Constraints on the development of liberal ideas and practices in colonial Namibia

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Abstract
This paper sets out to show how the nature of colonial rule and the attitude of white Namibians made the development of a liberal culture of tolerance and cooperation almost impossible. However, there is also evidence of a movement among certain individuals and groups to assert their inalienable rights to human dignity and freedom from oppression especially since the 1970s. This cannot be seen as an initiative to promote broad-based liberal political and civil values in an institutional context, but it was of great significance for engendering a spirit of hope in the face of oppression. This paper will be followed by another which examines initiatives to promote contacts between white and black people in Namibia and create conditions for the realization of liberal values such as the rule of law, protection of property and consent of the governed.

Introduction
A noticeable feature of the colonial period in Namibia was the absence of a liberal tradition, exemplified by organizations and practices as well as theoretical constructs designed to formulate alternatives to the reigning practice of white hegemony and the exclusion of black people from basic civil rights and freedoms.1 Whereas in neighbouring South Africa and even the former Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Liberal Parties and associations made their mark campaigning for a space between the extremes of white, particularly Afrikaner nationalism and radical African resistance, in Namibia there were no such features. This paper examines the factors and conditions that militated against the creation of a culture of tolerance and understanding, which might ultimately bridge the gap between the dominant white minority and the dispossessed black majority. A characteristic of liberalism, especially in colonial contexts, was that it was premised on the understanding that colonized peoples should be granted rights and freedoms that

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1 This is the first of two papers. The second paper to be published in JNS 14 deals with the manner in which a number of individuals responded to the absence of democratic freedoms in colonial Namibia, striving to promote basic civil rights for all.
came to be considered of essentially western provenance: the rule of law, the separation of powers, freedom of conscience, speech and association, democracy — in the form of regular elections — and a belief in the possibility of material progress, in which all should be allowed to share. Whether this amounted to a form of cultural imperialism is an issue much debated in the era of multiculturalism and will be briefly touched upon in the next section.

It is believed that by investigating the factors and conditions that might explain the intolerance of the colonial regime and whites in general on questions of equal rights for the colonized people in the country, our understanding of the nature of colonial domination may be enhanced. Furthermore, it may shed light on the ideas and activities of individuals who strove, against considerable odds, to promote equal rights for all, on whom the next paper will focus. Apart from probing the political constraints and racist inclinations that shaped colonial discourses, a brief overview will be provided of protests by individuals and groups who resisted discrimination, fighting for the recognition of the human dignity of black people and asserting the right to equality for all. Because of the oppressive nature of colonial rule such actions were often brief and fragmented, making it difficult to trace their evolution and impact. The vast majority of these were also designed to resist the discriminatory impact of colonial rule and apartheid, rather than to promote particular liberal values. In most cases the so-called black churches were prominent in this respect, although in the 1980s various community organizations briefly asserted the right to energise local communities in self-help and improvement initiatives.

The evolution of liberal ideas and practices in the western world

The view that liberalism comprises a “belief that it is the aim of politics to preserve individual rights and to maximize freedom of choice”, has retained its attraction for liberals in an increasingly complex modern world. Related to this is an enduring faith in the possibility of improving present social conditions. Despite setbacks liberalism has not jettisoned its ameliorative ambitions.

Originally conceived to enhance the freedom of the individual and to protect it from an excess of government power, liberalism gradually came to embrace the use of such power to “correct perceived inequities in the distribution of wealth resulting from economic competition.” From classical liberalism there emerged utilitarianism, the belief in “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”, or “the belief that something has value when it is useful”. Gradually liberalism started to embrace capitalism and a market economy, which allowed the emerging middle classes the opportunity to employ

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4 Ibid.
their energies “by expanding the means of production and vastly increasing the wealth of society.”5 When limited government and the excesses of the market conspired to pose a threat to societal well-being, liberals thought it prudent to reconsider the economic role of the state. It came to be accepted that “the rewards dispensed by the market were too crude a measure of the contribution most people made to society, and, second, that the market ignored the needs of those who lacked opportunity or who were economically exploited.”6 Just as liberals devised mechanisms to prevent the achievements of democracy being undermined by the tyranny of the majority by embracing the principle of the separation of powers, periodic elections and protection of the rights of the individual, they proposed and supported the application of alleviative measures in the economic sphere. Various social services, including unemployment and health insurance, a minimum wage and the redistribution of wealth through graduated income tax and inheritance tax, were some of the measures taken to soften the impact of market capitalism.

From its heyday in 19th century Western Europe liberalism was increasingly forced onto the defensive due to the growing loss of confidence in the idea of the inexorable progress of humanity, a loss occasioned by the indiscriminate slaughter of people during World War I, rampant nationalism and the Great Depression in the first half of the 20th century. After World War II successful government economic intervention to stimulate the economy and create employment in the liberal democracies appeared to revive the prospects of realizing traditional liberal objectives, which is why such measures were widely imitated by the emerging nations of Africa and Asia. The decidedly mixed results achieved in these newly independent states and the more recent economic upheavals caused by deregulation in financial markets in the USA and western Europe, have again raised doubts about the often uneasy association of liberalism with the evils of rampant capitalism and escalating consumerism. This may account for the accusation by critics that liberalism is “infected with bourgeois values, those appropriate to the position of the emerging class of capitalists in present industrial society.”7 Liberalism has in fact always battled to counter the perception that it is intimately associated with elitist political, social and economic practices.

In the last 40 years a number of liberal philosophers have aimed to devise ideological constructs within which liberal ideas such as justice and equality could be given more concrete expression. The eminent political philosopher John Rawls’ idea of ‘justice as fairness’ is arguably the most ambitious of such attempts, attracting much praise, but also searing criticism. Rawls proposed that it should be possible to secure agreement amongst reasonable persons on particular principles of justice by imagining an original position (‘a veil of ignorance’), untainted by progressive disruption by selfish, ambitious and prejudiced notions and interests.8 John Gray, considered to be a cultural relativist9,

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
strongly disputes this possibility. He unequivocally stated that it is a fallacy to conceive of a liberal doctrine, since any particular liberal order is simply “one among the legitimate forms of political order.” According to Gray no doctrine or theory can speak for or on behalf of ‘humanity at large’. The aim, he argues, should be more limited: “the object of theorizing is the attainment of self-understanding as practitioners of the historically contingent and specific forms of life we inherit or adopt […] . For not only the subject matter but also the result is particularistic.” The value of liberal ideas, then, does not rest on its ability to offer universal panaceas or prescriptions, but whether it continues to sharpen human sensibilities and understanding of the complexities of human co-existence. Gray’s position should not be considered to be a rejection of liberal ideas, but as reflecting an acute awareness of the “particularistic character of all genuine moral and political reasoning.”

Although Gray does not favour uniform prescriptions for improvement of the human condition he is much more sympathetic towards the ‘radical liberalism’ espoused by John Stuart Mill, through which many of the same humanistic ideas espoused by current liberals are expressed. Mill, though, differed from them in his refusal to pretend to have answers to the great dilemmas of the day. Mill’s spirit of enquiry, according to Gray, would demand constant criticism of liberal political and economic institutions. Mill also favoured the radical reform of political institutions towards political devolution and diffusion of power and initiative and tied this to massive redistribution of property and incomes. He did not, however, subscribe to a particular doctrine or programme capable of achieving these aims.

Without denying the validity and importance of liberal ideas such as ‘justice as fairness’, Gray’s caveats would appear to gain credence when one considers that progress in liberal thought normally occurred in an incremental, restricted manner. Although liberalism’s enduring legacy is most evident in western liberal democracies, since 1945 it has gained broader international support. The most dramatic expansion of human rights, political and social, occurred in the post-World War II period with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In contrast to an earlier tradition of ethnocentric concerns underlying considerations of human rights, the aim with the UDHR was to conceive of human rights on a world-wide basis. It also reflected the impact of the women’s emancipation movement, new thinking about the rights of individuals to choose their nationality, and finally, it included aspects from outside the liberal tradition, such as the fruits of the long struggle of the labour movement and socialist strivings for greater social justice. The close affinity between the “welfarist ambitions of utilitarianism” and the “liberal concern with amelioration” dates from as early as the end

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10 Gray, Liberalisms : 264.

11 Ibid.: 262.

12 Ibid.: 1-8.
of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. From the 1970s onwards, however, a number of liberal philosophers like Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and Robert Nozick began to elaborate intricate conceptual structures capable of advancing more concrete notions of justice. They were especially concerned with applying neutral procedures which do not discriminate between “the diverse conceptions of the good or ways of life adopted by citizens.” As mentioned above, the tendency to conceive of a liberal doctrine capable of universal application is what John Gray strongly criticized. Nevertheless the concern with devising practical schemes for securing justice obviously transcends the idea of limited government that was always a central concern for liberals: “rule of law, separation of powers, constitutionalism, emphasis on civil liberties.”

If it is true that no universal liberal doctrine is possible, there arises the conundrum of a plurality of relativistic values, none of which could aspire to universal validity. Isaiah Berlin was widely considered to have clearly understood the relativity of values. Gray has credited him with being the source of a new and superior kind of liberalism, trumping conventional liberalism because it acknowledges a plurality of conflicting values. People like Berlin have tried to address the contradiction inherent in a relativist liberal approach to values: if they are indeed incommensurable, none can claim to be superior. This would have the effect that both tolerant and intolerant values should be accommodated, or alternatively, a line needed to be drawn to distinguish between the two. Ernest Gellner posed the question: who are the arbiters of this distinction (majority of individuals, particular groups, the enlightened elite?) and once this matter is dealt with, should the views of minorities be simply disregarded? For those optimistic that freedom and liberal values have triumphed, Gellner argued that its victory is not an unblemished achievement. “Liberty has gained its victory, in contemporary history, thanks to the economic and hence military effectiveness of liberal societies. To put it brutally, it has ridden to victory on the back of consumerism.” However, Jason Ferrel has suggested that Berlin could be read as having established a link between liberalism and pluralism. The facilitating factor, he reasons, is philosophy which Berlin characterizes as a “liberating activity.” Philosophy, according to Berlin, presides over the “general field of undifferentiated human enquiry” and as such is demanding “wider freedom […] upsetting existing values and habits […] destroying boundaries, [and] transforming familiar contours.” Since philosophy can only flourish when there is

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13 McLean and McMillan, Dictionary of Politics: 308.
14 Ibid.
17 Ibid.: 4.
freedom from repression, which amounts to external interference, it should be “clear that philosophy is most secure under a liberal regime.”19

Berlin’s position would then appear to transcend the difficulties experienced by philosophers who have tried to construct universal liberal doctrines. He did not propose such a doctrine, but conceived of philosophy and liberalism as intellectual activity and political practice respectively. This refusal to endorse both with ideological universality, but rather to view them as being capable of engaging in a continuous quest for understanding beliefs foreign to one’s own, provides a potential solution to the problem of an irreconcilable pluralism of values. Rawls had proposed that on an international level only people’s political beliefs could be subject to criticism, but he was not convinced that this should apply to religious, philosophical, or metaphysical accounts of the truth of moral judgments and of their validity.20 Berlin went further though. He argued that it is possible to “judge the content of comprehensive beliefs”. For example, Nazism can be rejected because it depends on ideas and assumptions that can be proved to be false.21 Here Berlin countered Gellner’s accusation that he failed to allow for objective criteria with which conflicting values and ideas could be assessed. Gellner himself has argued that the possibility of criticism of a social and political order is an essential ingredient of liberty, but it doesn’t make sense unless it is accepted that independent criteria are at least thinkable. A society which is merely a ‘plural’ congeries of styles and values cannot criticize any part of itself.22

Other scholars have provided examples of how liberal ideas have a wider application than is often accepted. Given the uneven trajectory of liberalism as a political doctrine and its apparent inapplicability to culturally diverse conditions, the question may well be raised whether liberal ideas are at all applicable outside the liberal democratic sphere of the western world. Though strongly influenced by Rawls’ ideas of justice, Amartya Sen cautions that the “equal distribution of primary goods does not go to the core of human needs and aspirations.” He asserts that many people are so ground down by “disease, or the customs of race, gender, disability, or all three, that they cannot see their own horizons.” They should therefore be enabled to fulfil their potential as well as having a

19 Ibid.: 309.


21 Ferrel, “Isaiah Berlin”: 311.

22 Gellner, “Sauce”:
free choice of who they want to be. He provides an example of the poor southern Indian state of Kerala to illustrate how good education can alleviate the effects of poverty. The fertility rate of women in Kerala was reduced from 3.0 to 1.8 between 1979 and 1991 and unlike the rest of South Asia, they outlive men — life expectancy for them is 74 years, to 71 for men.

Some scholars have presented convincing evidence to counter the widely accepted assumption that non-western societies lack the capacity for analytical reasoning and the embrace of liberal values. Sen reasoned that there does indeed exist a credible tradition of applying reason in non-western societies. The emperor Ashoka of India was a ruler who championed tolerance and freedom. In the third century BC he covered the country with inscriptions on stone tablets about good behaviour and wise governance, including a demand for basic freedoms for all. He did not exclude women and slaves as Aristotle did, but insisted that these rights must be also be enjoyed by the ‘forest people’ living in pre-agricultural communities distant from Indian cities.

In recent years some scholars have pointed to the existence of traditions of tolerance within Islam, countering the apparently growing conviction amongst observers in the western world that a so-called clash of civilisations appears to be inevitable. Kwame Anthony Appiah made the point that Europeans often fail to recognize the fundamental contribution that Islam has made in the construction of their cultural self-image. He cites David Levering Lewis’ argument that the civilization that modern Europeans inherited was constructed as decisively by the Muslim culture of Spain (called al-Andalus) as by the Catholic Franks under the leadership of Charlemagne. Though Jews and Christians were subordinated to Muslims, they “shared in its manifold intellectual and material treasures” and the three religions cooperated in borrowing and transmitting the pagan traditions of Greece and Rome.

In response to the argument posited by some western scholars that “scandals that outrage European liberals and conservatives — the Rushdie affair, the Muhammad cartoons, the verbal attacks on Israelis and their supporters at campus meetings” are the outcome of “Islamo-fascism” or proto-Marxist ideologies, Malise Ruthven offers a contrary view. Such conflicts, he says, should be seen as arising from “struggles around the contested symbols surrounding group identities and communal allegiances”. He continues by pointing out that the Islamist movement is not an ideological monolith backed by the power of an industrialized state though there may be nasty underpinnings, as in the export from oil-rich countries of medieval prejudices about homosexuals, women and Jews. All the Islamist movements seek legitimacy by drawing

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24 Ibid.
on the symbolic capital sanctified by an ancient religious tradition. However, since — unlike in Christianity — there are no central organising institutions capable of managing and controlling this symbolic proliferation, a high level of anarchy — some of it with terrorist offshoots — persists. Ruthven states that “managing or ‘domesticating’ Islam is a challenge for Western policymakers, as it was in the nineteenth century”. Removing “one of the principal catalysts for terrorism, which is the presence of Western troops in Muslim lands”, would be a good start. He also mentions that Ian Buruma made the “useful suggestion that functioning democracies need not depend on shared values: the minimum requirement is, simply, that citizens abide by the law”.28 This is of course an entirely sensible observation, provided the law is informed by a minimum of universally-accepted values and beliefs, in itself a challenging proposition.

The liberal tradition in South Africa
It is against the background of these observations that the achievements and failures of liberalism can be assessed in a concrete locality. A liberal tradition can be traced to the mid-19th century in the Cape Colony in South Africa at the latest. As Marks and Trapido point out, in the early part of the century a “liberal incorporationist strategy” dominated, “based on the belief of the ultimate assimilability of indigenous peoples.”29 The motives underlying this approach were ambiguous. White liberals viewed society in class terms and supported enlisting the minority of black people into the colonial order, yet this view comfortably co-existed with a belief that black people also represented an available labour pool that could be exploited. Furthermore, since the incorporation of the colonized was premised on acceptance of the belief in the supremacy of ‘Western civilisation’, it is not surprising that the rise of scientific racism towards the end of the 19th century threatened to be disruptive of liberal ideals.30 For the small, yet growing black middle class liberalism offered political opportunity and material gains. The hardening of racial attitudes and the “demise of cherished liberal ideas — such as the equality of man and the doctrine of inevitable progress”31, concerned them, but they

28 Ibid.
30 A sobering reminder of the limits of liberal tolerance is provided by Richard Price in his study of British rule in the eastern Cape, where liberal-minded British officials and missionaries, faced with Xhosa resistance against the growing tendency to abrogate liberal values in favour of outright British domination, embarked on the destruction of Xhosa culture and autonomy as the inevitable prelude to establishing ‘civilisation’. (Cf. Richard Price, Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008).
responded by using the machinery of electoral politics and civic association to articulate their views.\footnote{Marks and Trapido, “Politics of race”: 6.}

The ideal of ‘civilised rights for civilized men’, in Cecil John Rhodes’ words, increasingly gave way to the white minority’s growing fears of being swamped by the African majority. Alternative conceptions of securing white hegemony while retaining the essence of liberal values and ideas were formulated. The new discipline of anthropology was instrumental in promoting a concern for African culture as a bulwark against the eroding effects of urbanization, commercialism and secularism. It may have had little impact on state policy but significantly influenced the development of a segregationist ideology.\footnote{Dubow, “Race”: 81.}

Even liberals shared in the prevalent obsession with biological differentiation and by the 1920s Cape liberalism came to be considered somewhat archaic, according to Dubow. He responded to Paul Rich’s assertion that scientific racism was not particularly noticeable in early twentieth-century South Africa, by pointing out that Rich did not take into account the extent to which scientific racism was integral to the political discourse of the time.\footnote{Ibid.: 75.}

The concepts of segregation and trusteeship were increasingly preferred to the nineteenth-century liberal ideas with their ‘civilising mission’, on the one hand, and the repression of Africans, especially as was believed to have been practiced in the former Boer Republics, on the other hand.\footnote{Ibid.: 88.}

According to Dubow 19th century evolutionary thinking, which provided the edifice on which individualism and scientific racism rested, gave way to the pluralist and relativist qualities of the concept of culture.\footnote{Ibid.: 89.}

By the 1930s most liberals had ceased to embrace mid-19th century Cape liberalism. Prompted by the growing alienation brought about by National Party rule and its operating philosophy of apartheid, liberals were torn between those who supported equal political rights for Africans and others who clung to the principle of a qualified franchise. When the Liberal Party was created in 1953, the issue acquired greater urgency. It was only towards the end of the 1950s that the party took the then radical step of allowing Africans to become members. At a time of growing government repression in SA, Liberal Party members were instrumental in supporting Africans with advice and material assistance, such as legal aid and funding for court cases. This represented an important shift in emphasis and political approach, from the traditional role of liberals as advocates of African rights towards engaging in actions designed to soften the impact of government policies on them. Despite this impressive commitment to social and political justice, Vigne admits that the party was virtually shunned by most whites and treated with suspicion by ANC and PAC leaders. Black Africans tended to
dismiss liberals as ineffective and unable to exert any meaningful constraining influence on the escalating trajectory of white hegemony and oppression.

There have been a number of studies on liberalism and the Liberal Party in South Africa. Christopher Saunders mentions that, in recent decades, academic and popular criticism was directed against liberals and liberalism, especially from the left. They were accused of being associated with the oppressive apartheid system and of diluting black militancy.\(^\text{37}\) He points to the fact that even Nelson Mandela accused liberals of being afraid to identify with the struggle of the oppressed. Whites, by contrast, perceived liberals to be wolves in sheep’s clothing. Vigne observed in his book *Liberals against Apartheid*, that the National Party government, especially under Premiers Verwoerd and John Vorster, targeted liberals with particularly hostile displays of intolerance, as if the biggest danger facing South Africa emanated from them, rather than from African opponents of apartheid.\(^\text{38}\) It is true that in terms of membership and electoral success, the Liberal Party was a marginal player on the SA scene. Nevertheless, prominent African intellectuals and leaders such as D. D. T. Jabavu, Jordan Ngubane, Z. K. Matthews and Albert Luthuli were strongly supportive of liberal ideals.\(^\text{39}\) Upon the demise of the Liberal Party in 1968, Alan Paton presciently predicted that “South Africa would eventually reject the Liberal Party but accept its policies.”\(^\text{40}\) Vigne asserts in similar vein that the adoption of a liberal constitution for Namibia can be ascribed to the ties developed between the Liberal Party and Swapo and the respect that the latter had developed for liberalism. He also claims that the Liberal Party was instrumental in destroying the Verwoerd government’s hope of securing international support for its separate development policy.\(^\text{41}\) Saunders, however, argues that there were more factors influencing Swapo’s decision to embrace a liberal constitution. He also speculates that Vigne’s claim that the government’s repressive actions against Liberal Party members during the early 1960s was a true reflection of the challenge posed by the party, may yet prove to be considered more symbolic than substantive by future historians.\(^\text{42}\)


\(^\text{40}\) Quoted in Vigne, *Liberals*: 231.

\(^\text{41}\) Vigne, *Liberals*: 182. The Liberal Party was active in supporting democratic forces in the Transkei in 1963 to defeat the pro-government Kaizer Matanzima.

An illiberal state: the political and economic nature of colonial rule in Namibia

In trying to account for the lack of a liberal tradition in Namibia, a number of factors spring to mind: firstly the predominantly agrarian white settler population exercising a conservative influence on politics; secondly, South Africa’s tightening grip on the territory since the early 1950s, exemplified by the application of the ideology of apartheid, a rapidly expanding bureaucracy, comprising civil servants, police and the military personnel, and the restructuring of African reserves into ‘homelands’ or Bantu-stans, in effect a classic divide and rule policy. As African resistance to SA rule gained momentum a comprehensive system of surveillance and intelligence was introduced to detect and eliminate any form of opposition.

Political conditions

Namibia was and remained for a long time an essentially rural country, based on various forms of pastoralism and limited crop cultivation. The white farming population, both German and Afrikaner, comprised a significant part of the white settler population and exercised real political influence. As often in conditions of settler colonialism, political beliefs were informed by highly conservative, essentially racist, notions. Before 1950 whites were divided along language lines (German and Afrikaans/English), but after 1950 ideology replaced language as the locus of division.43 In the 1950s there were a few attempts to establish alternative white political formations to accommodate those who were disinclined to embrace South Africa’s apartheid policy. All proved to be short-lived. A case in point was the Independent South West Party established to provide a home to the more independent-minded element in the German community. The events in the Belgian Congo in 1960 convinced those involved that they would be better off endorsing SA’s policies in Namibia.44 The first attempts at political reform were introduced in the mid-1970s with the establishment of the Turnhalle Conference. Most whites however, continued to support the local National Party and those who aligned themselves with the break-away Republican Party of Mr. D. Mudge were fiercely antagonistic to African nationalist movements such as Swapo and Swanu.45 Despite protestations by leading DTA figures that South Africa put a brake on reformist

43 André du Pisani, SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change, Johannesburg, Ball, 1986: 141-144. He also mentions that the momentum generated by African independence movements had the effect of rallying support for the NP and its policies.
45 Observers believed most civil servants were NP supporters. Cf. Wolfgang H. Thomas, “The economy in transition to independence”, in: Robert Rotberg, (ed.), Namibia, Political and Economic Prospects, Cape Town, David Philip, 1983: 41-91 (73f.).
initiatives, critical observers held the view that these parties were manipulated by South Africa and favoured a neo-colonial political solution for Namibia.\textsuperscript{46}

Up until 1960 about half the white population was involved in agriculture. Thereafter a rapid expansion of the civil service occurred, largely driven by South Africans seconded to the territory.\textsuperscript{47} The large civil service acted as a bastion of conservative thinking, testimony to SA’s determination to maintain a grip on public opinion and control of the opposition in the territory. The escalation of the war against Swapo from the mid-1970s and rapid militarization further fuelled the growth of bureaucracy. The conservative mindset, intolerance towards alternative ideological constructs and a lack of knowledge of conditions and thinking in the black communities in Namibia, are reflected in the letters column of the Windhoek Advertiser, the only paper with a relatively liberal editorial policy at the time. It was especially during the 1970s and 1980s that letter writers generally tended to associate the black churches and Swapo with terrorism, communist manipulation and a perceived collapse of ‘standards’ with the attainment of black majority rule.\textsuperscript{48} Unsurprisingly, the Afrikaans press and SA-controlled radio service, as well as the German daily, the Allgemeine Zeitung, slavishly toed the SA political line.

The growing numerical dominance of Afrikander was another feature of the evolving dynamics of Namibian politics from the 1960s onwards, accelerating reactionary thinking and attitudes and feeding the general pattern of political conservatism. The population census of 1921, at the onset of SA rule in Namibia, recorded 10,673 Union nationals and 7,855 Germans. Even though immigration of Germans picked up in the period 1924–1932, by 1936 the German proportion of the white population was further reduced to 31 percent. Germans comprised 9,779 of the total white population of 31,200, Afrikaners 18,233 and English-speakers 2,580. The war, internment and repatriation of a relatively small number of Germans brought about a decline in the German population: In 1946 they numbered 9,177, while the Afrikaner population increased to a total of 25,533. From 1950 onwards the National Party’s wooing of

\textsuperscript{46} Du Pisani mentions that the Turnhalle Conference, which gave rise to the DTA, had by 1982 “experienced an erosion of support and a crisis of legitimacy” (du Pisani, SWA/Namibia: 483). The latest, acclaimed book on Namibian history effectively ignored the DTA, the Transnational Government of National Unity and the machinations of the domestic pro-SA parties, except to mention how they were utilised by the SA government for its own purposes. Cf. Marion Wallace, with John Kinahan, A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990 London, Hurst, 2011.

\textsuperscript{47} In 1946 there were 19,751 urban and 18,753 rural whites. In 1951 the gap widened with 28,774 urban and 21,156 rural whites (National Archives of Namibia [NAN], AP 5/3/1, SWA Population Census, 8 May 1951, Pretoria, Government Printer). The 1960 census revealed an even starker discrepancy: only 19,784 rural whites and 53,680 urban ones. In the 1960s there was still a rough equivalence between the number of farms and farm owners, but by 1989 consolidation had the effect of reducing the number of farm owners to 4,500 owners for 6,337 farms (Martin Schneider, “Agriculture in Namibia”, in: Heinrich Lamping and Uwe Jäschke, (eds.), Aktuelle Fragen der Namibia-Forschung. Rundgespräch in Zusammenarbeit mit der Deutsch-Namibischen Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeographie, 1991: 141-160 (143).

\textsuperscript{48} From the beginning of the 1970s to the early 1980s the paper’s editor, the redoubtable Hannes Smith proved to be an exception to the general pattern of knee-jerk intolerance.
German-speakers led to a more relaxed relationship between the members of the white community and German immigration picked up significantly. In 1951 there were 11,931, against 33,091 Afrikaans-speakers and 4,158 English-speakers and an even more dramatic increase occurred up to 1961 when their numbers increased to 16,533 — Afrikaner numbers though, jumped to 49,421 and English population numbers continued a steady, upward trend to stand at 6,279.\textsuperscript{49} In 1970 the census report revealed that the number of Afrikaners had increased to 61,910.\textsuperscript{50} The continuous influx of South African civil servants and military personnel had the effect of offsetting the growth of an indigenous white population. Although by 1960 a growing number of Afrikaners were locally born, many continued to enter from South Africa, increasingly as civil servants and professionals rather than as prospective farmers. In 1951 22,318 were locally born and 18,670 were born in SA, while in 1960 those locally born increased to 34,680, while South African born Afrikaners numbered 27,320.\textsuperscript{51} From then on the foreign element rapidly increased. An independent study estimated that in the late 1970s over half the number of Europeans in Namibia were South African state employees or were employed by state corporations (like the First National Development Corporation), while about one-fifth were employees of foreign-based companies.\textsuperscript{52}

Much more than any other group, Afrikaners were the beneficiaries of state support: before 1960 with the South African-sponsored land settlement programme and prospects for expansion in the farming sector becoming increasingly constrained by lack of land, the civil service proved to be the main avenue for accommodating Afrikaners without realistic alternative employment options. Many Afrikaners who came to Namibia after 1920 were either poor or were victims of the drought and recession of the early 1930s. The long term Agricultural Policy Commission of 1948 found that about 90% of whites earned below £1,000 per year, considered to be the minimum level on which whites could enjoy a reasonable living and meet their obligations. Comprising about two-thirds of the white population, Afrikaners would have constituted the biggest number of poorer whites.\textsuperscript{53} As mentioned earlier, after the 1960s the situation changed dramati-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} NAN, AP 5/3/1, Census Report, 1970.
\item \textsuperscript{51} NAN, AP 5/3/1, Population Census, 1960, Social aspects, vol. 1, Government Printer, Pretoria.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Reginald Herbold Green, Namibia: Background Notes, IDAF Research and Information Department (no date – probably 1980).
\end{itemize}
ally, with Afrikaners playing a more assertive role and experiencing greater economic
mobility, in the civil service and to an extent the professions. Assessing the colonial
period as a whole, the reliance of Afrikaans-speakers on state support and employment
in the civil service is readily evident, as is the extent to which the SA government relied
on a captive white population for political support.

Economic conditions
Between 1920 and 1960 South Africa’s interest in economic development in Namibia
was confined to promoting white settlement, mostly for Afrikaners. Mining concerns were
largely owned by foreign enterprises and 80% of imports came from SA. Profits from
mining accrued to foreign nationals and SA imports gradually replaced goods produced
by indigenous, small-scale agricultural and manufacturing enterprises. After 1960 SA’s
growing political and administrative control over the territory was accompanied by steps
to increase economic centralization and development. The extractive nature of the
Namibian economy and its dependence on foreign finance, skills and technology reflects
the territory’s heavy dependence on the primary sector (mining & farming). The
secondary sector remained small and grew only incrementally. A sophisticated service
sector, which usually follows on substantial economic development in the primary and
secondary sectors, was gradually introduced and controlled by South Africa
companies. Up until the 1970s most whites lacked technical training and tertiary
education. Educational and training centres such as those in South Africa which
produced both black and white intellectuals capable of engaging in a public discourse on
politics, culture and economic matters, did not really exist in Namibia.

A key aspect of SA’s growing control over Namibia was the comprehensive programme
for reshaping the lives of the African people through the Odendaal Plan which was
implemented in the mid-1960s. Its signal feature was the so-called homelands policy,
designed to promote political and socio-economic development on an ethnic basis. Its
ideological character was evident not only from the political and economic fragmentation
that the plan envisaged, but tellingly, in the increase in the number of South African civil
servants as advisers or technical experts in the homelands. From a mere 136 in 1951

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128 & Ger. 994; unemployed/unspecified: Afr. 710, Ger. 106 & Eng. 11; artisans (self-employed): Afr. 148,
Eng. 15 & Ger. 195 & artisans in industries: Eng. 339, Afr. 1922 & Ger. 854; Afrikaners also dominated
employment in mining (workers) and as drivers in motor and rail transport (NAN, AP 5/3/1, SWA Population
Census, 8 May 1951).

54 Agriculture and fishing contributed as follows to GDP in the ten year periods since 1920: 17.4, 39.5,
45.2, 45.3, 25, 17.5, 14.2, 10.2%. Mining’s contribution has remained steady since the 1970s, at approx.
33% of GDP. The secondary sector improved slightly from 6 to 10 percent, trade from 8 to 11 percent,
while other tertiary sectors remained stable at 15 to 17 percent and government’s contribution to GDP
increased from 8 to 17 percent. (Paul Walter Hartmann, Hartmann, Paul Walter, A Statistical Presentation of
the National Accounts of South West Africa/Namibia for the Period 1920 to 1987, Windhoek, Central Bureau
and a modest 358 in 1960, their numbers increased to 2,399 in 1970.\(^{55}\) The whole programme was in effect an attempt at modernising African politics. Although framed by the ideological tenets of the apartheid plan devised in South Africa following the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission in the early 1950s, the Odendaal Plan was also a belated recognition of the neglect that African communities suffered under South African rule. The Odendaal Commission in effect justified this state of affairs by arguing that Africans previously depended on whites for promoting development in the reserves, but from the 1960s onwards the implementation of the plan required Africans to take a more active role in the development of their communities. Operating on the assumption that the territory’s economic progress was the result of white enterprise and initiative, the impression was created that the introduction of the Odendaal Plan was a natural consequence of the nature and trajectory of SA rule in Namibia.\(^{56}\) It was to be a crucial element of the SA government’s responses to criticism of the shortcomings of its apartheid policy, to point to the higher levels of per capita spending in the Bantustans compared to those in the countries where the loudest critics came from.

Given the demographic profile of the white population, with its large South African component and the excessive dependence of local-born whites on the SA military for security, on support for farmers and on employment for large numbers of civil servants, it is not surprising that the white community generally tended to be inward looking and reluctant to support political change. This should also be considered against the background of SA’s growing control over the local administration which accompanied the implementation of the Odendaal Plan, signifying its determination to manipulate the future political development of the territory. Up until the late 1980s SA invested heavily in Namibia, convinced that the territory was integral to its own prospects for political and physical survival. Whites, Afrikaners in particular, exhibited an excessive tendency to rely on South Africa, politically, economically and even culturally. It is against this background that the absence of initiatives designed to promote liberal ideas and values should be understood.


\(^{56}\) South Africa, Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, 1962-63, Pretoria, printed for the Govt. Printer, by Cape & Transvaal Printers, 1964, Argument, pp. 53-61. The Odendaal Plan brought about quite significant increases in spending on social and economic affairs in African ‘homelands’, but the plan’s effectiveness was hamstrung by its ideological rigidity and the fragmentary nature of the ethnically-based political, economic and social structures to which it gave effect.
Fragmentary attempts to construct a culture of human rights and liberal values

The aforementioned factors reflected a political reality informed by predominantly reactionary attitudes in the white community, but mention should be made of counter-tendencies, constrained as these inevitably were. Although the period between 1920 and 1960 could hardly be termed liberal, it certainly presents a contrast to the post-1960 era. As in South Africa, segregation was applied without the ideological rigidity and hegemonic aspirations that characterized the period of apartheid rule. In this earlier period English-speakers, including Jews and a leading section of the German community contributed towards setting the tone on public debates.57 Jews present a fascinating picture of a small, yet hugely enterprising community, active in large-scale trading (esp. in the motor and industrial enterprises dominated by the Cohen and Pupkewitz families), professions (particularly in law and medicine), as shopkeepers and in civil society (Red Cross, Cancer Society, municipal service, Road Safety Organisation and the Arts).58 A significant number of English civil servants, especially magistrates, native commissioners and senior administrative officials tended to render the public discourse more paternalistic than racist. In the absence of organized African political activities ‘bridge-building’ did not feature at all, only a limited, rather paternalistic concern with ‘African issues.’

From the 1960s onwards it became evident that the South African government was determined to smother any attempts at promoting contacts between white and black people in the territory. Such initiatives had been undertaken in the early 1960s, only to be terminated, partly due to an unwillingness to test the limits of the local administration’s tolerance and a growing culture of security police surveillance. The one area where cross-cultural/black-white contact was possible was in the field of religion. Initially expatriate white clergymen were prominent in trying to facilitate contacts, but state harassment resulted in the expulsion of most of these individuals. By the early 1970s black Namibian church leaders took the lead in opposing and exposing human rights abuses under apartheid.

‘Bridge-building initiatives’

A flurry of visits from well-known South African liberals and others eager to assess the potential for contacts across the racial boundaries, took place in the early 1960s. In July 1960 Alan Paton addressed a meeting held in the Sam Cohen hall in Windhoek, unaware of the fact that Africans were not allowed to attend. Chairperson Hans Berker told three interested Africans that his committee could not allow them to attend as it might militate

57 Several prominent people, including Afrikaners, testifying before the SWA Commission in 1935, argued that Afrikaners were not sophisticated enough to engage Germans in debates on the future of South West Africa. Even administrator Werth (1926-1932) mentioned that there was by and large a lack of knowledgeable Afrikaners (NAN, KSW, SWA Commission, Windhoek, 1935).

against holding similar meetings in future and that they even feared “getting arrested”.\footnote{59}{Randolph Vigne, Namibian Democracy: A Liberal Legacy?, Alan Paton Memorial Lecture, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1 September 1994.}

Encouraged by Swapo members of the party in Cape Town he proceeded to try and mobilize the tiny group of liberal whites to engage in contacts with Swapo.\footnote{60}{Ibid. Berker was the first president of the Namibian Supreme Court after independence.} It was a tiny element indeed and they were fearful of attracting the attention of the SA security establishment, which made them extremely reluctant to establish contacts with Africans. Ruth First was another visitor from South Africa who took an active interest in Namibian affairs and met with white and black leaders in 1962. She too, noted the almost complete lack of contact across the colour line and the reluctance of all concerned to speak openly about political matters. According to her even well-meaning whites were totally incapable of comprehending African ambitions and “African political attitudes have hardened in recent years to a rigid hatred of the South African government and the South West African administration.”\footnote{61}{Ruth First, South West Africa, Middlesex, Penguin, 1963: 17.} Highly unusual for a white person to talk to black persons, First was made aware of a ubiquitous security police presence wherever she went.\footnote{62}{Ibid.: 11-22.}

Vigne, as mentioned, also noted the very limited possibilities for bridge-building, stating that the small group of liberal-minded whites did not think it realistic to establish formal links with black political leaders. There were at the time two groups of whites that represented relatively progressive opinion. One was the so-called ‘Gruppe’ convened by Israel Goldblatt, a noted lawyer, which met regularly to debate matters relating to the United Nations and the ‘SWA issue’. The other group was assembled in the South West Party, headed by politician Japie Basson. The latter was, however, more concerned with unity among the three white groups, though it was critical of the cruder aspects of government policy. The white liberals that Vigne met indicated that they lived in constant fear of arrest and experienced enormous pressure from within the white community.\footnote{63}{Vigne, Namibian Democracy.}

It is therefore unsurprising that black leaders had little appreciation for liberalism and the dilemma that white liberals faced when contemplating ways of reaching out to their African counterparts. Vigne and First’s attempts to assess the possibilities for promoting contacts between black and white Namibians spelled the end of the first, tentative phase to facilitate contact between Africans and Whites and except for a limited number of white church officials and a few individuals who maintained irregular personal contact with Africans, this state of affairs continued until the mid-1970s. Displays of white ignorance and an apparent lack of concern with conditions in the black community did not fail to elicit negative responses. Peter Katjavivi, at the time Swapo’s Publicity Secretary, once remarked that “there is no basis for co-existence with the white man”.\footnote{64}{Hannes Smith, “Too late or in the nick of time?”, Windhoek Advertiser, 21 June 1974.}
The remark caused Hannes Smith, then editor of the Windhoek Advertiser, to comment that though these were strong words, to deny its reality and forcefulness "is a pitiful way of self-deception." J. Kozonguizi, Swanu politician, was scornful of liberals and argued that they were politically irrelevant. Even when Bryan O’Linn transformed the United Party into the Federal Party and later helped to establish the coalition Namibia National Front, whose constitution strongly reflected his liberal ideas it did not result in meaningful support from Africans. Dr. Z. Ngavirue, historian and politician, who may be considered the epitome of a cultivated liberal person, never had the opportunity to engage with white liberals in the realm of organized politics or community activities.

The church: the voice of the oppressed

Arguably the most significant contacts between white and black people from 1965 onwards occurred within the confines of various church denominations. A limited number of white clergy began to associate themselves with the call for greater unity between churches and opposition against the impact of apartheid policies on church members. By the mid-1960s expatriate white clergymen in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches attempted to promote contacts and greater understanding among white and black members of their congregations. Prominent amongst these persons were bishop Colin Winter, Robert Mize and a number of German pastors who agitated for unity between the white German Evangelical Lutheran Church (DELC) and its counterparts, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (product of the Finnish Mission) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of SWA (offspring of the Rhenish Mission). A fierce internal conflict erupted in DELC in the late 1960s with the vast majority of German-speakers opposing church unity, citing fears of losing their identity as Germans if a single Lutheran Church was established. By then the leadership of ELC and ELOC had donned the anti-apartheid mantle by speaking out on behalf of the oppressed majority, constantly renewing their calls for white brethren to join them in promoting opposition to apartheid.

The conflict in DELC illustrates the limits of liberalism and the strength of ethno-centric sentiments. Attempts to promote church unity between DELC, ELOC and ELC were initiated by white Lutheran pastors who were seconded to Namibia by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). For several years an intense debate raged in DELC

65 Ibid.
67 Up until the 1960s the German community in Namibia was served by missionaries of the Rhenish Mission in Germany, who also provided pastoral care for black Namibians in the Mission Church. The EKD began to provide pastors trained in theology in the 1960s and they, more attuned to the thrust of ecumenical cooperation that became a feature of the work of the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation at the time, were the drivers of attempts to promote church unity.
congregations about what many in the church considered to be politically, rather than theologically inspired attempts to establish closer ties between the three Lutheran churches. Not only were there debates about theological justifications for unity, there was also a conviction amongst most members of DELC that the church should concern itself with spiritual matters and eschew involvement in politics. This approach starkly contrasted with those of the black churches who embraced the task of demonstrating empathy and support for the victims of South Africa’s apartheid policy. By 1973 it was evident that the ideal of church unity had been shipwrecked by the refusal of white Germans to endorse the practical implementation of the idea, although the principle of unity had previously been accepted. The fierce debates that raged about this matter were reflected in the German daily, *Allgemeine Zeitung* and in German congregations throughout the territory. In essence, it was the German community’s deeply felt fear of losing cultural autonomy and a growing conviction that proponents of unity were driven by ulterior motives, that proved to be decisive. The famous open letter by bishop Auala of ELOC and pastor Gowaseb of ELC, addressed to PM John Vorster of South Africa, signalling the churches’ concerns with the effects of apartheid, especially in its impact of the lives of migrant labourers, as well as the decision by the World Council of Churches to provide material support to members of liberation movements, were considered definitive proof of the extent to which theological considerations were jeopardized by political ones. Despite the disappointing outcome of the initiative for church unity, what is quite remarkable is the internal debate that was generated in the German community on the matter. For a few years there were attempts to promote exchanges of pastors between DELC and ELC and occasionally even appreciation for the sermons delivered by black pastors to white congregations.

The church increasingly served as a conduit for channelling aid to Namibians suffering from the effects of SA rule. The establishment of the Council of Churches in Namibia in 1978 was the high point of ecumenical cooperation, according to Steenkamp. The council’s objectives were “the facilitation, coordination and promotion of the various ecclesiastical and social services offered by the churches”. Soon, however, the churches experienced internal tensions. ELOC and the Anglican Church remained more or less immune to changes associated with the escalation of violence, Swapo’s move from a primarily nationalist to a more Marxist ideology and South Africa’s switch from undiluted aggression to a form of neo-colonialism. ELC, comprising various ethnic groups (Baster, Damara, Nama and Herero), were more deeply affected, with some supporting liberation, others favouring a neutral role for the church as a mediator between conflicting groups, while a third group was against church involvement in politics. Increasingly the CCN started to act as the voice of the disenfranchised and oppressed in Namibia. Its activities ranged from political actions designed to support the implementation of Resolution 435, discrediting the SA-sponsored domestic politicians to

68 Rüdiger, *Die Südwester*.
undertaking relief and development work. Attacks against church leaders and bombing of church buildings reflected the growing realization that the church had become “the most important anti-colonial voice.”70 The church leadership was the one consistently outspoken critic of human rights abuses in Namibia. With growing SA repression and the local wing of Swapo largely inactive, the CCN was becoming the “most powerful political force in the internal opposition”. More significantly though, the CCN functioned as a “highly political, and partisan, institution”. SA propaganda depicted the council as a Swapo ally, a widely held perception. Steenkamp in fact asserted that the CCN could be considered, not unfairly, as the “internal religious wing of Swapo”.71 This was not merely propaganda. According to Leys and Saul, by the mid-1980s Swapo opposed internal political and social initiatives, afraid that it would dilute its hold over potentially independent-minded individuals and groups. The CCN effectively became a compliant body, subject to Swapo directives from the outside.72

The contentious role of the CCN became especially evident in the so-called spy drama, when Namibian exiles, mostly from southern Namibia, were subjected to imprisonment, torture and even killing by Swapo. The CCN leadership was extremely reluctant to respond to the allegations, and when it did, it tended to dismiss them as the result of SA propaganda. Eventually, faced with empirical evidence supporting the allegations of former detainees, church leaders resorted to playing a mediating role, blaming apartheid for spreading ‘suspicion and distrust’ and calling for reconciliation and forgiveness. Steenkamp noted the irony of this approach. Earlier, the churches condemned those opposing political involvement of the church as having retreated into spiritualism. Now the church stressed its “spiritual responsibilities over worldly ones”.73 At the time, this failure of the church’s vocation was defended by supporters as necessary, given the propaganda benefits that South African would have gained from church criticism of Swapo. Steenkamp perceptively observed: “it must be remembered that the moral authority and material interests of many organizations and individuals were closely intertwined with Swapo’s image. This ensured their silence”.74

Namibia Peace Plan Study and Contact Group (NPP 435): supporting independence, human rights and the rule of law

The establishment of NPP 435, Study and Contact Group, under the leadership of advocate B. O’ Linn, signalled the first attempt by a group of whites to openly embrace independence for Namibia, premised as it was on the inclusion of the constitutional principles introduced in UN Security Council Resolution 435. Though it was never

70 Ibid.: 101.
71 Ibid.: 99.
74 Ibid.
explicitly spelled out, the group embraced liberal values, for example the rule of law, protection of property (as proposed in the constitutional principles in Res. 435), regular elections and protection of basic human rights. Apart from its role in disseminating information about the 'peace plan', NPP 435 promoted exchanges with progressive groups inside and outside Namibia and facilitated discussions between white Namibians, particularly farmers, business people and professionals. Further to this NPP 435 set out to convince conservative white Namibians to engage in constructive cooperation in an independent Namibia. Though appreciative of Swapo’s role in the struggle for independence, NPP did not shy away from expressing disagreement with the organization. The ill-fated invasion of Swapo guerrillas across the border into Namibia in April 1989 was criticized as having contravened the stipulations of the settlement plan.

Despite its relatively short existence, NPP 435 managed to embark on an impressive array of initiatives. For example, in 1988 its activities included: visits to the USA and various European countries to inform church leaders, academics, executives at foundations and anti-apartheid activists about NPP 435’s work; attendance at a conference in Lusaka for action against apartheid, a meeting in Sweden between Swapo and influential members of the white community and attendance at a symposium organized by the German Green Party to commemorate the tenth anniversary of UNSCR 435 and a press conference to introduce the translated versions of the NPP booklet, The Choice; in Namibia itself symposiums were organized in Rehoboth and Windhoek, an advertising campaign was launched to inform the public about UNSCR 435 and NPP 435 and papers were presented about conscription, democracy, reconciliation and reconstruction; fifteen press conferences and press releases were organized and consultations took place with a wide array of visitors from abroad and from South Africa.

The Interessengemeinschaft: positioning for independence and serving the interests of the German community

The Interessengemeinschaft Deutschsprachiger Südwesten (IG), later renamed Interessengemeinschaft Deutschsprechender für Namibia, set out to establish itself as an organization promoting “national interests above group interests” and could be considered an exception to the general rule of apathy among Germans who were “socially backward looking and politically unprepared for the political changes of the 1970s and 1980s”. One observer claimed that the IG had embarked on an

76 A few prominent members in NPP’s executive attracted the wrath of the Swapo leadership after independence by expressing criticism of particular aspects of government policy. This will be discussed in the second paper.
78 Weiland, “Persistent detachment”: 21.
increasingly assertive approach by this language group in the search for political solutions to end apartheid and bring about the independence of the territory”. 79 In 1990 the president of the IG expressed the opinion that in the early 1980s the organization had been instrumental in reaching out to Swapo and embracing the organization’s policy on reconciliation. The IG also, more than any other group, worked to promote the position of Germans in an independent Namibia, he asserted.80 Weiland, though, pointed to the IG’s gradual demise and eventual dissolution in 1992 as proof of its restricted political appeal and the limited support that it enjoyed in the German-speaking community.81 This failure may be ascribed to the IG’s ambivalent attitude: it allowed its members to support political parties of their choice, yet it also attempted to position itself as a neutral body, unaffiliated to the discredited policies of South Africa in Namibia. This ambivalence dates back to the 1950s when German-speakers felt they were effectively co-opted into supporting SA’s policies in Namibia in exchange for partial recognition of German language and cultural rights.

**Conclusion – a civil society**

This paper has attempted to show, on the one hand, how conditions in Namibia militated against the emergence of a liberal culture. Yet, on the other hand, it is also true that particularly from the 1970s onwards, various individuals and organizations started to assert their inalienable rights to human dignity and freedom from oppression. These were not initiatives aimed at promoting broadly-based liberal political and civil values in organizational structures, but it were of great significance for engendering a spirit of hope in the face of oppression. When one considers today the vibrant character of organizations operating in civil society, it may well be asked whether there is any organic link to similar bodies in the pre-independence era. In fact there was. The Bricks Community Project, the Namibian Women’s voice, the Namibian Students’ Organisation, the National Union of Namibian Workers were “local and sectoral, but nonetheless mobilizing and empowering, associations, cooperatives, and other agencies”.82 Leys and Saul refer to these undertakings as representative of ‘community-based activism’. Because of official harassment and Swapo’s growing suspicion of independent organizations that, it was feared, could dilute the support and impact of Swapo’s role as the vanguard of the liberation struggle, many either faded into inactivity or fell into the line dictated by Swapo. Many of these organizations nevertheless operated on the principle

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80 Quoted in Rüdiger, Südwester: 159.
81 Weiland, “Persistent detachment”: 2.
82 Leys and Saul, “Swapo”: 81.
of democratic accountability, community involvement and a desire to engage in critical debate.83

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