

2012

# An Introduction into the Formation of National Identity in Namibia

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## Citation

Mahoney, Colin. "An Introduction into the Formation of National Identity in Namibia." Student essay. Saint Joseph's University, 2012. Print.

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## **An Introduction into the Formation of National Identity in Namibia**

Throughout the history of the modern world there has been great attention paid to the way in which nations are formed and maintained. This is not only a theoretical study but also has practical value to understand why and how different states, or non-state actors, are able to come together and form a nation, or why and how they crumble and fail. The ways that nations are formed determine whether or not they will have different issues in the future, in regard to domestic and international stability. This paper will focus on Namibia's quest to form a national identity and its efforts to create a long lasting and strong nation under which they can grow into the future. Three main schools of thought in nation forming will be considered as the most plausible in the case of Namibia. The first will be the idea of constructed primordialism, where primordial building blocks are used as a jumping off point for the modern construction of national identity. The second will be based on the instrumentalist idea of one group's manipulation that is used to create a new identity and nationalist sentiment to further their own political and economic agendas. The third and final school will be a look into the constructivist idea of the 'other' in creating an 'us' versus 'them' mentality.

Namibia is a relatively young and diverse country, gaining independence from an UN-initiated, South African mandate on March 21, 1990, and is home to upwards of twelve different ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> The history of Namibia is long, mainly associated with strong independent ethnic groups who did not come together until they were forced to under the rule of Germany in what was then known as German South-West Africa, followed by the continuation of their struggle for existence and identity under the apartheid system and control of the South Africa regime, until its independence in 1990, when Namibia was born. This paper will look into the rise of Namibian

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Fact Book, *Country Profile: Namibia*,  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wa.html>.

nationalism during the 1960's, spearheaded by, the ethnically Ovambo, South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), which culminated in the state's independence in 1990, and how this diverse country was able to come together, and stay together to form a relatively peaceful and cohesive nation, where most of its inhabitants feel a part of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to study cases like Namibia, which have achieved success in creating a national identity through diversity, in order to use its successes as a possible framework for other states, specifically African ones similar to Namibia, in forming a strong national identity. Having studied in Namibia during the spring semester of 2012, I have heard first hand the struggles many people faced to gain independence, create a nation, and establish an identity larger than themselves and their ethnic groups. I have also seen first hand the struggles many face to hold onto their newly formed national identity, as well as find and maintain a balance with their ethnic identities. That is why it is important to understand how the notion of a Namibian nation came to be, in order to preserve it and make sure it lasts for future generations.

The creation of a nation is a highly complex and debated phenomenon in international relations and the case of Namibia is no different. It was, and still is, an elaborate process that is filled with many questions, some have been answered and others have been left unanswered. The main question in the puzzle that this analysis will focus on is how, through so much diversity, was Namibia able to create a nation and a strong national identity, which some argue has become the primary identifying factor for Namibians above their ethnic affiliations? Through this main study other questions will be looked at as well, like what affects has the new nation had on the primordial ethnic associations that many of the different groups have based their identity on for centuries? Another intriguing question that will be looked at is how and why the San (Bushmen)

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<sup>2</sup> Amanda Lea Robinson, "National Versus Ethnic Identity in Africa: State, Group, and Individual Level Correlates of National Identification," *Afrobarometer*, Working Paper No. 112, September 2009.

people have been able to maintain and keep their highly unique identity, culture, and language through the evolution of the Namibian nation? Finally, what has and what should Namibia do to maintain its national identity in the future, and can this approach be used as a framework for other African states?

The paper intends to show that the formation of the Namibian nation was largely due to the years of colonization by Germany and, most importantly, South Africa and that the adoption of a strong 'us' versus 'them' mentality among the different ethnic groups that now make up the Namibian nation against their oppressors, was key to its formation. It will be seen that this mentality, more than anything else, is the reason why Namibia came together in its Independence struggle to form a national identity. However, it will be seen that other factors after Independence, mainly the Instrumentalist practices of the dominant SWAPO party has evolved and maintained the national identity into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Creation of the Namibian Nation: Three Competing Theories**

The process Namibia went through to become a nation is complicated and hard to pin point, as there were many factors that played a role and many schools of thought on how nations are formed that could be plausible. The case study of Namibia is a continuation in the debate amongst scholars as to how nations are formed. However, there are schools of thought that will be shown do not make sense for different time periods in Namibia's quest for identity formation. The three competing school that will be laid out in this section will be, the constructed promordialism school, the instrumentalism school, and the constructivist us vs. them school.

***Constructed Primordialism School:***

The constructed primordialist school of thought which is a combination of constructivism and primordialism, and is accepted by scholars on both sides of the spectrum, is summed up by Adeed Dawisha, via Anthony Smith, and his idea of ethno-symbolic nationalism, which states, “traditions, customs, institutions and symbols must all grow out of the existing, living memories and beliefs of people who are to compose the nation.”<sup>3</sup> This means that all of the aspects that comprise a nation must be based within preexisting feelings of commonality and shared beliefs, a shared history. This shared history has no time frame of how long the history has to reach back. Whether it is millennia or just a mere hundred years. The only distinguishing factor in a nation that is formed under constructed primordialist thought is that this shared history must be a close knit feeling that most members of the nation identify with, and which new customs and beliefs are built from.

This theory, which is plausible for many modern nations, cannot work for Namibia because it is too diverse a state. There are too many ethnic groups with vastly different histories. Although the ethnic groups in Namibia have a shared history of colonization, it is not old enough or closely tied enough to provide a strong basis for primordial building blocks. Another factor against constructed primordialist thought is that the territorial boundaries of South-West Africa predated the *nation* of Namibia, and ethnic nations within Namibia span across international boundaries, with the Khoisan in South Africa and the Tswana in Botswana, for example. The close corollary between the state and the nation, and constructed primordialism lack of explanation for it, instantly associates it with a more modernist thought.

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<sup>3</sup> Adeed Dawisha, “Nation and Nationalism: Historical Antecedents to Contemporary Debates,” *International Studies Association*, New York: 2002, 22.

That leaves the nation forming process to be defined as either an instrumentalist thought, based around the idea that elites and power actors use the phenomena of a nation to further their political or economic means, and a constructivist thought, based on an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality that perpetuates the formation of the nation. Both of these schools of thought are sometimes interchangeable, as they have many of the same principles under the broader modernist theory of nation forming, where the nation is constructed. However, this review focuses on the precise phenomena that were mentioned above to find the exact cause to the creation of the Namibian nation.

***Instrumentalism School:***

The second school of thought, which takes root in the instrumentalist theory, is summed up well by Sheila Croucher who states, “Modernists have and continue to emphasize the recentness and constructedness of nations as social creations engineered by elites in pursuit of political and economic goals and for which objective ethnic or ancestral commonality is not necessary or a sufficient precondition.”<sup>4</sup> What Croucher states seems plausible for what took place in Namibia. SWAPO started the liberation movement that sparked the Namibian nationalism movement in the 1960’s, and they continue to be the dominant political party in Namibia today. So it is possible that SWAPO created a liberation movement and nationalist sentiment among all ethnic groups of South-West Africa in order to further their political gains and solidify their role as the dominant political force. This point will be studied further within the analysis of this case study.

In Adeed Dawisha’s article, entitled *Nations and Nationalism: Historical Antecedents to Contemporary Debates*, he focuses on a constructivist view, putting emphasis on the role of

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<sup>4</sup> Sheila Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004) 95.

education in creating the nation. He states that, “The history that the nationalist seeks is not an academic discipline; it is a political instrument to be exploited and manipulated for national aims.”<sup>5</sup> Within this line of thinking, in the case of Namibia it would be thought that due to SWAPO’s dominance as the liberation party before independence and the ruling party after, it would use instrumentalist practices to further their political power. Also in the article Dawisha points out that, “To the writers of the instrumentalist conception, such spiritual and social linkages do not just happen. They are shaped and nurtured specifically for political and material advantage.”<sup>6</sup> SWAPO has dominated the political landscape of Namibia since it was formed in 1960. Dominant political parties, like SWAPO, sometimes look to hold onto their political power through whatever means possible, and being the party of the ethnic Ovambos, who comprise 50% of the Namibian population, it would appear a well calculated political move to start a nationalist movement for the whole of Namibia to ensure it remains in power through wide support.<sup>7</sup> An instrumentalist approach by SWAPO would be a useful tool in *maintaining* a national identity rather than using it to *create* a national identity. With the domineering presence of the South African government in South-West Africa and their “...monopoly of legitimate education...” to use the words of Ernest Gellnar, it remains to be seen and must be studied further to identify if either South Africa or SWAPO were able to use instrumentalism to create or maintain a national identity within Namibia.

Another instrumentalist approach to creating and maintaining national identity is by creating collective memories through museums and national folklore. As Eviatar Zerubavel states, “These objects have absolutely no use to us other than a purely commemorative one, and we design them only in order to allow future generations mnemonic access to their collective

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<sup>5</sup> Adeed Dawisha, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Adeed Dawisha, 5.

<sup>7</sup> CIA World Fact Book.

past.”<sup>8</sup> While in Namibia, I saw the use of things like museums and histories aimed at shaping the memory and identity of Namibians. This tool of instrumentalism is important in the maintenance effort of the national identity. This control over culture and memory will play a part in Namibia’s identity, as the single party control of SWAPO may lead to what Anthony Smith asserts, the “dominant *ethnie* model”. In this model the foundation of the new state’s national and political identity is the culture of its dominant ethnic community. Although other cultures continue to do well, the identity of the new up-rising political community is shaped by the historic culture of its dominant ethnic group.<sup>9</sup>

***Constructivist Us Vs. Them School:***

The third and final competing theory in the case of Namibia is the constructivist idea of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ Anna Triandafyllidou is the champion of such relationships and their roles in forming national identities. In her article, *National Identity and the ‘Other,’* she states, “...for a nation to exist, it is presupposed that there is some other community, some other nation, from which it needs to distinguish itself. The nation thus is understood as a part of a dual relationship rather than as an autonomous, self-contained unit.”<sup>10</sup> The idea of ‘othering’ another nation is the crucial concept in this school, it can be an internal or an external group, but in the case of Namibia, and most colonized states, it is an external force. The ‘othering’ in Namibia started with the Germans until South-West Africa came under South African rule after the First World War. South Africa remained the “significant other” to South-West Africa and naturally that of Namibia.<sup>11</sup> This is an important aspect of Namibian nationalism, the solidifying of the ‘us’

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<sup>8</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, “ Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past,” *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1996, 292.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Triandafyllidou, “National Identity and the ‘Other.’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 21 Number 4, July 1998, 594.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 599.

encompass most or all of the ethnic groups, an idea that is expanded by the next author, Anthony Smith.

In Anthony Smith's book, *National Identity*, he brings up the "...distinction between ethnic and territorial nationalism..." with regards to states that are or were under colonial rule who seek to find a national identity for different reasons.<sup>12</sup> For territorial nationalists, who do not have homogenous ethnic roots during pre-independence "...will seek first to eject foreign rulers and substitute a new state-nation for the old colonial territory; these are anti-colonial nationalisms."<sup>13</sup> In post-independence states they "...will seek to bring together and integrate into a new political community often disparate ethnic populations and to create a new 'territorial nation' out of the old colonial state; these are integration nationalisms."<sup>14</sup> In these two steps Smith points out the 'othering' of the foreign ruler and the desire for the ruled to eject them from their territory. Furthermore, he identifies the importance of creating an 'us' after independence, where all ethnic groups are brought into the national identity. This exemplifies the situation in Namibia perfectly. They wanted to get rid of the 'them' in South Africa and institute the 'us,' as in the whole of Namibia's inhabitants.

### **Model and Hypothesis**

*Pre-Independence:*

#### **The Creation of 'Us' vs. 'Them' Mentality → Strength of Newly Formed Nation**

The ability of an oppressed people to perpetuate a clear inclusive-exclusive relationship, with a strong 'us,' where one group, or a number of groups, can come together versus a clear 'them,' usually a colonizer or competing state, the stronger the new identity and the easier it will be to

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Smith, 82.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Smith, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

solidify a national identity and nationhood. Conversely, if Namibia had failed in its ability to create an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ relationship with the Germans, and more importantly the South Africans during its liberation struggle, they would have failed to create the *nation* of Namibia and would have had merely the *state* of Namibia with many nations inside of it.

*Post-Independence:*

**The Dominance of SWAPO’s Instrumentalist Practices**      →      **Strength of Nation and Consolidation of National identity**

The solidification of SWAPO as the dominant political party in post-independent Namibia resulted in their control over the political and educational landscape within Namibia, resulting in their ability to consolidate a strong Namibian national identity into a sole identity accepted by most within the state. Conversely, if post-independent Namibia was a multi-party system, where other ethnic based political parties shared power in politics and education, then the national identity within Namibia would not be as strong and people would identify more with ethnic or tribal identities.

### **Research Design**

In order to obtain the most accurate evaluation of the hypothesis, a wide variety of sources will have to be referred to. The research will be primarily qualitative, as most of the determinants are based on the thoughts and feelings towards nationalist outcomes, and the means used to reach these outcomes. The research of the Namibian case study will focus on the why and how the nation was able to be formed into what it is today, rather than the what, where, and when it took place. Obviously, the what, where, and when are important in understanding the

circumstances of the why and how, but the latter is the focus used to determine the results of the puzzle and research questions pertaining to the national identity within Namibia.

It is important to define the key concepts that will be used in the analysis of the case study in order to give the reader the best understanding of how national identity has been formed in Namibia. The case study will be broken into two different time period, Pre-Independence: 1885-1989 and Post-Independence: 1990- Present. For the pre-independence case study the independent variables for the instrumentalism school will be the control of the political and educational landscape and political rhetoric by both the South African regime and SWAPO. The independent variable for the us vs. them school will be defined by the 'us' as the ten plus ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in Namibia and the 'them' as the Germans from 1885-1917 and the South Africans from 1918-1990. In the case study of post independence, the independent variable for the instrumentalism school will be defined by the control of the political and educational landscapes and political rhetoric by SWAPO. For the us vs. them school the independent variable will be defined as the 'us' as the members of the Namibian nation and the 'them' as the economical elites of the country, mainly the Germans, Afrikaners, and original members of SWAPO. The dependent variables for all case studies will be the strength of the nation, which is defined by how the collective of Namibia views the Namibian nation and whether they feel apart of it.

In order to utilize my own experiences in Namibia, I will look to use sources and information I obtained during my studies of Namibian nationalism. Since my research question has been narrowed in this paper from my general study of Namibia abroad, I will contact professors and host families that I befriended in Namibia, in order to obtain personal accounts of what the country was like during the nationalist movement and how their perceptions of the idea

of a Namibian nation changed over time. Also, to look at what the identity is like now, twenty years after independence, to compare and look at its longevity and the prospect of its continuation into the future.

The background literature consulted for this case study, and my personal experience in Namibia point to a confirmation of my hypothesis that the perpetuation of the 'us' versus 'them' led to the building of a strong Namibian national identity prior to independence and the instrumentalism of SWAPO post independence. The next section of analysis will aim to show these results.

### **Nation Formation in Pre-Independent Namibia: Finding a Significant Other in South Africa**

This section will look into the process towards forming a nation within Namibia before independence. The three schools of thought will be analyzed to find which one had the most impact in laying the foundation for a Namibian nation, before the country even gained Independence. There are overlapping aspects of the three schools, as the events that happened in the Liberation struggle in Namibia have different causes and correlation in the process of national identity building. The model and hypothesis will be tested along side the two other school to test whether or not it was the us vs. them mentality that brought the Namibian people together, and one step closer to forming a unified national identity encompassing all of the ethnic groups who call Namibia home.

#### ***Constructed Primordialism:***

The SWAPO Liberation party ran a campaign to increase 'Black Nationalism,' starting in the 1960's, in an effort to join all of the different ethnic groups and African people of Namibia in the fight against the white South African apartheid colonial regime. The campaign called for a

general unity of native Namibians under a common African decent. This harkened to building a future of comradeship and association of a distant shared past, which they could use as a unifying factor in their liberation struggle. This was a sound effort in finding a common building block of a semi-shared past as African people who live in 'Namibia' and were fighting the same fight against an outsider.

Although there is a shared past, it is not as much a unifying factor in the case of Namibia, as the fight against the outside colonizing force that is South Africa. The Primordial construction of a shared African decent is an important step in bringing about a unified liberation force, but it is only a small factor in a greater picture. The important factor in identity formation is the cause they were unifying for, which was the fight between 'us' and 'them.'

***Instrumentalism:***

Pre-independent Namibia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defined by the ruthless rule of the Apartheid South African regime, which controlled Namibia as a colony. It practiced the same 'divide and rule' strategy that it did within South Africa, where it aimed to separate the different ethnic groups by setting up tribal reserves, in which, after the white South Africans took the land away from Namibians, they sent them to tribal reserves in their 'homelands.'<sup>15</sup> This strategy was also used in urban centers, dividing cities into townships designated by ethnic tribe. This strategy was used in order to discourage the joining of forces between the ethnic groups in an attempt to maintain the power the ruling South Africans had. The South Africans systematically used their political rule to ensure that there would not be a unifying Namibian voice or movement. First, they took total control of the politics of Namibia, but later, in 1980, with mounting international pressure, they gave the seven majority ethnic groups, the Basters, Damara>Nama, Herero, Himba,

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<sup>15</sup> Carolina Hamma and Johanna Sixtensson, "A Study on National Identity and Nation-Building in Post Colonial Namibia," *Master Thesis*, May 2005.  
[http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/1743/uppsats\\_divided.pdf?sequence=3](http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/1743/uppsats_divided.pdf?sequence=3).

Kavango and Owambo, empowerment over quasi-autonomous ethnic sub-states.<sup>16</sup> This was not a move to give Namibians more power, but conversely to weaken them, by highlighting ethnic differences and prohibiting a unified 'Namibia' from forming.

The South African regime also used the education system as a tool to squash native Namibians and promote and further the white South Africans status as political and economical elites. "Education for black children was called *Bantu Education*, and was overtly referred to as the foundation and the prerequisite for white hegemony and (total) suppression of the blacks."<sup>17</sup> This was one of the many laws and practices that aimed to make Namibians lower tier citizens and create a submissive state in which the South Africans would rule with little interference or back lash from the native populations.

Despite the South African regimes attempts to use their instrumentalism and dominance of the political and education systems to squander any chance of a unifying Namibian force, SWAPO was able to jump start a Liberation movement, and used its own form of Instrumentalism in order to gain the support and unify the Namibian population and push them towards Independence and a Namibian national identity. SWAPO used many factors in order to gain legitimacy in themselves and the movement towards a unified Namibia, however they also used forms of Instrumentalism in order to do so. Mainly this was done through political rhetoric aimed at solidifying the movement. SWAPO's slogan during the time of the Liberation struggle was, "SWAPO is the nation and the nation is SWAPO."<sup>18</sup> This was used to show that the nation revolves around SWAPO, as the main political and liberation party in Namibia, a sort of Namibians being forced to choose SWAPO over the South African regime. Not only was the

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<sup>16</sup> James Suzman, "Minorities Report in Independent Namibia," *Minorities Rights Group International*, 2002. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/469cbfcd0.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Carolina Hamma and Johanna Sixtensson, "A Study on National Identity and Nation-Building in Post Colonial Namibia."

<sup>18</sup> Namibia, *Countries and their Cultures*, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Namibia.html#b>.

rhetoric from within SWAPO pointing towards their dominance, but also in the 1970's the United Nations stated that SWAPO was the "sole and authentic representation of the Namibian people."<sup>19</sup> Again showing the instrumentalism in solidifying SWAPO as the identifying force of Namibia. Even with these powerful slogans that helped SWAPO gain legitimacy as the representation of Namibia, the control by the South African regime over the political and educational sectors was too large for SWAPO to use instrumentalism to form any sort of national identity, although its rise to power was important it was only a part of the formation of the national identity.

***Constructivist Us Vs. Them:***

In 1885, a conference held in Berlin gave the land that is today Namibia to Germany as one of their colonies. German South-West Africa would be under the colonial rule of Germany until the end of WWI when South Africa would take control of the territory after Germany was forced to surrender all of its colonies.<sup>20</sup> The thirty-two years of German rule were ruthless, forced labor, forced migration, war, the first concentration camps, and genocide in which three-quarters of the Herero people were killed and one half of the Nama people were killed.<sup>21</sup> After the Herero Genocide in 1904 and the beginning of a strong German military onslaught, many tribes of Namibia, for the first time came together in the Anti-Colonial Resistance that lasted until 1907.<sup>22</sup> This was the first instance of a strong emergence of and 'us,' where before it would be individual ethnic tribes fighting against the Germans on their homelands, now 'Namibians' were starting to come together.

After the transition to the brutal rule of the South African regime and during their rule,

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<sup>19</sup> James Suzman, "Minorities Report in Independent Namibia," *Minorities Rights Group International*.

<sup>20</sup> Carolina Hamma and Johanna Sixtensson, "A Study on National Identity and Nation-Building in Post Colonial Namibia."

<sup>21</sup> Namibia, *Countries and their Cultures*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

nationalist sentiment and fervor started to grow within Namibia despite South Africa's attempts to squash such feelings. "Their common experience of oppression under colonialism, however, led to shared nationalist sentiment, first expressed in the 1940s during a letter-writing campaign by traditional leaders to the United Nations protesting South African rule. Initiated by the Herero Chiefs Council, the campaign grew throughout the 1950s to include leaders from other ethnic groups."<sup>23</sup> This common experience led to more and more unity as the decades went on. South Africa officially spread its Apartheid system into Namibia during the 1960's, extending the control over Namibia to the Police Line in the North, leaving the Red Zone to be less dominated by South Africa. This is historically Owamboland, and thus allowing SWAPO, an ethnically Owambo liberation group to gain strength in the 1960's and 70's and start a movement towards liberation.<sup>24</sup>

SWAPO and the Liberation movement used many methods to gain Independence, they called on the UN, who in 1974 said that the South African control of Namibia was illegal and they needed to forfeit the lands by 1975, although South Africa did not do so, having the UN on the side of Namibia would prove to be a useful resource in the end.<sup>25</sup> SWAPO summoned a Black Nationalism movement that emphasized their common experience as an oppressed people by an outside white force. Solidifying the us vs. them mentality under a common purpose of liberation and independence. They worked to break down the ethnic divisions created by the South African Apartheid regime, and replace it with a single Namibian identity.

In pre-independence Namibia this us vs. them mentality was the most important and useful form of national identity formation. It incorporated the different aspects of the two other

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> James Suzman, "Minorities Report in Independent Namibia," *Minorities Rights Group International*.

<sup>25</sup> Carolina Hama and Johanna Sixtensson, "A Study on National Identity and Nation-Building in Post Colonial Namibia."

schools, calling on the Primordial ties Black Nationalism, and using Instrumentalism to gain control as the dominant Liberation force, however the reason these two other school could be used by SWAPO was the sense of comradeship in coming together as a single ‘us’ to fight the oppressive ‘them’ who had been ruling them for decades. This us vs. them mentality laid the groundwork for a strong Namibian National identity that was growing stronger, as Namibia gained Independence in 1990 and the colonizing force left Namibia. Now, for the new Namibian people, the challenge would be how do they solidify their new identity, reshape it and maintain it for the future once the ‘them’ had left.

**The Perpetuation and Strengthening of the Namibian Nation in Post-Independence: The Importance and Power of the Instrumentalism of SWAPO**

This section will look into the landscape of post-independence Namibia and its efforts to solidify and maintain the Namibian national identity. The three schools of thought will be analyzed in an attempt to discover which explains the perpetuating of the newly formed Namibian national identity into the future after independence. All of the schools explain a small factor in a complex national identity, however, this case study will aim to show that, like the model and hypothesis puts forward, that the instrumentalist practices of the dominant SWAPO party and their control of the political and educational sectors within Namibia, in an attempt to guide the identity of the nation in one concise and cohesive identity.

***Constructed Primordialsim:***

The fact that the ethnic groups that make up the greater Namibian state have different cultures, languages, histories, it is hard to find a common or shared history that can be the foundation, a concrete building block in which a national identity can be formed. In Post-independent Namibia, there becomes a common history among the majority of the population, a

shared history of colonization, struggle, and independence. These are real concrete histories and memories in which people, no matter what ethnicity, can relate to and relate with. However, in the grand scheme of the Namibian national identity, this shared history is only a small unifying factor. It does not, however, explain the reasons why the national identity has been able to solidify itself into one strong, cohesive body or maintain itself into a main identifying factor among the citizens of Namibia.

***Instrumentalism:***

SWAPO has dominated the political landscape of 'Namibia' since it was formed in 1960. When the South African government left in 1990, SWAPO gained full control as the sole party of Namibia. Dominant political parties, like SWAPO, sometimes look to hold onto their political power through whatever means possible, and being the party of the ethnic Ovambos, who comprise 50% of the Namibian population, it would appear a well calculated political move to start a nationalist movement for the whole of Namibia, and form a strong national identity, to ensure it remains in power through wide support.<sup>26</sup>

There was success in forming a national identity during the Liberation struggle using the us vs. them technique, now Namibia, and SWAPO as the main party, needed to solidify that identity and push it forward into the future. SWAPO used calculated rhetoric with slogans like, "One Namibia, One Nation," "Namibian and Proud of It," and "Unity in Diversity."<sup>27</sup> There was a shift in the slogans and rhetoric from the Liberation movement, which accentuated SWAPO as the nation, in an attempt to gain support for them, but after independence the slogans switched to a more open and inclusive feeling of accepting all Namibians into the nation no matter what ethnic identity they associate with.

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<sup>26</sup> CIA World Fact Book.

<sup>27</sup> James Suzman, "Minorities Report in Independent Namibia," *Minorities Rights Group International*.

Not only was there a shift in the rhetoric, but SWAPO also gained total control of the political and educational sectors, which allowed them to use instrumentalism to solidify the national identity. A big part of forming a national identity in Namibia lies in the language. There is a large diversity of languages and dialects, which are very important to a lot of ethnic tribes identities. After gaining control, SWAPO choose English as the official language, in order to provide a base that most people could learn and communicate with the outside world, instead of the imperialist Afrikaans language.<sup>28</sup> It also allowed and encourages the teaching and practice of native tongues, which allowed people to find the balance between their language and ethnic identity and the national identity and language. This was part of a greater scheme to bring the most marginalized ethnic groups, mainly the San and Himba, into the educational system and into the Namibian society.

In recent elections, SWAPO received more than 90% of the general election, and the ‘ethnic’ backing of the Owambo based party constitutes 50% of the population, so they are receiving a vast plurality of other ethnic votes.<sup>29</sup> However, there still remains the concern that SWAPO is “disregarding cultural and ethnic indicators in order to build a new single Namibian culture.”<sup>30</sup> This would follow along with Smith’s theory of dominant ethnic control, in which one ethnic group pushes forward its culture and identity onto the rest of the country. Despite this, many in Namibia, feel that the new single identity is just an evolving and growing Namibian identity, not an Owambo identity, especially among the youth and urban populations who feel strongest about the National identity. However, it is important for a single voice to be put

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Bryan Sims and Monica Koep, “Unfinished Business: Democracy in Namibia,” *idasa*, 2012, [http://www.academia.edu/1642959/Unfinished\\_Business\\_Democracy\\_in\\_Namibia](http://www.academia.edu/1642959/Unfinished_Business_Democracy_in_Namibia).

<sup>30</sup> James Suzman, “Minorities Report in Independent Namibia,” *Minorities Rights Group International*.

forward, and the Instrumentalism by SWAPO has been that voice, that has pushed for unity and inclusion of marginalized groups into a single Namibian identity.

***Constructivist Us Vs. Them:***

After Independence, the structure of Namibian politics, and society in general, changed. All of the colonial forces lost political power. In spite of this, many of the white South African and German elites who were part of the ruling class of politics, still maintained the large plots of lands they owned and the social and economic status and control. The original members of SWAPO have joined this small minority, which owns most of the economic means of production and commerce in Namibia, and by which most of the power within the country. This creates an us vs. them situation to an extent, however, it is an internal 'other' and for the case of Namibia, it is more of a class or socioeconomic us vs. them rather than a situation that would affect the national identity of Namibia. It is an important aspect of Namibian life that will need to be followed as it might develop into something greater that could affect identity over the long run, but for now the Instrumentalism and control of SWAPO in most aspects of Namibia is a far greater match for solidifying and maintaining national identity, to class us vs. them is to breaking down that identity.

**National Identity Formation in Namibia: A Possible Framework for other African States**

Namibia's situation and its long journey to independence, and the struggles it has faced are similar to those of other African countries, however similar it may be each case is different. In Namibia, its journey towards a national identity followed greatly with that laid out by Anthony Smith, in which, For territorial nationalists, who do not have homogenous ethnic roots during pre-independence "...will seek first to eject foreign rulers and substitute a new state-

nation for the old colonial territory; these are anti-colonial nationalisms.”<sup>31</sup> In post-independence states they “...will seek to bring together and integrate into a new political community often disparate ethnic populations and to create a new ‘territorial nation’ out of the old colonial state; these are integration nationalisms.”<sup>32</sup> This was the path that Namibia chose to take. In pre-independence, the distinguished South Africa as its ‘significant other’ and the Liberation movement and SWAPO brought together the ‘us’ comprising most of the ethnic groups within Namibia versus the ‘them’ the significant other of South Africa. After independence was won, SWAPO and Namibia as a whole work to bring together all of the ethnic groups of Namibia, especially the most marginalized, in an attempt to form a concrete identity and maintain that identity it had started to form in pre-independence.

This should be used as a framework for other African countries, however there are challenges in that all of the countries in African are already independent so it is hard to find a strong outside ‘significant other.’ Looking at the case of South Sudan, however, this model could be used, in that they gained independence after a long struggle versus a ‘them’ but I am not sure how strong the ‘us’ within South Sudan has evolved, in my limited research it seems as though ethnic ties are more important for citizens of South Sudan compared to a national identity. In other nations, where there is internal strife and the possibility of regimes falling, or other countries forming, like in the case of South Sudan, for there to be a chance for a new national identity to form in place of ethnic identities. It is important however, to find the correct balance between ethnic and national identities. It should not be dealt with in absolutes; one does not have to forfeit their ethnic identity to join the national identity. National identity is a complex topic

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony Smith, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

and its study will never end, but finding ways to bring people together within a geographical territory is important for the stability and future of that state.

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