of practices and theologies remain the same, concern over differing church teachings remains strikingly disruptive.

Theologies surrounding sexuality, in particular LGBT relationships, have proven to be surprisingly divisive in the Namibian context. While single-sex partnerships are illegal under Namibian law, no case has been tried since independence. In 2001, however, President Nujoma threatened the existence of all gays in Namibia; a year earlier Home Affairs Minister Jerry Ekandjo urged police cadets to "eliminate [gays and lesbians] from the face of Namibia."[46] In more recent years, there has been ongoing pressure from the UNHRC to remove this legislation in favor of eventually installing state recognition of same-sex unions. This is supported by John Walters, the Ombudsman of Namibia. The Church's response has been greatly mixed, with some supporting a change in legislation and others passionately against. Currently the major disagreement is over engaging with gay congregants and holding conversations regarding sexuality. For example, while ELCRN has taken a stance of tolerance, the other Lutheran bodies have either condemned or declared that judgment will be served by God for homosexual sin. In some more

[46] "Namibian Minister Wants Gays 'Eliminated'," *News 24* Archives. October 2, 2000. https://www.news24.com/xArchive/Archive/Namibian-minister-wants-gays-eliminated39-20001001. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

charismatic denominations, conversion and exorcism rituals have been performed in an effort to counteract homosexuality in congregations.[47]

A similar disunity can be found in conversations on the topic of abortion. While no church supports the pro-choice movement, there are varying levels of disagreement. Under the 1975 Abortion and Sterilisation Act of South Africa, which Namibia inherited at independence, termination is only legal in cases of maternal or fetal health or when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Abortion has been declared by the Namibian government to be a public health issue rather than a means of family planning. A number of debates regarding revisions of the abortion law have arisen in the post-1990 era. However, denominations are largely vocal when rallying against new legislation treating abortion as a choice. The former secretary-general of the Council of Churches in Namibia, Reverend Maria Kapere, a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, said: "The life of an unborn child is precious and sacred, and a fetus is regarded as a human being."[48] The nature of this anti-abortion mindset is not uniform across the church, however. Many churches categorize abortion as murder regardless of circumstance, including situations of rape or health concerns.

Disconnect of the International Community

Along with internal division, certain issues have arisen within the Namibian church that have hampered its capacity. As mentioned earlier, tension with SWAPO in the

---

[47] Paul John Isaak, "Homosexuality: Dimensions of the Issue in Church and Society in Namibia," *Ecumenical Review* 50, no. 1 (1998): 71-77.

[48] "Abortion Shocker," *New Era Reporter*, 28 March 2017. https://neweralive.na/posts/abortion-shocker. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

post-apartheid landscape has deeply altered the church's role. In some capacity, given the peace and relative harmony of the Namibian people, the church is not deemed to be as important in the republic state, thus falling into the fallacy of modernism equates to secularism.

This also can be seen in the relationship with the international church. Thirty years ago the church poured considerable prayer and money into the Namibian cause. Today Namibia is viewed as a success story rather than a work in progress. When independence was established, international financial support for the Namibian church was retracted. International faith-based organizations reallocated their funds to East African development and campaigns within their own denominations rather than to church unity efforts. The revolution of the church against institutionalized racism is heralded while the residue of apartheid stains the Namibian experience.

The Western church also hosts a more liberal approach to theology than is common in Namibian denominations. Groups previously aligned with the Namibian cause now find themselves disagreeing with those whose cause they fought for. Relationships between the church and the wider international community remain complicated. Divisions between churches regarding the nature of theology have often been identified as issues of Western influence. Homosexuality is often viewed as a Western behavior that is not present in Namibian history or culture. In the abortion conversation, it is believed the West de-prioritizes family and community, and that is identified as the reason women why feel unsupported, incapable, and judged.[49]

---

[49] Ashley Currier, "Political Homophobia in Postcolonial Namibia," *Gender & Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 110-129.

Higher Priorities

As funding and resources saw new limits, the CCN had to reassess its priorities. Church unity—always difficult and ultimately lacking real resolve—was placed on the back burner in favor of more urgent issues.

The HIV/AIDS crisis that arose in 1996 became Namibia's leading public health issue, peaking in 2002 when 22% of Namibians tested positive. After reacting slowly to the magnitude of the crisis, the church was called upon by the community to be proactive against what was believed by many to be an even worse enemy than apartheid. The church's infrastructure and credibility meant it had the underlying capacity to define strategies of health care implementation.

The church also had a unique capacity to help children impacted by AIDS. Since its inception in 2002, the Church Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) has been one of the leading groups supporting faith-based organizations in their work with vulnerable children. This is done largely through community mobilization and advocacy, support grants, training, and local organisational capacity building. From 2010 to 2015, CAFO received more than US$3 million in assistance from the U.S. Embassy in Windhoek.[50]

In turn, supported by ecumenical bodies, many of the efforts surrounding AIDS have been undertaken at the denominational and/or congregational level. As an example, in 2001 ELCRN introduced the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia AIDS Programme (ELCAP). ELCAP offered a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS offering care and counseling support of orphans and families affected by HIV/AIDS and prevention of HIV/AIDS through education and raising awareness.

---

[50] "Church Alliance Grows Funding for Orphans," *Economist,* 12 February 2012. https://economist.com.na/12224/community-and-culture/church-alliance-grows-funding-for-orphans/. (Accessed 6 August 2018.)

Another new priority, considerably more divisive, is counteracting the rise of new religious bodies in Namibia. Two main categories of new religious groups have appeared in Namibia: Christian-based sects and satanic cults. As seen across Africa and its diaspora, the so-called "prosperity gospel" has become a powerful force not only within churches but also across society. The prosperity movement came to Namibia shortly after independence and quickly gained popularity in the Katutura settlements of Windhoek. Apart from being deemed heresy, prosperity gospel undermines government, NGO, and church efforts to counteract poverty, defying economics and manipulating people into financial submission.[51]

Satanic cults have also increased since independence, to the great concern of the wider Namibian population. The movement is believed to be an offshoot of Zambian and Zimbabwean groups. Religious freedom laws in Namibia protect the rights of such groups to exist, but suspicion surrounding the rise of non-Christian religious groups has spread across southern Africa amid reports of antisocial and criminal activity by such groups. Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic denominations have been declared by SWAPO to be the most appropriate groups for counteracting the spread of Satanism, particularly since the cults are not technically illegal.[52] This is largely due to the social and relational power of faith in Namibian communities, despite SWAPO's views on Western religion.

---

[51] Baslius Kasera, "The Dangers of Prosperity Gospel in Namibia." In B. Kasera, *The Biblical and Theological Examination of Prosperity Theology* (GRIN Verlag, 2013), 122-135.

[52] Maletsky, "Nujoma should be clear."

Chapter VI

Conclusion

In the 1990s, poised to define the national narrative on reconciliation, the church in Namibia instead chose to bend to SWAPO's declared monopoly on heroism. Today's new generation of Namibian citizens rising to leadership has never known the horrors of war and institutional apartheid. They know only the narratives of colonialism set out in history curriculums designed by SWAPO. However, apartheid, now almost 30 years gone, still defines Namibian identity. The state today remains divided—racially, regionally, tribally, and economically.

The Namibian church, the first and most socially powerful group to unify across traditional barriers, entered the post-Colonial arena as a proactive and prophetic voice. The glue of anti-apartheid struggles proved merely a contextual bond, however, leaving the church once again a divided body. While that union could have evolved as legislative partitioning was replaced with institutional division, it has not.

There is considerable potential for the church to once again take up the mantle of reconciliation. Efforts of congregations to work through cultural barriers with English-speaking, non-denominational congregations have proven fruitful. Joint campaigns to tackle AIDS and abortion have reminded denominations of their shared interests. The church still has a unique capacity to be a transforming force in Namibia. If this force is to influence national reconciliation, it needs be placed as a priority, with congregations actively integrated across racial, tribal, socioeconomic, and political lines.

References

"Abortion Shocker." *New Era Reporter*, 28 March 2017. https://neweralive.na/posts/abortion-shocker. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

"Afrobarometer Survey Findings: Summary of Results, ROUND 3." *Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia*, 2006: 58. http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/nam_r3_sor.pdf. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

Amnesty International Report, 1987. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1000021987English.pdf, 80.

Auala, Leonard and Paulus Gowaseb. Open Letter to His Honour the Prime Minister of South Africa. 30 June 1971. http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-6E-84-african_activist_archive-a0a6n3-b_12419.pdf. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 33-55.

Bertram, Robert W. *A Time for Confessing*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017.

Botman, H. Russel, and Robin M. Petersen. *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation*. Cape Town, SA: Human & Rousseau, 1996.

"Church Alliance Grows Funding for Orphans." *Economist,* 12 February 2012. https://economist.com.na/12224/community-and-culture/church-alliance-grows-funding-for-orphans/. (Accessed 6 August 2018.)

Conradie, Ernst M., ed. *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity.* Vol. 2. African Sun Media, 2013.

Conway, Paul. "Truth and Reconciliation: The Road not Taken in Namibia." *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (2003): 66-76.

Currier, Ashley. "Political Homophobia in Postcolonial Namibia." *Gender & Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 110-129.

Dobell, Lauren. "Silence in Context: Truth and/or Reconciliation in Namibia." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 377.

Du Pisani, Andre. "Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma–My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia." *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture* 1 (2007): 97.

Elphick, Richard, and Rodney Davenport, eds. *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Episcopal Churchpeople for a Free Southern Africa. "The AI-GAMS Declaration." April 30, 1986. http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-FF7 (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

Fourie, Louis, C. H. Hahn, and V. Vedder. "Kalinga Believed to Control the Elements in Ovambo Tradition." *The Native Tribes of South West Africa*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012.

"(The) Freedom to be Free: The Maseru Declaration," July 1978: 3. http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/ files/ 50/304/32-130-1571-84-Damaraland_fall_ 1978_opt.pdf. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

Frydman, Jenna. "A Critical Analysis of Namibia's English-only Language Policy." Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics, 2011: 178-189.

Geingob, Hage. Keynote Address, Heroes Day celebration, 26 August 2017. https://www.un.int/namibia/sites/www.un.int/files/Namibia/Statements/OtherStatements/keynote_addressed_by_h.e_dr._hage_geingob_on_the_commemoration_of_heroes_day.pdf. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Groth, Siegfried. *Namibia, the Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle*. New Delhi: Hammer, 1995.

Gunda, Masiiwa Ragies. "Changing Relations Between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century." *Exchange* 38, no. 2 (2009): 187-188.

Hayward, Victor, and Donald McGavran. "Without Crossing Barriers? One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures." *Practical Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1974): 203-224.

Horn, Nico. "Churches and Political Reconciliation In Post-Apartheid Namibia." *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2010): 55-62.

Isaak, Paul John. "Homosexuality: Dimensions of the Issue in Church and Society in Namibia." *Ecumenical Review* 50, no. 1 (1998): 71-77.

Kasera, Baslius. “The Dangers of Prosperity Gospel in Namibia.” 122-135. In B. Kasera, *The Biblical and Theological Examination of Prosperity Theology.* GRIN Verlag, 2013.

Katjavivi, Peter H. *Church and Liberation in Namibia*. London: Pluto Press, 1989.

Keulder, Christiaan. “Afrobarometer Survey Findings: Summary of Results in Namibia.” *Afrobarometer* (2006): 22. http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/nam_r3_sor.pdf. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

Kjeseth, Peter L. “The Church and Politics in Namibia.” *Africa Today* 36, no. 1 (1989): 7-22.

Lissner, Jørgen, ed. *Namibia 1975: Hope, Fear and Ambiguity*. Lutheran World Federation, Department of Studies, 1976.

Lombard, Christo. “The Role of Religion in the Reconstruction of Namibian Society: The Churches, the New Kairos, and Visions of Despair and Hope.” *Journal of Religion and Theology in Namibia* 1 (1999): 38-87.

Lombard, Christo. “Ecumenical Anecdotes Illustrating Various Forms of ‘Ecumenicity’.” Chapter 9: 101-146. In Ernst Conradie, ed. *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity.* African Sun Media, 2013.

Maletsky, C. “Nujoma Should be Clear on ‘Misleading Churches’,” *CCN Economic News* 17 June 2004. https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=6365&page=archive-read. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

McGavran, Donald A. *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

Moleah, Alfred T. “Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation.” Wilmington, NC: Disa Press, 1983.

Musvamhiri, Simba. “The Dynamics of Discipleship in a Multicultural Evangelical-Charismatic Church in Namibia.” *God’s Mission in Southern Africa: NETS Theological Research Papers.* Volume 1 (2011).

“Namibian Minister Wants Gays ‘Eliminated’.” *News 24* Archives. October 2, 2000. https://www.news24.com/xArchive/Archive/Namibian-minister-wants-gays-eliminated39-20001001. (Accessed 20 January 2019.)

Nghistivali Mtuleni, Julius, “A Christian Attitude Towards Violence and Resistance: A Theological Appraisal of Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms with Reference to the Namibian Situation.” Ph.D. diss., Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1987.

Nordquist, Kjell-Åke. "Reconciliation as a Political Concept: Some Observations and Remarks." *Perspectives on Peace and Conflict Research* (2007).

Nujoma, Sam. Inaugural Speech, March 21, 1990. http://www.swapoparty.org/1990_inaugural_speech.html. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Omar, Abdullah. Speech to the South African Parliament introducing the bill "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation." 17 May 1995. In Dobell, *Silence in Context*, 373.

Pew Research Center. Religion & Public Life Project, 2015. "Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050." http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/. (Accessed 22 Dec. 2018.)

Saul, John S. "The Dog That Didn't Bark in the Night: Namibia's Missing TRC and the South African Model." Paper delivered at TRC: Commissioning the Past Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, 11–14 June 1999. http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/10500/797/1/thesis.pdf. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

Saul, John S., and Colin Leys. "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 351.

Saul, John S., and Colin Leys. "Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia." In Henning Melber, ed., *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence.* Nordic Africa Institute, 2003.

Sovik, Arne, ed. "Christ–A New Community." Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, June 13-25, 1977.

SWAPO Party. "Their Blood Waters our Freedom: Glory to the Heroes and Heroines of the Namibian Liberation Struggle." SWAPO Party, Windhoek, Namibia,1996.

Trewhela, Paul. "SWAPO and the Churches: An International Scandal." *Searchlight South Africa* 2, no. 3 (1991): 67.

"Tweya Rejects Dungeons Inquiry." *Namibian* 3 September 2017. https://allafrica.com/stories/201709030146.html. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

Tweya, Tjekero. "Namibia: Tweya Rejects Lubango Dungeons Inquiry." *Namibian*, 3 September 2017. https://allafrica.com/stories/201709030146.html. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)

UN Security Council Resolution 435. Adopted 29 September 1978. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_435. (Accessed 19 January 2019.)

Vigne, Randolph. "SWAPO of Namibia: A Movement in Exile." *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1987): 90.

Walshe, Peter "Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice Within Divided Churches." Chapter 25. In: Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds., *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

World Council of Churches. "The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling–The Canberra Statement. 20 February 1991. https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-unity-of-the-church-gift-and-calling-the-canberra-statement. (Accessed 18 January 2019.)