

Searching for justice – the pursuit of a liberal tradition in colonial Namibia

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Abstract

Despite an inauspicious environment in which to operate, the result of a hostile government and an indifferent white community, a small number of individuals managed to actively pursue ideals of justice and respect for basic human rights. The absence of an organised political or social tradition that could provide the foundation for the realization of these ideals effectively ensured that these individuals had to largely operate in isolation. In the process much resistance had been encountered, both in the pre- and post-independent phases of Namibian history. This raises the question as to whether the commitment to liberal values, as enshrined in the constitution, will survive the test of time.

Introduction

In an earlier attempt to account for the absence of a liberal political tradition in Namibia, it was found that various constraints conspired to inhibit the development of such a tradition.¹ Not the least of these was a profoundly conservative colonial society and a colonial authority markedly hostile to liberal ideas, even during the period of limited, controlled change starting in the mid-1970s. The focus in this paper is on the role played by a small number of white Namibians who embraced the principle of peaceful political change, an undertaking informed by traditional liberal ideas. It should be mentioned at the outset that the political situation in Namibia did not prove to be receptive to liberal ideas. For both the forces of reaction and black nationalism there was a deceptive quality to liberalism: liberals were considered insufficiently dedicated to the maintenance of white hegemony while for black nationalists it signified a lack of commitment to the struggle for liberation. Nevertheless, supporters of a political dispensation premised on liberal values had one advantage that proved to be significant in the long run: From the early 1980s onwards there was growing consensus among

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¹ Christo Botha, "Constraints on the development of liberal ideas and practices in colonial Namibia", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 13, 2013: 7-31.

international power brokers involved in negotiations for the independence of Namibia, about the inclusion of certain constitutional principles in Resolution 435. Over the course of time growing local and international pressure meant that denying these values became increasingly difficult. The difference between the liberal supporters of change profiled in this article and local political leaders, such as those from the National Party (later Aktur) and the Republican Party (a member of the umbrella Democratic Turnhalle Alliance – DTA), was that the latter operated on the assumption that the promotion of their vital interests depended on resisting and undermining their opponents, principally Swapo. The former, though, came to accept that internationally-accepted independence for Namibia and a constitution underwritten by constitutional values could be best secured by the liberation movement, Swapo. Such a dispensation, it was believed, would be the best guarantor of realizing those core liberal values considered necessary for the establishment of a just and democratic society in Namibia.

This author is essentially in agreement with Saunders's premise that there is no comparison between Namibia and South Africa in terms of the depth of liberal opposition to apartheid. Saunders provided a valuable outline of initiatives and activities undertaken by whites in Namibia, which he termed, after Randolph Vigne, 'bridge-building', before concluding that it still fell short of constituting a liberal tradition.² This article attempts to take the matter a little further by providing more detail on the lives, ideas and work of a number of white liberals within the context of what was in effect a police state.³ The aim is to provide an indication of the constraints under which these people operated and possibly, of the significance of their work within the broader Namibian context. Furthermore, there is also evidence that the lives and work of individuals profiled in this paper evolved within a slowly changing context. In the 1960s there was considerable ferment in church circles with the newly autonomous black churches (ELOC and ELC) striving to promote unity and some white clergy, mostly foreigners, seeking common ground with their brethren suffering under the apartheid system. A number of persons from within the German community tested the water to see if a new political formation, separate from the pro-South African parties, could be established. In the mid-1970s South Africa introduced the Turnhalle concept, which would prove to be the prelude to its double-edged strategy of paying lip service to international demands for independence while proceeding with its policy of ethnic fragmentation. In its wake various, often unrelated initiatives sprouted, aimed at mobilising support against South African rule. While black opposition against apartheid snowballed, whites by and large were still largely apathetic or hostile to fundamental change. It is against this background that a few individuals became involved in initiatives

² Chris Saunders, "'A lone and brave voice from Namibia': Goldblatt and 'bridge-building'", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 8, 2010: 79-90 (79).

³ The term 'liberals' is used with some caution here. Some of the persons profiled did not consider themselves liberals, but their work and the causes they supported can be best categorised under that rubric.

premised on liberal values such as respect for human rights, democracy and equality before the law.

The law as an instrument for promoting justice: Israel Goldblatt and Bryan O'Linn

Both prominent members of the bar, Israel Goldblatt and Bryan O'Linn shared a keen sense of the injustices that pervaded Namibian society under SA rule. An exploration of their respective roles in promoting tolerance and justice reveal differences in temperament and tactics, yet also striking similarities. Both expressed unequivocal support for the supremacy of the rule of law and the application of basic human rights to all people. They dedicated themselves to preserving the integrity of the legal system in line with the highest traditions of their profession. This was especially noticeable in their recognition of the validity of the role of the United Nations as the final arbiter in determining the political future of Namibia, a highly unpopular stance in the context of white colonial society at the time. In similarly unpopular actions, both of them attempted to reach out to black Namibians, dispensing advice and aid to help them cope with the injustices of a racist system.

The divergent trajectories in the careers of Goldblatt and O'Linn can be understood as a consequence of differences in personality and the changing political conditions in which they operated. Goldblatt, aware of the intense scrutiny under which persons suspected of liberal views had to live in the 1960s, adopted a cautious approach to human rights issues, focusing on dispensing legal and administrative advice to Africans. O'Linn, by contrast, was actively involved in politics and a high profile defender of the civil rights of disadvantaged people under the law.

Israel Goldblatt

Following the Old Location shootings in 1959 Israel Goldblatt, concerned about the implications for inter-group relations as a result of the incident, approached the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) in Geneva, proposing the establishment of a UN Association in Namibia. WFUNA, whose mission was to promote tolerance, understanding, solidarity and cooperation irrespective of race, sex, language, religion or political orientation, responded by suggesting that given the delicacy of the situation, the only prospect would appear to be to establish an association comprising black and white persons "who have previously agreed on a common program to spread objective information."⁴ Given the fact that such an association was bound to attract the attention of the SA Security Services, who were already known to be active in Namibia, Goldblatt opted to form a Study Group comprising Europeans only. It was to be

⁴ Dag Henrichsen, Naomi Jacobson, and Karen Marshall, (eds.), *Israel Goldblatt. Building Bridges. Namibian Nationalists Clemens Kapuuo, Hosea Kutako, Brendan Simbwaye, Samuel Witbooi*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010: 3.

decidedly non-political and aimed to serve its members by educating them about the status and role of the United Nations in matters concerning the former South West Africa. Former SA Liberal Party member, Randolph Vigne, on a visit to the territory in 1961 to explore the possibility of promoting contacts between white and black leaders, confirmed that there was little prospect for bridge-building endeavours, given the whites' fear of official harassment. The Study Group met irregularly and existed for only two or three years.⁵

Despite his caution in avoiding active involvement in politics (he regularly informed the Security Police of meetings of the Study Group and later also made clear that his meetings with Africans were of a purely educational character), Goldblatt had definite views about the international status of the territory and its future. In a pamphlet written in November 1960 he rejected SA's legal claim over Namibia. He argued that SA should recognize the validity of UN supervision over SWA and allow for turning over the territory to the UN Trusteeship System. He also suggested that political parties should cease to treat the politics of the territory as a whites-only issue.⁶ Towards the end of 1961 Goldblatt started meeting with a number of Africans who would later prove to be influential members in the African community, men such as Hosea Kutako, Clemens Kapuuo, Levy Nganjone and the Rev. B. G. Karuaera. In these meetings the situation in SWA was discussed, regular "classes on law and administration" were conducted, in addition to legal consultations, which the Africans requested.⁷

Goldblatt managed his contacts with African leaders with great caution, aware of the fact that he was subject to Security Police surveillance. He took pains to avoid activities that could be construed as politically-inspired. His caution was understandable, given the heightened international attention focused on Namibia and the local administration's sensitivity to criticism of its apartheid policies. Nevertheless, he not only maintained his regular contacts with mostly Otjiherero-speaking leaders, but also became involved in providing legal advice to Caprivian politician Brendan Simbwaye and Kaptein Samuel Witbooi, a frequent petitioner to the United Nations. His meetings with Kapuuo developed into a lasting friendship and the latter introduced Goldblatt to Herero culture. Goldblatt obtained a lot of information about African politics and culture during his meetings with African politicians. Conversations with Kapuuo, Nganjone and Kutako often dealt with Herero history and Goldblatt started to keep a record which he would use to write a book titled *A History of South West Africa*.⁸ Towards the end of the 1960s his involvement in his legal work declined as he was finishing his work on the book. In 1970 he left for Israel and died in 1982.

⁵ Ibid.: 4-6.

⁶ Israel Goldblatt, *The conflict between the United Nations and the Union of South Africa in regard to South West Africa*, quoted in: Dag Henrichsen et al., *Israel Goldblatt*: 7-8.

⁷ Ibid.: 16f.

⁸ Goldblatt kept notes of his meetings with African politicians and these are recorded in Henrichsen et al., *Israel Goldblatt*, passim.

The book on the history of SWA and a document written to analyse the responsibility of the international community towards the territory, demonstrates Goldblatt's declared intention to be an impartial judge and let historical characters 'speak for themselves'. The book in particular, reflects what may be called a liberal critique of colonial rule, both German and South African. Care is taken to present the views of both local African leaders and their European protagonists. Although there are references to 'Hottentot' (for Khoekhoe) and the 'primitive conditions' under which the Damara, of whom a number were thought to be slaves of the Nama, were supposed to live, he otherwise took pains to be fair to both sides. Only when he was convinced of the immorality or plain injustice of particular actions, would he occasionally express moral judgements. This is especially evident where he presented the causes underlying the Herero's decision to resist German rule, making it quite clear where the balance of guilt lies.⁹ The NP government's position was, according to Goldblatt, a consequence of its "essentially racialistic" approach to racial matters, with its policies effectively ensuring "permanent domination of the whites in South Africa". "This state of mind", he argued, also applied to territories outside the Union, including by implication Namibia.¹⁰ Christopher Saunders, in a review article of Henrichsen's and the Goldblatt daughters' book on Israel Goldblatt, questions the long-term significance of his work. He argues that there is no evidence of his contacts with Africans having fed into later initiatives, such as Clemens Kapuuo's contacts with South Africans or meetings with whites prior to his involvement in the Turnhalle Conference in 1975. Saunders also considers Goldblatt's book on South West Africa to "be only marginally anti-colonial" and to have had little influence on later, overtly anti-colonial writing.¹¹ In a real sense though, Goldblatt's life and work are situated in a context where the contours of anti-colonial resistance was only beginning to take shape. Moreover, such resistance and opposition to apartheid were often equated with communism.¹² The constraints under which Goldblatt operated should be recognized and there is sufficient evidence of the importance that African leaders like Hosea Kutako and Clemens Kapuuo attached to his advice. He was one of the very few local whites who ventured to transcend the barriers separating white and black people and to have earned the respect of leading elements in the African community. His steadfast support of the principle of UN trusteeship for Namibia came at a time when the

⁹ Israel Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa, from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*, Cape Town, Juta & Company, 1971: 129-139. Goldblatt concludes his extensive treatment of the causes by stating, contrary to Leutwein's assertion that Hendrik Witbooi and Samuel Maherero had the vision of being the stronger side in a conflict with the Germans, that it was rather the 'strength of despair' that characterised their resistance.

¹⁰ Goldblatt, *History*: 250.

¹¹ Saunders, "Voice from Namibia": 84-86.

¹² Politician Japie Basson complained of the tendency that prevailed among NP leaders to equate liberal opposition to apartheid with disloyalty and by implication, support for communism. See Basson's series of memoirs, for example *State of the Nation – As Viewed from a Front Bench in Parliament, 1969–1981*, Cape Town, Politika, 2008, and also Bryan O'Linn, *Namibia. The Sacred Trust of Civilization. Ideal and Reality*, vol. 1, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, n.d.

SA government and whites overwhelmingly viewed the UN with animosity. A former security policeman later commented that Goldblatt was the only “acknowledged white liberal in the country”.¹³

Bryan O’Linn

Bryan O’Linn’s liberal beliefs were already evident at an early stage of his career. He had penned a “detailed manuscript in Afrikaans, as early as 1959, analyzing the racist and discriminatory system then prevailing in South Africa and Namibia”.¹⁴ In 1961 he made a public speech at a commemoration of the Afrikaner Day of the Vow, in which he endorsed such classical liberal values as compassion, fairness and justice as pre-requisites for finding a just solution for the peoples of Namibia.¹⁵ A member of the local United Party, O’Linn was active in trying to get the party to shed its reluctance to reach out to African political groups. He was instrumental in converting the UP into the Federal Party of Namibia, the first to open its ranks to all Namibians. The establishment of the Federal Party was accompanied by strident criticism from a former party leader J. du P. Niehaus and a number of conservative members who tried to depict O’Linn as a communist or communist-inspired.¹⁶

Initially, O’Linn conceived of a federal dispensation as the answer to fears of minorities, whites in particular, of black political domination. He presented his ideas in a booklet titled *The Future of South West Africa Built on Reality*,¹⁷ originally published in Afrikaans and translated into German and English. The federal concept that he proposed was elaborate and intricate. Its key features were: the creation of four or five federal assemblies each combining particular ethnic groups organized on a regional basis. The white assembly was to remain separate and dominant in terms of its control over finances for a period of ten or more years. All the regional assemblies would be represented in a central federal assembly. Representation and election would be based on merit – a group’s economic contribution and level of educational achievement were to be determining factors. Designed to escape race or colour as criteria in electoral

¹³ Quoted in Henrichsen et al., *Israel Goldblatt*: 74.

¹⁴ O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1, “Introduction: Notes on the life and work of the author”: x. According to Christo Lombard, the manuscript was never published despite entreaties from a prominent academic and educationalist, respectively. The views expressed in the manuscript were “expected to be highly controversial and to antagonize Afrikaans-speaking whites and the National Party Government”. A liberal financier, approached to provide funding for a book, declined on account of having “too many commitments” (ibid.).

¹⁵ The Day of the Vow commemorated the Boer victory against the Zulu in 1838 at Bloed River and in the 20th century it served to inspire and mobilise Afrikaners. It was annually celebrated on 16 December and was the occasion of much mythmaking and appeals to *volkseenheid* (unity of the people, or ‘ethnos’).

¹⁶ O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: 96. Despite a conservative backlash O’Linn was elected party leader by a large majority and the party congress approved of the transformation of the then United Party into the Federal Party by a vote of 80 to 3 (ibid.: 98).

¹⁷ Bryan O’Linn, *The Future of South West Africa Built on Reality*, Windhoek, Verenigde Pers, 1974: 3-6. His proposal was to be submitted to the United Party for approval.

politics, the entrenchment of white domination for a lengthy period and the requirement of demonstrating proven skill in administration and governance, was designed to ensure that the transition to majority rule would take place in orderly fashion. Though the evident rationale appeared to be to dilute the voting numbers of the numerically superior Oshiwambo speakers of northern Namibia, it was received with indifference or hostility by white Namibians.

In 1972 he debated the merits of the federal system for Namibia with the editor of the local National Party mouthpiece, *Die Suidwester*. The latter stressed that the “the right to self-determination reside in ‘volke’ [ethnic units] and not in a population”. O’Linn correctly sensed that this was merely a strategy to avoid the reality of majority rule. He asserted the key principle that black people should, once in possession of the required skills and expertise, exercise “*beslissende seggenskap*” (final or determinative power).¹⁸ Unlike most whites, he could point to the problem that the National Party consistently failed to address, namely how to balance competing interests in an equitable manner. For him the exact nature of an evolving relationship between black and white could be debated, which he consistently did, but the principle of joint deliberation and the logic of eventual black majority rule, constrained by the rule of law, was not negotiable.¹⁹

In 1977 O’Linn’s Federal Party joined the non-racial Namibia National Front (NNF) composed of seven political parties. Its policy manifesto made no mention of federalism, instead stressing a unicameral parliament, a bill of basic human rights and provincial councils dealing with “regional concerns”.²⁰ O’Linn and the Federal Party nevertheless believed that the NNF policy manifesto could be reconciled with their own policy.²¹ In 1979 the SA government introduced a National Assembly and disagreement on participation caused the Federal Party to break away from the NNF, who refused to join the new body.²² In 1983 O’Linn retired from party politics, sensing a serious weakness among local political leaders and an inability to offer real alternatives to South Africa’s divide and rule politics.²³ Before its demise the Federal Party made “a positive contribution to the adoption of the 1982 agreement on Constitutional principles [sic!] which became an extremely important part of the Namibian Peace Plan.”²⁴

¹⁸ *Die Suidwester*, 10 November 1972.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ André du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia. The Politics of Continuity and Change*, Johannesburg, Ball, 1986: 334.

²¹ O’Linn noted that the “Federal Party regarded the provincial system coupled with a relatively rigid constitution as equivalent to the federal regions of a federation.” (O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: 131).

²² *Ibid.*: 148. The Federal Party called the National Assembly a form of “provisional responsible government”. O’Linn and his Federal Party later had a change of mind and decided against participation.

²³ O’Linn’s decision to jettison politics in favour of promoting civil society initiatives echoed that of Van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the Progressive Federal Party of SA, who resigned his position as party leader and abandoned parliamentary politics, arguing that it had failed to overcome the impasse presented by apartheid policy.

²⁴ Joachim Pütz, Heidi VonEgidy, and Perri Caplan, *Namibia Handbook and Political Who’s Who*, Windhoek, The Magus Company, 1989: 373. See also O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: 148.

In 1986 he co-founded Namibia Peace Plan, Study and Contact Group, a group dedicated to disseminate information about UN Resolution 435, adopted to pave the way for the independence of Namibia. Its activities spanned the public spectrum, from establishing contact with the Swapo leadership in exile, to arranging conferences at which prominent local and foreign personalities debated the future of Namibia and issues relating to democracy, human rights, primacy of the rule of law and socio-economic policies. A particular issue of concern for NPP 435 was to convince white Namibians of the benefits to be derived from the attainment of independence and the constitutional safeguards designed to protect their vital interests. By then O'Linn had abandoned his earlier beliefs in a qualified franchise and federal political arrangements in favour of majority rule. It also signalled a departure from active political opposition to Swapo to an approach favouring positive engagement aiming to find common ground and mutual interests.

Bryan O'Linn can be described as a legal conservative. He was suspicious of judicial activism and did not consider the law to be amenable to individual interpretations. It was by interpreting the law as having evolved according to the time-tested tenets of fairness and justice, that O'Linn fought his legal battles with dedication and passion. For more than twenty years he braved the increasingly oppressive nature of SA rule in Namibia by taking on the legal defence of persons accused of terrorism. There were even calls from within his own political party for him to desist from this practice, but he refused.²⁵

An outstanding feature of O'Linn's legal career was a dogged perseverance if convinced of the legality and justice of a cause as well as a willingness to defend political prisoners, Swanu and Swapo members in particular, something that hardly endeared him to the conservative white community. He was a persistent and outspoken defender of the rights of the poor and marginalized in society and did not hesitate to express his disagreement with what he considered to be inhumane and unjust laws and policies. SA journalist, Clive Cowley once accurately characterised him as "positively pugnacious in condemnation of injustice and intolerance, even to the extent of badly neglecting his legal practice".²⁶ A trial of particular significance took place in 1983 when the recently established Namibian Supreme Court heard a case concerning three persons involved in the armed struggle. South Africa started to appoint Namibians to the court and O'Linn stated that his defence team "anticipated and expected a more sympathetic and understanding approach by this Court".²⁷ The trial allowed the defence to call several witnesses, including Prof. John Dugard, Mr. Andreas Shipanga, Dr Zedekia Ngavirue and Mr. Max du Preez, and made it possible for the first and only time to discuss the fundamental aims of the armed struggle in a public forum. On completion of evidence O'Linn, leading the defence team, ventured that the armed struggle was caused by the following factors: the "racist policy of apartheid", SA's decision to incorporate SWA into the Republic of South

²⁵ O'Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: 148.

²⁶ Clive Cowley, "Political parties in SWA/Namibia", *Institute of South Africa Bulletin*, 18 (4/5), 1978: 145-155 (152).

²⁷ O'Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: 216.

Africa and support provided for apartheid by white churches. He furthermore argued that the white opposition was powerless and peaceful protest ineffective. The “origin of the armed struggle was in the first place to be found in the attitude and the policies of those whites who governed South Africa and South West Africa”. Changes that were introduced, he stated, came about as a result of pressure from outside as well as inside the territory.²⁸ Another trial of significance took place in 1983 when it was found that the Police were culpable in causing the death of a detainee, a verdict O’Linn called “a grave indictment of the government of the day and its police force, particularly its security police and its security laws”.²⁹ Though normally a very placid person, he could become animated when issues of principle were at stake. During the trial of Swanu politician G. H. Veii in 1967, Judge-president F. Badenhorst reprimanded him for raising his voice. At one stage he refused to continue with proceedings, following which “sharp exchanges took place” between him and the bench, according to a report in a local newspaper.³⁰

It was in the post-independence period that O’Linn’s essential legal conservatism became evident, as well as a refusal to accept what he considered to be unwarranted judicial activism. In a series of judgments involving a case of treason and another of freedom of speech, he drew fierce criticism from members of the public and even from within the legal profession itself. Presiding over the Treason Trial of 1991, in which three white persons were accused of trying to sabotage the election and killing a police officer, O’Linn handed down what was perceived by certain members of the ruling party to be very lenient sentences. Former Swapo Chief Coordinator Moses Garoeb mobilised public opposition against the verdicts and O’Linn was subjected to personal attacks and calls for his dismissal as judge. He later referred to the whole episode as an onslaught on himself, all white judges of the High and Supreme Court and the Prosecutor-General.³¹

In 1995 he took the unprecedented step of writing a ‘discussion paper’ in which he set out reasons why he disagreed with a Supreme Court ruling, which held that a black police officer was not guilty of gross indiscipline when he severely criticized senior white officers in a TV debate, accusing them inter alia of undermining the government policy of reconciliation, facilitating corruption, supplying arms to white terrorists and abusing their power. The court argued that freedom of speech trumped what may have been considered “a mere indiscretion” on the part of the black police officer. O’Linn’s discussion paper, prompted by his “rebellious spirit”, disagreed on the grounds that the accused police officers did not have the opportunity to defend themselves against the accusations. The fact that a police officer was present did not alter the situation, he argued: “Where is the free exchange of ideas when the Accused are not present to

²⁸ Ibid.: 218.

²⁹ Ibid.: 224.

³⁰ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 2 June 1967.

³¹ Bryan O’Linn, *Namibia. The Sacred Trust of Civilization, Ideal and Reality*, vol. 2, Windhoek, Polination, 2009: 1.

exchange ideas?"³² It resulted in an ugly confrontation with Chief Justice I. Mahomed who asked him if he thought he 'was the House of Lords' and claimed that O'Linn's actions amounted to the worst case of judicial indiscipline that he had ever come across. According to O'Linn, Mahomed was believed to have used his influence in preventing a case of prosecution for contempt of court against Swapo leader Moses Garoeb, who had, as mentioned earlier, mobilised Swapo supporters in protest against the sentences meted out to white Treason Trialists in 1991. Mahomed reportedly told O'Linn he would be on his own "on this issue" (i.e. prosecution).³³ Subsequent to these incidents, Mahomed never included O'Linn in sessions of the Supreme Court over which he presided. O'Linn, nevertheless notes with appreciation that he was subsequently requested by both Namibian presidents to chair commissions of enquiry and continued to serve as a Judge of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice J. Strydom and later as an Acting Judge until his retirement. O'Linn's concerns about the unbiased application of the rule of law were later echoed by a legal scholar. In an article written in 2009, former Dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Namibia, Nico Horn, commented on the distinction the Namibian Supreme Court appeared to have made between formerly disadvantaged persons in the colonial era and the advantaged (whites), by implication considering the provisions of the Racial Discrimination Prohibition Act (No. 21 of 1991) not to be applicable to the former. Accusations of racism, in other words, would apparently not apply to black people. This, Horn argues, sets a dangerous precedent and could open to the door for hate speech, or derogatory language against particular ethnic groups.³⁴

O'Linn's deeply felt passion for justice and concern for the less fortunate sometimes appear to sit uneasily alongside what appear to be a failure to appreciate the historical impact of foreign rule on colonized peoples. He held some frankly conservative views about the backwardness of certain indigenous groups and the redemptive values of 'western' civilisation and Christianity.³⁵ His rather restrictive proposals for a federal dispensation in Namibia which were mentioned earlier and in which full political equality would require that previously disadvantaged people first 'prove' themselves, also falls in this category. In this respect his beliefs reflected Cecil Rhodes' maxim of civil rights for civilised men. He also strongly opposed the ban on the death sentence, arguing that the law cannot disregard the view of the majority of people in Namibia which supports the death penalty. His argument was based on the premise that comprehensive consideration be given to the rights of perpetrators of violent crimes, while the rights of victims are disregarded.³⁶ In the process he appears to underplay the societal imprint

³² Ibid.: 106. The full text of the discussion paper is printed in pages 103-114. The Supreme Court overturned a High Court ruling written by O'Linn.

³³ Ibid: 122.

³⁴ Nico Horn, "Freedom of expression and hate speech in Namibia", *Namibia Law Journal*, 1 (1), 2009: 43-56.

³⁵ Cf. the introductory chapter of his first book: O'Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 1: x.

³⁶ An extensive discussion is devoted to this matter in O'Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 2: 38-100.

on the characters of criminals. Nevertheless, in line with his compassionate attitude towards those who have experienced discrimination, he argued that while the courts of Namibia did not appear to be in a position to fully recognise the rights of gay people, he suggested that the matter should be dealt with by appealing to parliament to pass the required laws to place the “status of homosexual relationships on an equal basis with that of the normal relationships presently provided for in the Namibian constitution.”³⁷ Again this reflects a refusal to adopt an activist interpretation of the constitution, but it is in line with O’Linn’s conviction that issues such as the death penalty and full civil rights for gay people are ultimately dependent on legislative rather than judicial action.

It is evident that O’Linn is deeply disappointed with developments in Namibia since independence. Though arguably not always sufficiently aware of the contentious nature of ‘western’, liberal values and the extent to which these often reside uneasily in the African tradition of political and philosophical discourse, he nevertheless retains his belief in the power of reason and the possibility that people of goodwill can make Namibia a success story:

[W]e must continue to build bridges across the racial, ethnic, religious and political divide. We do not stand alone. We may still rely on our Courts of Law [...] as well as the Security Council of the United Nations, should the Namibian Government follow the direction propagated by some of its most prominent leaders.’³⁸

The public intellectual: analysing the conceptual, institutional and moral character of the state in colonial and post-colonial Namibia – André du Pisani

In an opinion piece about the definition of the concept of the public intellectual, the noted philosopher A. C. Grayling quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson’s perspective on this category of being “the idea of individuals who are acquainted with both history and the history of ideas, who can take from them insights of relevance to the present, and who effectively communicate new ideas and insights as a result”.³⁹ This formulation aptly describes the role that political scientist André du Pisani has performed for a period of close to 40 years in commenting on political developments in Namibia. Inevitably, the task transcends the mere communication of ideas. Grayling argues that intellectuals bring “intelligence and engagement” and “speak out”⁴⁰, while the late Christopher Hitchens hoped that “the word never loses its association with the subversive”.⁴¹ Du Pisani consistently avoided overt moralising, but in his work as a political analyst and commentator, he never ceases to stress the moral dimensions of ideas and actions. Like

³⁷ Ibid.: 163. The issue of gay rights are dealt with in detail in chapter 8, pp. 132-163.

³⁸ Ibid.: 106.

³⁹ A. C. Grayling, “Do public intellectuals matter?”, *Prospect Magazine*, 24 April 2013.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Christopher Hitchens, “How to be a public intellectual”, *Prospect Magazine*, 24 May 2008: 2.

the other persons profiled in this paper, du Pisani is unashamedly concerned with the fate of the less privileged strata in society.

Du Pisani began to harbour doubts at an early age about the viability of racial separation of people in Namibia as envisaged by the Odendaal Plan. Travelling with his father, who worked as a census officer, du Pisani witnessed first-hand the impact of apartheid on migrant workers in particular, people who had no legal status or protection.⁴² He finally broke with the National Party when, as a student at Stellenbosch University, the efforts of students to establish links with English-speaking campuses and students of the University of Western Cape were rebuffed by university authorities. After graduating at Stellenbosch, his enrolment as a post-graduate student at the London School of Economics offered him his first opportunity to meet black students on an equal footing. Being part of a delegation comprising mostly Afrikaans-speakers that met with leading ANC figures in Dakar, Senegal in 1987, heightened his awareness of the extent to which the people of South Africa were polarised.⁴³ For him the real value of the talks was the demonstration that “rational debate was still possible” and “given goodwill there could be a victory for reason”.⁴⁴ He perceived the ANC to be basically a middle class organisation that embraced social democracy, rather than being a monolithic ideological bloc. Impressed with the quality of its leadership, he was nevertheless concerned about the ANC’s lack of reflection on economic matters. He was concerned that they did not adequately consider the complexity of matters such as “uncontrolled urbanization, the use of investment capital, resource allocation, taxation and the relationship between politics and the economy”.⁴⁵

Rapidly earning a reputation as an astute analyst of SA’s policies in Namibia, du Pisani published widely. His output included journal articles, monographs, book reviews and scholarly opinions in newspapers. He regularly participated in panel discussions at the South Africa Institute for International Affairs, in which he served as research director. Something that continues to characterize his academic writing to this day is his conceptual grasp of issues and impressive analytical ability, as well as an acute understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Like many liberals he initially harboured doubts about perceived extremist tendencies in Swapo. In an opinion piece written in 1977, he said it would be tragic if “present white political hegemony will be merely exchanged for exclusive monistic party control by radicals”. He argued that it was to be hoped that Swapo would not consider the initiatives of the Western Contact Group and concessions by the Turnhalle as meaningless and opt to change the political system by violent means.⁴⁶

⁴² Graham Leach, *The Afrikaners. Their Last Great Trek*, Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1989: 151.

⁴³ Ibid.: 154.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 161.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ André du Pisani, “Political change in Namibia”, *Times of Namibia*, 1 (5), October 1977: 9f.

Du Pisani was unequivocal about the shortcomings in South Africa's designs for Namibia. The dualistic nature of the Namibian economy during the colonial period (a money economy and a subsistence economy), could, he cautioned "aggravate the role of ethnicity as a source of resource competition". Furthermore, "the institutional import given to ethnicity within the South African policy of ethnic homelands implies that ethnicity is in fact the basis for the authoritative allocation of values, goods, status and power in society".⁴⁷ He said in 1978 that SA had neglected the "human infrastructure" of the territory – education was being used as an ideological weapon and official glorification of ethnicity had resulted in "institutional balkanisation" that undermined the "critical process of national integration". The country, he warned, was in a "state of pathological fragmentation" and suffered from "an absence of integrative leadership". Development too, was conceived of in a compartmentalised rather than an integrationist way. Finally he asked whether Namibia possessed the "supportive values, national symbols and integrative leadership to structure peaceful political change and to sustain a stable democratic polity".⁴⁸ He had at an early stage understood that the Turnhalle Conference was unlikely to serve as a vehicle for national integration, because of its composition and its "instrumental consensus on values and policy objectives".⁴⁹ In 1979, in a review of M. T. Arnheim's *South Africa after Vorster*, he disagreed with the author's contention that the SA government was "converted" to liberalism after foreign minister Pik Botha's statement at the UN that the SA government was in the process of departing from race- and colour-based discrimination. He pointed out that the individualistic *Grundnorm* of liberalism, premised on freedom and equality, was hardly underwritten by Afrikaner *verligtheid* (enlightenment), with the latter subscribing to a group approach to politics in which individualism decidedly did not constitute the leitmotiv.⁵⁰

A review of G. Töttemeyer's study of elites in the former Ovambo offered du Pisani the opportunity to argue for a more nuanced understanding of elite formation and political allegiances amongst Oshivambo speakers at the time. He problematised Töttemeyer's contrast between traditionalists and modernists in which a tendency to statism, a lack of openness and authoritarianism were ascribed to the former while the latter was associated with progressivism. Questions also ought to be raised, du Pisani argued, about whether the relationship between Swapo, the churches and traditional leaders turned on "patronage, class variables, congruence in ideology or mere convenience". He argued that 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of political organisation could complement each other, in the process anticipating the ability of the Swapo government

⁴⁷ University of Namibia Archives (UNA), Du Pisani Accession, André du Pisani, "Reflections on the role of ethnicity in the politics of Namibia", *Africanus*, 7 (1), September 1977: 15.

⁴⁸ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 31 March 1978.

⁴⁹ Du Pisani, "Political change": 9.

⁵⁰ UNA, Du Pisani Accession, Draft: Review of Arnheim, M.T., *South Africa after Vorster*, Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1979, (n.d.).

to accommodate the Oshivambo-speaking traditional leadership prior to the 1990 independence elections and after the establishment of an independent Namibia.⁵¹

In 1980 du Pisani sensed that Robert Mugabe's election victory in Zimbabwe was bound to see a far more assertive challenge to South Africa from the leaders of liberation movements in the southern African region. The election victory, he asserted, was an "explicit argument against compromise with white power structures" and it destroyed the "widely-held myth that Blacks are by nature conservative, tribal and that they would compromise with the white establishment rather than join with Black extremists". Another consequence was bound to be the radicalisation of black political thinking both in Namibia and South Africa.⁵² In 1981 he appeared to have correctly anticipated that South Africa would introduce new obstructions to further delay the implementation of UN Resolution 435 for Namibia. Emboldened by the election of the Reagan administration in the USA, the SA government introduced the issue of Cuban troops in Angola, hoping that it would offer breathing space in negotiations over Namibia's political future.⁵³

At that time the DTA started to draw up its own constitution, which contained a bill of rights. This, du Pisani argued, was still in line with SA's two-track policy and pointed to a growing awareness that constitutional constraints might be a better option than having to rely on the slim hope that the DTA might beat Swapo at the polls. By then his concerns about Swapo had given way to a conviction that the movement was essentially nationalist, fighting for real independence. His first comprehensive treatment of the political situation in Namibia was undertaken in his book *South West Africa/Namibia. The Politics of Continuity and Change*, which appeared in 1986 at the height of South Africa's increasingly oppressive reign in the territory. It contained a sustained critical analysis of the hegemonic ambitions and the ideological underpinnings of South African rule in Namibia and represented a measured analysis and indictment of South Africa's neo-colonial strategy.

After independence du Pisani, though appreciative of Swapo's achievements, was quick to sense certain disquieting tendencies. Among the positive changes characterising democratic Namibia he listed the celebration of cultural diversity, a robust, if not particularly analytical print media, greater awareness and promotion of women's rights and the spirit of reconciliation fostered by the governing party. However, he noted that since 1997 "our political and ethical life could be in danger of further battering", for example referring to a tendency to perceive "notions of 'disloyalty' when there is public

⁵¹ UNA, Du Pisani Accession, André du Pisani, Review of G. Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New*, London, Hurst, 1978.

⁵² UNA, Du Pisani Accession, André du Pisani, *Namibia: scenarios for change (first draft)*, n.d. (the paper appears to have been written in 1980, shortly after the election in Zimbabwe).

⁵³ UNA, Du Pisani Accession, South African Institute of International Affairs, Corporate member's seminar, South West Africa/Namibia: where do we go from here?, Johannesburg, 1981. Participants: Mr. R. Eksteen, Dr Z. Ngavirue, Mr. J. Kirkpatrick and Comments by O. Krause, M. Spicer and A. du Pisani.

disagreement on important national issues such as Epupa".⁵⁴ In the same article he also noted that government's unilateral decision to become involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo is an example of how the highest legislative body – parliament, was deprived of its role as the fulcrum of national debate. In an important and perceptive chapter in a study analyzing the ideological foundations of the policy of national reconciliation in Namibia, du Pisani sets out to investigate the way in which Swapo has given content to the concept of nationalism.⁵⁵ He argues that Swapo has constructed an anti-colonial nationalism which is essentially political, rather than cultural. Because it is defined by colonialism, it cannot serve as the basis for a national identity. He continues:

If colonialism chiefly determines the range of subject-positions open to nationalist discourse, then nationalist subject positions are rather counter identifications with colonialism than identifications with a genuine inclusive 'Namibian nationalism'.⁵⁶

In effect, Swapo had been striving to attain a hegemonic political position, in the process enlisting organised labour and for a period of time the major Namibian churches.⁵⁷ This tendency militates against its claim to have established peace and democracy as well as freedom of speech.⁵⁸ According to du Pisani

It is only a discourse of democracy and people-centred development that has the potential to transcend the legacy which both the structure of power of the colonial state and the structure of thought of colonialism exert on the post-colonial state in Namibia.⁵⁹

A related concern for du Pisani is how the language of the 'free market' and rampant commoditisation has intruded in the public sphere in Namibia. Amidst conditions of growing poverty outside pockets of privilege the limits to liberation where matters of social and economic justice are concerned were aptly illustrated in Namibia. To him the Maerua Mall commercial complex in Windhoek, an entity combining services, retail, leisure and offices, can be considered a "perfect example of market-led urban development with its attendant inequity".⁶⁰ Intimately associated with this trend is the absence of intellect and visionary leadership, causing Namibian society to reflect a situation where many positive human values, such as social justice, caring, honesty, equity and love have degenerated into "self- aggrandisement and social indifference".⁶¹

⁵⁴ André du Pisani, "Reflective mirror and companion: The Namibian turns 15", *The Namibian*, 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine, Windhoek, 2000: 12.

⁵⁵ André du Pisani, "The discursive limits of Swapo's dominant discourses on anti-colonial nationalism in Postcolonial Namibia – a first exploration", in: André du Pisani, Reinhart Kößler, and William A. Lindeke, (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010: 1-40.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 35.

⁵⁷ Du Pisani, "Discursive limits": 4.

⁵⁸ Swapo 1999 Election Manifesto, quoted in: du Pisani, "Discursive limits": 34.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 35.

⁶⁰ André du Pisani, "The politics of illusion: a defect of vision", *The Namibian*, 28 July 2006.

⁶¹ Ibid.

These demonstrable deficits in the Namibian body politic are for du Pisani intimately linked to another dimension of public life in Namibia about which he is deeply concerned: the lack of a true public discourse on the impact of decisions on economic, social, environmental and political issues. He laments the lack of an analytical tradition in local journalism and pleads for democracy and citizenship to be imbued with more positive content. From his philosophically-grounded world-view “language, reality and truth have drifted apart” and “morality and power no longer stand in a dialectical tension, as they should”.⁶² Like other liberals he is profoundly aware of the disruptive and corruptive potential of absolute power and in his writings one senses an eerie reminder of the endurance and consistency of illiberal forces, both in Namibia and the world at large. In his regular column in the Namibian newspaper, du Pisani has persistently highlighted these challenges and threats and kept the tradition of vibrant public discourse alive.

Religion and social justice: the moral underpinnings of opposition against apartheid: Christo Lombard and Gerhard Töttemeyer

Christo Lombard

By the early 1970s political tension in Namibia was also reflected in the churches, with whites-only churches (the Dutch Reformed Church and the Deutsche Evangelical Lutheran Church) beginning to distance themselves from their counterparts, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, today ELCN and ELCRN respectively, bringing to an end a long period of fruitful, though limited cooperation.⁶³ By the mid-1980s the relationship between the South African-introduced internal government and the churches was filled with mistrust. It was in an atmosphere of growing societal divisions that Stellenbosch-educated theologian Christo Lombard returned to Namibia in 1984 with a threefold vision: to transform the teaching of religious studies at the former Academy, promoting ecumenical ties among the various religious denominations and getting involved in civil society initiatives aimed at furthering the search for peaceful change and eventual independence. From the outset he encountered opposition and mistrust, with supporters of the status quo branding him a supporter of Swapo and opponents of the regime suspicious of someone operating from within the Academy, at the time widely considered to have been created as an anti-Swapo institution. Over the following 20 years Lombard would personally experience how difficult it was to transcend divisions in society against a background of generations of enforced separation and oppression.

⁶² A. du Pisani, “Reflective mirror”: 4.

⁶³ The divisions can be traced to the time when the DRC elected to suspend cooperation in the Tri-partite Agreement in 1967, according to which the DRC and the Rhenish and Finnish Missions cooperated in ministering to the religious needs of Oshiwambo migrant labourers. The whites-only German Evangelical Lutheran Church (DELC) also abstained from joining ELOC and ELC in an expanded United Evangelical Lutheran Church of SWA. A growing distrust of apartheid was by then becoming evident among leaders of the black churches.

From an early age Lombard had been convinced that religious belief and societal justice were intimately linked concepts. At high school he was part of a Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) bible study and prayer group that participated in joint religious ceremonies with people of the black township in Windhoek. He was in the audience in 1965 when former SA Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd spelled out his vision of the essence of apartheid and how it was to be applied in colonial Namibia. Many years later he observed that this occasion had convinced him that apartheid could not offer a just and lasting solution for the problems facing SA and Namibia.⁶⁴ At Stellenbosch University he became aware that the DRC's narrow, ethno-centric approach to matters of church and religion was harmful to the prospects of developing just and equalitarian societies in both SA and Namibia. He firmly believed that the search for justice had to rest on a sound theological foundation to ensure that praxis, a coherent system of religious beliefs and values, could be reconciled with the realities of a broken world. Conceiving of religion as amounting principally to a vertical relationship between God and humans, amounted to a sterile, conservative approach, he believed.

Participating as a student in outreach programmes offered by the Dutch Reformed Student Church in Stellenbosch, he suggested to the organising committee that an involvement with farm workers should transcend spiritual matters to focus on the social conditions within which these neglected people had to live. A well-known winemaker responded positively to suggestions that improvements be made to the working and living conditions of the so-called Coloured employees.⁶⁵ Having to choose between a post as a lecturer in philosophy at Stellenbosch and a position in Bible Studies at the University of Western Cape, where contextual involvement from a biblical perspective shaped his theological ideas in a whole new direction, he chose the latter. He was soon actively involved in initiatives directed against apartheid by a small group of young theologians in solidarity with the voices from the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa.⁶⁶ At the University of Stellenbosch he was active in opposing the Broederbond-influenced ASB (Afrikaanse Studente Bond) at the campus. He and his wife resigned from the DRC in 1982 and joined the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC – now known as the Uniting Reformed Church of SA) which was led by the Rev. Alan Boesak and supported the church's endorsement of the Belhar Confession, which declared apartheid a heresy. Lombard's move in the early 1980s from the DRC to the Mission Church, one of the DRC's so-called daughter churches, was a manifestation of his conviction that a search for justice could only be realised in a religious context that transcended doctrinal and denominational boundaries.

Upon his return he naturally gravitated towards issues relating to SA's illegal occupation of Namibia and the search for a democratic dispensation. He gradually came to endorse

⁶⁴ Bernard Lategan and Hans Müller, (eds.), *Afrikaners Tussen die Tye*, Bramley, Taurus, 1990: 80; Christo Lombard, personal communication, November 1999. Unless mentioned otherwise, most of the material on Lombard's professional career and experiences before 1990 derived from this source.

⁶⁵ Christo Lombard, personal communication, Bellville, 8 April 2011.

⁶⁶ Lategan and Müller, *Afrikaners*: 81.

the liberal cause as far as politics were concerned, especially after meeting and forming a lasting friendship with adv. Bryan O'Linn in the mid-1980s, but retained a firm belief that the search for justice had to transcend a mere theoretical commitment to particular values and beliefs.⁶⁷ In the late 1970s and 1980s it was becoming evident that developments in Namibia were giving rise to a 'society under siege', when South Africa subjected the territory to a state of full-blown militarisation and kept an iron grip on all forms of resistance and opposition. In 1986 Lombard and lawyer Peter Koep approached O'Linn with the idea of establishing Namibia Peace Plan 435, an initiative designed to disseminate information about the United Nations-sponsored peace plan and promote contacts with influential figures who supported the plan. He often subjected to vitriolic criticism, but this was compensated by witnessing "a true change of attitude towards accepting the ideal of independence among white colleagues and conservative students".⁶⁸

Based in the department of Biblical Studies at the Academy Lombard initiated changed to promote the first two aims mentioned above. The department offered contextualized syllabi featuring aspects such as violence, racism, discrimination, poverty and church-state relations interpreted from a biblical perspective. There were initiatives to ensure that academic work was informed by international and ecumenical perspectives. Visitors such as Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane and Sheena Duncan were brought in to address symposia and discussion evenings. Negative reactions from a conservative public were immediately forthcoming and even the Afrikaans churches had little stomach for the agenda of persons perceived to be advocates of liberation theology and involved in mixing religion and politics. The idea of establishing a Theological Faculty met with suspicion from the left, with the Council of Churches viewing Lombard and his colleagues as being allied to the South African instituted Academy and from the right, where the Dutch Reformed Church led an alliance of evangelical groups that soon resulted in the foundation of its own theological training seminar. Though the Academy had been tainted as an instrument of South Africa's neo-colonial strategy and a counter to the United Nations Institute of Namibia, for people involved in the affairs of the institution in the 1980s, students and lecturers alike, it was a formative experience. The opportunity to interact with people whom apartheid had effectively put beyond the range of formal and informal communication, was for many a new and in some ways life-changing experience. Students, in discussion fora, public protests and interaction with sympathetic lecturers, with Lombard playing a pivotal role, relished the opportunity to nail their aspirations and hopes for peace and freedom to the mast. Lecturers engaged the

⁶⁷ At an Executive Committee meeting of NPP 435, Study and Contact Group, immediately after independence, he argued that he did not see himself as a liberal, but is willing to accept that the group's philosophy was informed by liberal values, beliefs and practices and that he was willing to support this approach.

⁶⁸ Lategan and Müller, *Afrikaners*: 87.

institution's management to facilitate a culture of openness and the Senate often featured robust debates about the need to expand the space for academic freedom.⁶⁹

With the establishment of the University of Namibia Lombard quickly moved to establish the Ecumenical Institute of Namibia (EIN) as an instrument through which tolerance and understanding could be promoted. Part of the programme involved reaching out to the local Muslim community, with Islamic scholars presenting papers to students. This took place under the auspices of the Philosophy Society which arranged debates on Sunday evenings aimed at giving students the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which religious and philosophical beliefs and values interacted with politics in particular and life in general. Lombard's involvement in a variety of initiatives designed to promote the cause of justice, inevitably invited hostile responses from white reactionaries, church and political authorities. Smear campaigns involving seditious pamphlets were launched against him and fellow academic opponents of apartheid. The DRC of Namibia effectively cold-shouldered him and politicians occasionally accused him of using his academic position to promote leftist political and academic initiatives (read: pro-Swapo). The establishment of the Council of Churches of Namibia in 1978, which the DRC considered to be politically-inspired, led to a DRC-sponsored alliance of evangelical groups that resulted in the foundation of an own theological training seminar at Orumana, later relocated to Windhoek. This was not simply due to doctrinal disagreements. Lombard had become aware of the way in which the DRC had engaged in incessant manipulation of its 'daughter' churches on account of ideological and church-political differences, up to 1995. His endorsement of the Belhar confession in 1986 also proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the DRC.⁷⁰

The animosity experienced by Lombard, especially from within the DRC, is understandable, given the manner in which critical voices were silenced in South Africa (Nico Smith and Beyers Naude the obvious examples). Furthermore, Lombard was the one person capable of unpicking the ambiguities that often characterized the church's policies, refusing to adopt the popular practice of hiding complexities behind pious expressions of goodwill and fellowship. An example of this tendency is evident in an article written by a DRC pastor in a volume on church unity in Namibia co-edited by Lombard. The particular pastor, the Rev. T. van der Merwe, admitted that many DRC pastors and members preferred the retention of the status quo rather than to embrace

⁶⁹ The Academy's Senate was often the scene of heated debates about the issues of the time and although under immense government pressure, the management permitted discussions about contentious issues, such as language policy, the presence of police on the university campus and the military at schools in Namibia. In 1987 a 'convocation' was called, allowing for an unprecedented, in-depth debate by students and lecturers about the position of the Academy in a country in the grip of foreign rule.

⁷⁰ The DRC has still not adopted the confession, which elevated the principle of church unity to a confession, stating that the "unity of the people of God needs to be demonstrated in practice in a variety of ways". It rejected attempts to divide people and stated that God was on the side of the powerless and destitute (Annes Nel, "Is die Belhar Belydenis 'n belydenisskrif?", in: Christo Lombard and Jannie Hunter, (eds.), *Kom ons word een. Namibiese bydraes tot kerkeenwording in die "NGK familie"*, Windhoek, EIN Publications, 1995: 81-99.

the principle of church unity. At the same time though, he was of the opinion that pressure, in his view often unfair, was being exerted on the DRC, and that the church was accused of so many sins that it was appropriate to pose a rhetorical question: "It sounds as if nothing good can come from Nasaret!"⁷¹ Van der Merwe also objected to the insistence of the 'daughter' churches on the salaries of their pastors being placed on par with those of the DRC, arguing that it is an over-simplification to call for such a measure.⁷² Lombard's response to such arguments, echoing the views of black Christians, was that if the principle of church unity is taken seriously enough, ways and means could be found to address practical problems.⁷³ His refusal to engage in exchanges of diplomatic niceties to hide the real disagreements underpinning relations between the churches went beyond what most DRC members were willing to tolerate.

Confirmation of the paternalistic relationship that characterised the DRC's relationship with its 'daughter' churches is provided by the Reverend W. J. Daniels in his study of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, titled *Van Sendingkerk tot Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika 1960–1970*. When the Mission Church accepted the Belhar confession and in 1983 decided to request observer status at the Council of Churches in Namibia, the DRC responded by establishing a Conference of Dutch Reformed Churches. According to Daniels the DRC justified the decision by arguing that the members of the DRC family could not continue to operate independently from each other. It was however, actually designed to enable the DRC to formulate "doctrinal dogmatic principles on terrains on which members may experience problems".⁷⁴ It was also stipulated that member churches could not engage in ecumenical relations without consultation with the DRC.

By the mid-1990s Lombard became involved in the campaign to highlight the plight of former Swapo detainees and facilitated the publication of the book by Pastor Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence*, containing a narrative of the detainee saga.⁷⁵ Lombard himself wrote an article in which he strongly criticised Swapo for its failure to address the issue despite the fact that an enormous amount of evidence had been available prior to independence. He noted that the leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELOC) Leonard Auala and Cleophas Dumeni, knew about the plight of detainees in Swapo camps, but chose not to criticise the Swapo leadership directly or "to press the issues too far in public".⁷⁶ Founding president Sam Nujoma subsequently took Lombard

⁷¹ Thys van der Merwe, "Wat verhoinder eenheid?", in: Christo Lombard and Jannie Hunter, (eds.), *Kom ons word een. Namibiese bydraes tot kerkeenwording in die "NGK familie"*, Windhoek, EIN Publications, 1995: 41-49 (46).

⁷² Ibid.: 47f.

⁷³ Christo Lombard, personal communication.

⁷⁴ William Julius Daniels, *Van Sendingkerk tot Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika 1960–1970*, Windhoek, EIN Publications, 1999: 116.

⁷⁵ Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence. The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle*, Wuppertal, Hammer, 1995.

⁷⁶ *Windhoek Observer*, 24 June 1995.

to task, accusing him of being “assigned to work as an apostle of apartheid to ensure that Bantu education and white domination were perpetuated in Namibia”, who “dutifully served that apartheid system” and who is allowed to teach at the University of Namibia by virtue of the grace of the policy of national reconciliation.⁷⁷ For Lombard the failure of churches which had bravely opposed the South African dispensation before independence to take a stand against human rights abuses was a great disappointment.⁷⁸ During a recent visit he noted approvingly the DRC’s decision to join the Council of Churches in Namibia, hoping that the DRC might play a positive role in that body. He suggested that the DRC could contribute towards helping to restore institutional and operational efficiency in the Council of Churches (CCN) and member churches where a definitive decline was noticeable in the post-independence period.⁷⁹

In 2005 Lombard left Namibia to return to the University of Western Cape where he taught Religion and Ethics. One can detect a sense of disappointment when reflecting on developments in Namibia, how power politics continued to shape public discourse and the failure of the churches to fulfil their prophetic vocation. Although he avoids explicitly mentioning it, it could be that he felt that his work in Namibia had received far more condemnation and suspicion than recognition. The contrast between his experiences in Namibia and at Western Cape during the past ten years, where he continued to be involved in civil society initiatives and activities while actively participating in teaching and research at a very productive Department of Religion, is marked. His appointment to the Desmond Tutu Chair for Ethics and Morality is a fitting climax to a career in pursuit of a public order grounded in ethics and morality and one that offered him immense gratification.⁸⁰ He occasionally visits Namibia and remains in touch with individual church leaders in the Council of Churches of Namibia and civil society activists such as Samson Ndeikwila of ‘Forum for the Future’.

Gerhard Töttemeyer

In contrast to the other figures profiled in this paper, Gerhard Töttemeyer moved from his chosen profession to a career in politics, thereby exchanging the role of public observer and critic for service in government. The son of a missionary, Töttemeyer was born in the town of Gibeon in Namibia. He started his professional career as a lecturer in Political Science at Stellenbosch University from 1967 to 1970. Thereafter he lectured at the University of Transkei (1979–1984) and the University of Cape Town (1985–1987). Upon his return to Namibia he taught Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Namibia (1987–1993). In 1992 he was appointed director of elections, a

⁷⁷ Christo Lombard, “The detainee issue: an unresolved test case for Swapo, the churches and civil society”, in: Ingold Diener and Olivier Graefe, (eds.), *Contemporary Namibia. The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, 2001: 161-184 (179).

⁷⁸ Christo Lombard, personal communication.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

post he occupied until 1998 and having joined Swapo in 1991, he was appointed to parliament by President Nujoma as a non-voting member and became a deputy-minister in 2000.⁸¹ As Minister of Local and Regional Government and Housing he advanced the aims of a policy of decentralization and “promoted ethics in the face of claims of corruption at several local authorities”.⁸² He resigned in 2004 for health reasons. He resumed research, this time focusing on the role of the church in Namibia, an interest that dates back to the early 1970s.

As a student at the University of Stellenbosch he was active in student politics and was later expelled from the National Party for his liberal views. In 1978 his book, *Namibia Old and New* appeared and though it was written in sober, academic language, it was the first by a white Namibian to demonstrate the very wide opposition to South African rule that existed among the black people of Namibia, the numerically dominant Oshivambo-speakers of northern Namibia in particular. He obtained intimate knowledge of the views of leading figures in the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church, which claimed the biggest number of adherents of any church in Namibia. Töttemeyer was therefore well-positioned to register the sense of disillusionment with colonial rule and the divisive effects of apartheid on the lives of people, especially migrant labourers. In a review of his book, a scholar asserted that Töttemeyer’s “liberal anxiety permeates the work”, evident in his argument that as a liberal he tried to identify a “modern middle ground in Owambo politics that could have been encouraged by an enlightened South African government”.⁸³ As was the case with even moderate observers of the Namibian scene in the 1970s, Töttemeyer’s writings reflected unease with what was widely perceived to be the radical element in Swapo’s exile leadership. In a confidential report he asserted that the Namibia National Front, as a moderate social democratic entity at that stage offered the “best buy” in Namibia, standing between the largely discredited Turnhalle Alliance and the more radical Swapo with its “Marxist tendencies”.⁸⁴ Despite these reservations, scrutiny of Töttemeyer’s career and writings illustrate his evident concern with the growing chasm between white and black, a state of affairs he was passionately devoted to overcoming.

By the beginning of the 1980s, it was already evident that he was of the opinion that no solution in Namibia was conceivable without the support and participation of Swapo. The organisation, he argued, would win an internationally-supervised election, with its support base extending into the deep south of Namibia. He also asserted that it was not simply another communist organisation. He conceded that the DTA played a functional role during a transitional period, for example by scrapping discriminatory legislative provisions, also that it attempted to establish a representative body and that it

⁸¹ Graham Hopwood, *Guide to Namibian Politics*, Windhoek, Namibia Institute of Democracy, 2008: 281f.

⁸² *Ibid.*: 281.

⁸³ UNA, Du Pisani Collection, Review by John M. Mackenzie of G. Töttemeyer, *Namibia Old and New*, *The Annals of the American Academy*, 446, 1979: 170-172.

⁸⁴ UNA, Du Pisani Collection, Gerhard Töttemeyer, Confidential. *SWA/Namibië Scenario – Enkele gedagtes*, n.d. (probably 1978), 7 pp.

contributed to political socialization and creation of a political awareness in the territory. However, he considered the DTA's position to be fatally compromised for the following reasons: it represented divisive ethnic politics; the leaders of its various constituent bodies were not truly representative; it served as an agent of SA and defender of white interests and brought about too few fundamental changes – political and economic in particular.⁸⁵ A few months later he cautioned that the “existing credibility gap between black and white is widening and has reached an alarming and annoying stage”. He deplored the tendency among whites to consider blacks as immature, an attitude that said as much about the educational deficits of the past as it displayed ignorance about the “still untapped reservoir of black Namibians who have left the country in the past and have qualified themselves in many professions”. Finally he called on whites to discard “exclusiveness” and “self-imposed isolation” and actively embrace a reconciliation process by committing to and identifying with black aspirations.⁸⁶

In an article written in 1987 he argued that the SA-sponsored interim government could not provide an alternative to Swapo. He accused SA of ignoring the views of the black churches and stated that the war could have been avoided if SA was willing to listen to the reasonable voices of leading figures in church circles. He provided a spirited defence of Swapo's nationalist credentials, its essentially moderate character and commitment to embracing all groups, whites included, in a government of national unity, provided they reject ethnic and other divisive tactics. He rejected claims that Swapo was a Marxist-Leninist movement and also disputed the validity of the concept and reality of a communist-driven ‘total onslaught’, which most whites had virtually internalized as an act of faith.⁸⁷ In retrospect, it was by then evident that Töttemeyer was growing close to Swapo, even though he was still a member of NPP 435, the politically neutral, pro-independence group.⁸⁸ He reportedly joined Swapo in 1991.⁸⁹

Töttemeyer's path diverged from those of most of the other liberal figures in that he ceased to perform a role as public critic while serving in government. There were times when his close identification with Swapo's cause seemed to undermine his ability to render judgment on an impartial basis. In 1989 when Swapo troops, in what was eventually construed to be a violation of the UN ceasefire agreement, entered Namibia in an apparent attempt to present itself as a returning, liberating force, he defended Swapo, cautioning that they should not be criticised.⁹⁰ It can be argued though, that he

⁸⁵ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 14 June 1980.

⁸⁶ UNA, Du Pisani Accession, G. Töttemeyer, *The Namibian liberation struggle – the black cause and white obligation*, September 1980, University of Transkei, Umtata, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Gerhard Töttemeyer, “The interim government and its rule: the legitimacy crisis”, in: Gerhard Töttemeyer, Vezera Kandetu, and Wolfgang Werner, (eds.), *Namibia in Perspective*, Windhoek, Council of Churches in Namibia, 1987: 54-68.

⁸⁸ Pütz et al., *Namibia Handbook*: 319.

⁸⁹ Hopwood, *Guide*: 270.

⁹⁰ At the time Töttemeyer was the Director of the Namibia Institute of Social and Economic Research (Niser) and his comments were made during a briefing to fellow academics, at which the author was present.

interpreted Swapo's actions, as the party itself did, as simply aimed at allowing its fighters to return peacefully to designated camps in Namibia. Töttemeyer's unwillingness to criticise Swapo reflected the caution displayed by many on the democratic left who feared that criticism directed against the movement could have been construed as supporting South Africa's propaganda offensive against Swapo.⁹¹

When his active participation in politics came to an end with his retirement from government, he turned his attention again to an analysis of the role of the church. This time however, it was to assess to what extent the church, so courageous in speaking out on behalf of the oppressed before independence, had remained true to its prophetic vision and the search for social justice. He concluded that the Council of Churches (CCN) in Namibia did not live up to the high ideals expected from an organisation supposed to be the embodiment of the values of reconciliation and justice. He makes it clear that the CCN, which was established in 1978, failed to address the issue of Swapo detainees in exile, a matter that had the potential to truly test the validity and moral soundness of the policy of reconciliation. The real obstacle to a determined attempt to tackle the detainee issue, Töttemeyer argues, was former president Nujoma who pressurised church leaders into avoiding the issue and concentrating instead on a host of social ills such as alcoholism, socio-economic development, drug abuse and the plight of street children. Nujoma's attacks on Pastor Siegfried Groth and Prof. Christo Lombard, Töttemeyer argues, were ill-conceived and wrong, as they were aimed at people who have devoted much of their adult lives fighting for justice and against the oppressive nature of SA rule in Namibia. Nujoma's actions probably stemmed from a fear that a disclosure of Swapo complicity in abuses in exile would detract from the movement's role as liberator. Töttemeyer argues that Swapo had been given credit for its role as the party of freedom and its image would be enhanced rather than weakened by a revelation of the truth.⁹² The specific instrument that he envisages to address the issue of truth and reconciliation in Namibian society is a body similar to SA's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and he is of the opinion that the church should take the initiative in this matter, supported by NGOs and civic organisations. Töttemeyer cautions against using such a body in a way that would intrude on the terrain of the state, but argues that it should consider carefully whether its aims should be confined to investigating wrongs from the past, and ignore those of the present.

⁹¹ The same reluctance to speak out against Swapo was evident when information about abuses in exile camps became known in the late 1980s. *The Namibian*, for example, reported about the issue in noticeably muted fashion.

⁹² Gerhard Töttemeyer, "The role of the church in Namibia: fostering a discourse of reconciliation", in: André du Pisani, Reinhart Kößler, and William A. Lindeke, (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010: 103-137 (123). This article represents a condensed version of his book *Church and State in Namibia. The Politics of Reconciliation*, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010. In it he presents theoretical reflections on the concept of reconciliation and the socio-political background in Namibia from which the government's policy of reconciliation derived.

Töttemeyer's concern with the trajectory of developments in post-independence Namibia is mirrored by the observations of Bishop Zephania Kameeta, a consistent critic of human rights abuses since the 1970s. To Kameeta, Namibians appear to replicate the discrimination that they so fervently fought against under SA rule in Namibia. "Does it not mean that we were not really honest in our fight against colonialism, exploitation and racism and that this was just a matter of selective morality?" he asks rhetorically.⁹³ The church, Töttemeyer ventured, can be supportive of government "in an integrative and supplementary approach", though always mindful of its "social and ethical responsibility on many issues in addition to its spiritual responsibility". The CCN displayed an indecisive attitude on reconciliation, though he hastened to concede, by quoting de Gruchy, that reconciliation was a "much misunderstood and elusive notion, one that is abused in rhetoric and difficult to achieve in reality".⁹⁴

He avoids placing the blame for the failure to achieve real reconciliation on any specific group, mentioning that both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia as well as the Afrikaans Reformed Churches and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church were guilty of being "submissive to particular political interests". Nevertheless, he makes it clear that in the post-independence period neither government nor church achieved the ethical/moral and political/economic objectives that reconciliation implicitly require.⁹⁵ Töttemeyer elaborated on these issues in his book *Church and State in Namibia. The Politics of Reconciliation*, in which he argues that government policy and politics in Namibia suffered from a moral deficit, a concern frequently aired by other figures in this article.

Fighting for the cause of media freedom – Hannes Smith and Gwen Lister

Former colleagues, Hannes Smith and Gwen Lister exemplify the cause of journalistic activism that broke decisively with established practices in the profession in Namibia which had endured for almost three quarters of a century. Fiercely independent personalities, both displayed remarkable bravery in pursuing independent editorial policies in a hostile political environment. They treasured freedom of speech and had to pay a price for it, Lister in particular. Smith brought an irreverent, anti-establishment approach to his profession. His editorial policy did not reflect a recognisable ideological approach. By contrast, Lister developed a consistent and ideologically coherent editorial policy espousing liberal values such as freedom of speech, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fairness to all.

⁹³ Jörg Baumgarten, (ed.), *Zephania Kameeta – Towards Liberation. Crossing Boundaries between Church and Politics*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Mcmillan, 2006: 218.

⁹⁴ Töttemeyer, "Role of the Church": 136. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation – Restoring Justice*, London, SCM Press, 2002.

⁹⁵ Töttemeyer, *Church and State*: 182.

Hannes Smith

His role in Namibian journalism is usually credited more for his eccentric personality – he was sometimes referred to as ‘mal Smith’ (mad Smith), in public parlance – than for analytical depth and clarity in news reporting. However, a perusal of his reports and editorial columns over a period of almost four decades reveals strongly held beliefs. These comprised a sense of compassion for the poor and marginalised, an anti-establishment attitude, independent-mindedness, a refusal to embrace any particular political line, honesty and integrity and a capacity for unrelenting toil. Bryan O’Linn accurately depicted Smith as “an eccentric personality, but also a courageous and charismatic journalist who campaigned for the truth and was a champion of the underdog and an enemy of corruption”.⁹⁶ His compassion for the less-fortunate was an abiding feature of this many-sided person. His character and outlook were arguably shaped by a difficult childhood when he was estranged from his parents and had to fend for himself at a very early age.⁹⁷ He passionately believed that success was only possibly through hard work and often directed diatribes against a perceived laziness displayed by public figures.

Smith departed from tradition by criticizing the United Party, despite having been the editor of its mouthpiece, the *Windhoek Advertiser*. Unusual for a white person by the early 1970s, Smith had correctly sensed what the root cause of African discontent really was. In 1970 he stated that the UP leader in South Africa, Sir Devilliers Graaf, “forgot the first lesson about Africa, which is that her people want to rule themselves” and argued that Uhuru released a new pride and energy in black people. Colonial powers, according to Smith, did not bother much about development in Africa.⁹⁸ Such decidedly unorthodox views would be a recurrent feature in Smith’s newspaper articles and editorial columns.

He was among the very first journalists to take Swapo seriously. In 1972 he argued that the militant branch of Swapo, working in exile for six years, was still believed to have a strong following among the country’s 350,000 Ovambo (by far the largest language group) – the first time that this was stated rather unambiguously and long before Swapo’s support among the population became a matter of regular popular speculation.⁹⁹ Smith was fond of hyperbole in his reports and editorial columns. Attacks on Elok church presses elicited the following comments from him: “these hoodlums were inspired by the trash in our political life”. He also asserted that life in the north (the former Ovambo) was cheap.¹⁰⁰ He was however, no radical: in an editorial he defended police action to prevent a Swapo Youth League meeting at Rehoboth. He argued that

⁹⁶ O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 2: 269.

⁹⁷ Personal communication, Yanna Smith (Smith’s daughter); Smith once referred to himself as “the Palmvlakte boy with rudimentary background” (*Windhoek Observer*, 29 April 1995).

⁹⁸ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 6 February 1970.

⁹⁹ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 17 October 1972.

¹⁰⁰ *Windhoek Observer*, 22 November 1980.

the prohibition was “in fact aimed at stopping the inciting of non-white folk in the rural areas”. According to him the SYL preached that “the Boers should get out of South West Africa” (referring to all whites): “They are not looking for peaceful co-existence”. Nevertheless, he argued that Swapo was best positioned among black groups to pave the way for better understanding of whites by black people and also to achieve a better deal for the latter. However, he added pointedly, “they should stop preaching sweeping [the] Boer in the sea”.¹⁰¹

Smith was not given to political correctness and seemed to have judged persons and issues by instinct rather than according to conventional notions of status or class. He especially valued integrity in public figures and was not afraid to provide positive coverage of them, irrespective of their political position and beliefs. In 1980 he wrote a sympathetic article about General Jannie Geldenhuys, commander of South Africa’s military forces in Namibia, who was transferred back to SA. According to Smith Namibia had in the previous 10 years had no “personality to match” him “in promoting human relations and creating a multi-racial army which [...] does not recognize colour”. He mentioned that Geldenhuys had agreed that a Swapo fighter could be called a guerrilla or insurgent if he fights the security forces, but a terrorist when attacking civilians. Smith mentioned Nkongo base in the north which “never had racism”, an achievement for which Geldenhuys should be credited.¹⁰²

A noticeable feature of the *Advertiser* and later the *Windhoek Observer* in the 1970s and 1980s was the letters column in which both Swapo and Swanu supporters, as well as whites critical of these organisations aired their views. Typical of the former was a letter by J. Kozonguizi in which he pointed out that Africans suffered many forms of discrimination. Black teachers were paid four times less their white counterparts and ten times more was spent on white school children than on black learners.¹⁰³ Though Smith seldom enunciated a clear ideological position, he often expressed appreciation for what appeared to be incisive analysis or morally-just opinions. In 1978 he lauded as “brilliant and courageous” a speech by the Reverend P. D. Strauss of the DRC in which he explained that the black consciousness movement aimed at ridding people of an inferiority complex. Assessing discontent among black people Strauss quoted Rev. Z. Kameeta saying that the “white God is the one that oppresses”. Mention was made too, of the manner in which people’s “anger was stoked by the bombings of the Onipa Press” and how people are referring to the SADF as an illegal occupying force.¹⁰⁴ Smith targeted what he perceived to be hypocrisy in public figures. At the time that the Turnhalle conference was planned, a sudden upsurge in attempts to establish contact across the colour divide erupted, something that Smith found ironic, given decades of

¹⁰¹ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 14 January 1974.

¹⁰² *Windhoek Observer*, 12 July 1980.

¹⁰³ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 19 October 1972.

¹⁰⁴ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 3 March 1978.

neglect in this respect. He even criticised his colleagues for a failure to engage in discussions with and solicit the opinions of black people.¹⁰⁵

He riled conservative Afrikaner's religious sensibilities with the depiction of naked women on the back page of the *Windhoek Observer* and frequent reports of violence and deviant sexual behaviour. Unafraid to engage in debates in the paper about this practice, Smith argued that the depiction of nude women in his newspaper aimed to expose double-standards on sexual matters in society. He once commented that the punitive clauses in SA's Immorality Act were more immoral than the act of adultery itself.¹⁰⁶ Smith undoubtedly tapped into a vein of popular resentment against authority and reflected anti-establishment prejudices, which may explain why his paper, with its usual irreverent style and frequent outrageous mockery of authority figures and challenges directed at South African policies and actions in Namibia (and after independence, the Swapo government), was never banned, though a ban was occasionally mooted. A report on the media released in 2002 revealed that people perceived the *Windhoek Observer* to reflect the views of ordinary people and to be unafraid to "call a spade a spade". Another observer noted that the "independent-mindedness of the editorial stance is no doubt valuable and refreshing". It was mentioned though, that the failure to separate fact and comment is a "serious editorial weakness".¹⁰⁷

Smith's papers lacked comprehensive coverage of the various facets of public life in Namibia and most of his reports suffered from insufficient analytical clarity and coherence. It is nevertheless remarkable how he managed to cover events by crisscrossing the country on a weekly basis. He was fond of injecting personal opinions into reports, especially if he witnessed acts of selfless service in the public good or detected an abuse of public trust and misuse of resources. Often extensive coverage would be devoted to issues he considered to be in the public interest. South Africa's alleged mismanagement of the Namibian economy, a challenge thrown up by businessman Eric Lang at several well-attended meetings in the early 1980s, was the subject of extensive coverage in the *Windhoek Observer*. Detailed reports were published during the Thirion Commission of Enquiry's investigation into corruption at second-tier authorities in the mid-1980s. Another issue that was chronicled touched on a former employee's allegations that the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM) engaged in a long history of tax evasion, resulting in huge losses to the treasury. Smith did not refrain from taking on the omnipotent SA Defence Force in Namibia when he

¹⁰⁵ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 21 June 1974.

¹⁰⁶ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 13 March 1970. One of Smith's fiercest critics was later involved in an adulterous relationship, about which the *Windhoek Observer* devoted a brief, factual report. His reference to double standards was derived, partly, from the ubiquitous use of pictures of bare-breasted African women, often used in tourist brochures.

¹⁰⁷ Media Monitoring Project, *An Open Society initiative for Southern Africa*, Johannesburg, MISA, 2002. Representatives from civil society organisations, including Namibia Non-Governmental Organisations Forum (Nangof), Namibia Agricultural Union (NAU), Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) and National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), were interviewed for the project.

published reports of ivory smuggling and game poaching by members of the force. He often published reports under the by-line 'reporter in chief' and presented dramatised accounts of events, illustrated with his own photographs. Analyses of the situation in Namibia, particularly about apartheid, the state of the territory's political life and South Africa's policies, were often syndicated in prominent foreign newspapers and journals.

Smith was initially keen on allowing Swapo the opportunity to establish and prove itself in government. In 1991 his paper published reports of prominent NP leaders expressing appreciation at post-independence developments.¹⁰⁸ Smith also commented favourably on President Nujoma's state of the nation address and stated that Swapo have proved wrong those who believed it would subvert the constitution and impose a one-party state.¹⁰⁹ In June 1991 the *Observer* highlighted the issue of redistribution, stating that the colonial legacy has resulted in Namibia having 80,000 haves and 1.3 million have-nots. He asserted that much of Namibia's growth was achieved through exploitation of black labourers to the benefit of a white capitalist class.¹¹⁰ Gradually, however, Smith grew disillusioned, occasioned by disappointment over trends in the country. He gave wide coverage in the early 1990s to Swapo-inspired attacks on the still white-dominated judiciary in Namibia. His disdain for perceived attempts by the founding president, Dr Sam Nujoma to manipulate history in support of Swapo's hegemonic interpretations of the Namibian past, caused him to explicitly stress the role of non-Swapo groups during the protests that erupted in the Old Location killings in Windhoek in 1959. He engaged in several public altercations with the former president in his paper, challenging him to follow up on what was perceived to be veiled threats. In 1999 he asserted that Namibia's involvement in the conflict with Unita reveals that Nujoma was "itching and yearning to go down in history as a glorious bearer of the sword and a conqueror".¹¹¹ After 2000 his paper appears to have lost its characteristic zeal and poor health made him pessimistic and increasingly inward-looking. The *Observer's* coverage and editorial comments gradually descended in shrill denouncements of the government and certain political figures. The variety and verve that characterised the paper for almost twenty years were sadly lacking by then.

Gwen Lister

Gwen Lister's journalistic career in Namibia dates from the mid-1970s when she joined the *Windhoek Advertiser* edited by Hannes Smith. After a dispute with the publisher they left to establish the *Windhoek Observer* in 1978. Lister wrote a weekly column on political developments, for the first time providing detailed information in the local press about Swapo as well as other local political organisations. She left the paper when its

¹⁰⁸ *Windhoek Observer*, 13 July 1991 ("White Afrikaner minority say things are going well").

¹⁰⁹ *Windhoek Observer*, 15 June 1991 (editorial).

¹¹⁰ *Windhoek Observer*, 8 June 1991 (editorial).

¹¹¹ *Windhoek Observer*, 18 December 1999.

business partner considered her to be a “deterrent to advertising revenue”.¹¹² She started *The Namibian*, the paper that became synonymous with her, in 1985 and immediately attracted adverse attention from South African security agencies. The former interim government tried to block the registration of the paper by stipulating a R20,000 deposit, charging that Lister’s alleged Swapo sympathies “could constitute a threat to state security”.¹¹³ *The Namibian*’s support of Swapo as the only creditable movement to lead the transition towards independence, caused Lister and her paper to be condemned as Swapo stooges. In response to charges that *The Namibian* had actively endorsed the cause of Swapo, Lister pointed to the common objective that both Swapo and *The Namibian* shared, namely self-determination and independence, whereas after independence the paper accepted its role of speaking out “against corruption or abuse of power or wrongdoing”.¹¹⁴

The paper jolted the SA authorities when it publicised South African Police and Defence Force attacks on civilians and published photographs of slain guerrillas draped over armoured cars, a practice that attracted international condemnation. To *The Namibian* should be accorded credit for bringing home to people the horror of the war in the north, unmasking South African propaganda and countering prejudiced official reports. It should come as no surprise that the paper and its editor were subjected to hostile scrutiny by the South African and interim Namibian authorities. A campaign of “vilification in the local Afrikaans daily, as well as fire-bombings, bannings, detentions, harassment and death threats for a number of years” were matters that the paper had to endure for more than five years.¹¹⁵ *The Namibian* attracted widespread acclaim for its role in promoting independence, something for which it was lauded by Swapo. The wider significance of the paper’s role is also reflected by international acclaim for its promotion of truthful reporting and media freedom in Namibia and Africa. In its 15th commemorative magazine the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke of *The Namibian* as having “contributed immeasurably to press freedom and nation building”, while maintaining “its integrity and independent stance” throughout. The 25th anniversary magazine featured Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who stated that *The Namibian* “has remained true to the ideals of telling the truth and press freedom”.¹¹⁶ From the

¹¹² *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 9–10.

According to Smith’s daughter, he later admitted that the way she was treated was wrong (Yanna Smith, personal communication).

¹¹³ *The Namibian. 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2000: 61. Judge Levy set aside the charge and ordered the interim government to repay the money.

¹¹⁴ Christoph Maletsky, “Interview, Lister on 25 years”, *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*; *The Namibian. 15th Anniversary*: 61.

¹¹⁶ Kofi Annan, “Freespeak”, *The Namibian. 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*: 3; Desmond Tutu, “Independence has come”, *The Namibian 1985–2010. Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*: 3. Significantly, praise was also showered on the paper by fellow professionals, for example the World Association of Newspapers, the West African Journalists Association, the Commonwealth Press Union, Reporters sans Frontières and the International Press Institute (*ibid.*: 16f.).

Unesco Deputy Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information came praise for *The Namibian's* contribution to independence and its professional reporting, as well as its “unflinching commitment to advance press freedom in Africa”. The defining characteristic of *The Namibian* has been, and still is, its fierce defence of an “independent editorial policy”, hoping that the maintenance of such a policy would “contribute to a free and vigorous press for Namibia”.¹¹⁷ André du Pisani has argued that the paper embraced the ideas and ideals of John Rawls of ‘justice as fairness’ which was demonstrated in its defence of the rights to a fair trial for the Caprivi secessionists. The paper came to support the idea that “equality and liberty should be closely related”, though it did not embrace Rawls’s idea that “all social primary goods, liberty and opportunities, income and wealth and the bases of self-respect – should be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured”.¹¹⁸

In the first post-independence decade *The Namibian* maintained a cordial relationship with the new government. The paper did not find reason for challenging government, a stance that could be ascribed to the close identification of the paper with Swapo’s ideals for a free and independent Namibia. *The Namibian* did not, for example, join in condemnation of Swapo when the detainee issue was thrust in the public mind with the publication of Pastor Siegfried Groth’s book, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence*.¹¹⁹ The book and its local publishers were fiercely denounced by former president Sam Nujoma. Lister displayed typical liberal caution in avoiding controversy, aware of the pitfalls inherent in criticism of perceived African shortcomings. It is ironic that the defence of freedom of speech, an ideal that Gwen Lister accepted to be a key aim for which her paper campaigned and which it shared with Swapo, should have been to the cause of a government ban of the paper in 2001. She stated that she was informed that criticism of founding president Dr Sam Nujoma and the Zimbabwe regime of Robert Mugabe irked the former and contributed towards the ban of the paper.¹²⁰ Dr Hage Geingob, writing a foreword for *The Namibian* at its 25th anniversary, accepted co-responsibility for the decision though he was not a member of Cabinet at the time. He argued however, that *The Namibian's* right to publish freely was not threatened, but conceded that such a step may have been interpreted as “sending a wrong signal in the land of the free where we value and protect human rights and freedoms”.¹²¹ Du Pisani implicitly identifies the source of official discontent by stressing that *The Namibian* had continued to support Swapo’s political project of nation-building and national unity, but remained aloof of

¹¹⁷ Quoted in André du Pisani, “The Namibian turns 15”, *The Namibian. 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek 2000: 4, quoting from the founding editorial.

¹¹⁸ André du Pisani, “The Namibian at 25”, *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 6.

¹¹⁹ Rumours about the detainee issue had in fact already started to circulate in the late 1980s.

¹²⁰ Maletsky, “Interview”: 12f.

¹²¹ Hage Geingob, “Foreword”, *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 2.

proclaiming a definitive interpretation of the past as contained in the “anti-colonial nationalist ideology of the governing party”.¹²²

As with some of the persons profiled in this paper, Gwen Lister would probably not refer to herself as a liberal. She once commented that Swapo had long ago departed from its socialist roots and rendered Namibia a capitalist society, with only a minority believing that it should be otherwise. She included in this latter category former Prime Minister Nahas Angula and herself. She argued that black economic empowerment had benefited the elite few and Swapo did not devote itself to “promote the upliftment of everyone”.¹²³ The fruitful tension between her socialist inclinations and endorsement of key liberal values is evident in the way her editorial policy has evolved over the years. According to du Pisani the paper has remained true to its advocacy of critical humanism and liberal democracy and in this respect it differs from Swapo and its limiting nationalist ideology.¹²⁴

Lister did not consider it her newspaper’s proper role to parrot government policies, but to assist in the task of educating the people of Namibia and to serve as a link between government and people, facilitating the flow of information from one to the other. From the date of the ban on the paper a noticeably more critical attitude on the part of Lister can be detected. This is evident in a more acerbic editorial style, reflecting a sense of frustration with displays of intolerance by prominent government figures. On one occasion she concluded in her editorial column that *The Namibian’s* role goes beyond praising the good that government does to include “exposing wrongdoing in government, and taking our leaders to task when they spout the nonsense they often do”.¹²⁵ Responding to Information Minister Joel Kaapanda’s exhortation to the media to engage in “responsible reporting” and to “promote Namibia’s good image”, she equivocally stated: “the former is what we do”, while the “latter is not our problem. We have a duty to tell it like it is”.¹²⁶ Clearly, by 2000 Lister would have been well aware of worrying trends in the body politic calling for a more critical attitude. Du Pisani identifies the year 1995 as especially significant in that by then certain trends were becoming evident: “the erosion of [...] ethics”, the “concomitant decline of vibrant parliamentary opposition, the politics of patronage and the challenge of public accountability”.¹²⁷

Deeply aware of the damaging effects of colonialism and racism, Lister nevertheless endorsed those who displayed attitudes and abilities designed to overcome, rather than succumb to the tendency to ascribe blame for present failures to the past. On one occasion she commented approvingly on the life of former Robben Island inmate Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, as a person who embraced discipline and hard work, who never

¹²² Du Pisani, “The Namibian at 25”: 5.

¹²³ *The Namibian*, 30 July 2010: 6 (“Political Perspective”).

¹²⁴ Du Pisani, “The Namibian at 25”: 5.

¹²⁵ *The Namibian*, 6 August 2004: 6 (“Political Perspective”).

¹²⁶ *The Namibian*, 5 November 2010 (“Political Perspective”).

¹²⁷ Du Pisani, “The Namibian turns 15”: 12.

apportioned blame and was an honest, straight-forward person of great integrity.¹²⁸ This observation can be read as a veiled comment on the erosion of ethics in public life. There certainly appears to be a consistent trend of heaping abuse on non-conformist voices. Minister of Justice and former Attorney-General Pendukeni Ithana-Imvula warned Lister in a broadside in 2004:

Gwen Lister must know she is a white person and if she continues to write bad and negative things about Swapo leaders and other Namibians, we will take her to task for the wrongdoings committed by her fathers, mothers, grandfathers and her grandmothers. She must not forget she is a white person.¹²⁹

By the year 2000 du Pisani had already detected worrying trends such as senior government spokespersons denouncing critics as disloyal and directing “misguided” attacks on so-called “foreign” media.¹³⁰ Displays of intolerance by the former president and persons perceived to be close to him contrasted with a more tolerant attitude adopted by other Swapo figures. Geingob’s response has already been noted, while current president H. Pohamba once commented on his relationship with *The Namibian* and its editor by noting that he reads *The Namibian* and its editor “my sister Gwen Lister”, is welcome to talk to him.¹³¹

The manner in which *The Namibian* and its editor had been singled out for criticism can be interpreted as the result of its insistence on maintaining the paper’s editorial independence and a refusal to embrace the ruling party’s hegemonic grip on Namibian politics and its monopolisation of the cultural memory of the Namibian nation. *The Namibian*’s independent-mindedness is premised on the belief that all “people have the same rights and the same claim to respect, no matter whether or not they live in the same ways as each other.”¹³² Being the torch-bearer of such a vision, *The Namibian* “invokes the hope that people will see and treat others as individuals, not as label-bearers of one kind or another, such as ‘patriots’, ‘nationalists’, loyalists’, ‘dissenters’ and ‘hibernators’”.¹³³ *The Namibian* is by no means a paper with a record of reactionary or radical opposition to government. In fact, one may agree with du Pisani that *The Namibian* may arguably have “lost some of its erstwhile edge in exposing corruption and the abuse of power” though he concedes that it offers regular contributions from persons of different ideological persuasions.¹³⁴ There is no comparison between the paper and the Mail and Guardian of South Africa in terms of investigative reporting and

¹²⁸ *The Namibian*, 20 August 2008: 6 (“Political Perspective”).

¹²⁹ Quoted in O’Linn, *Namibia*, vol. 2: 285.

¹³⁰ Du Pisani, “The Namibian turns 15”: 12.

¹³¹ *The Namibian*, 1 October 2010 (interview with President-elect H. Pohamba by Christof Maletsky). It is nevertheless significant that President Pohamba, as well as the founding president, refused to provide the Namibian with messages on the 25th anniversary of the paper, despite requests to do so (Maletsky, “Interview”: 13).

¹³² Du Pisani, “Namibian at 25”: 6

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.: 7.

analytic criticism of government, and this in itself is a telling comment on the situation in the local media.

In the final instance the role of a newspaper such as *The Namibian* is that it, more so than opposition parties and an increasingly ineffective parliament, serves as reliable watch dog, representing the interests of ordinary Namibians. It is becoming increasingly evident that whatever its shortcomings, *The Namibian*, and to a lesser extent a host of other local newspapers and journals, hold out the only realistic hope for a degree of transparency and accountability in public life.¹³⁵

Other instances of initiatives for change, 1960 to the present

At the start of this paper it was argued that the life and work of the individuals profiled here reflected the more visible manifestations of a slowly changing political landscape. It was especially during the 1980s that various groups and organisations became active in opposition to South African rule.¹³⁶ There were other individuals too, less concerned with opposing SA rule, than with reaching out and making contact with their African counterparts. An earlier example is former politician Japie Basson, who represented the Namib constituency in the SA parliament in the 1950s and retained ties with Namibia until his death. He was involved in early attempts to promote political initiatives designed to soften the impact of apartheid and dogmatic National Party rule. In 1961 his short-lived Southwest Party issued a statement which blamed the NP for the loss of faith experienced by 'non-Europeans' in 'Europeans'. It further argued that only a policy acceptable to the disenfranchised and consultation with them could solve SA's problems.¹³⁷ He was perhaps best-known in the South African political context for being a political maverick, unafraid for taking on the might of the NP and being in the forefront of initiatives to promote political change in South Africa, first as a member of the United Party and thereafter the Progressive Federal Party. At the time of Basson's death he was credited with being one of the few SA parliamentarians who displayed consistent honesty, a critical approach and principled independent-mindedness.¹³⁸

In 1974 Henning Melber was one of the first white Namibians to join Swapo and in the 1980s he was active in the movements supporting Swapo and the independence of

¹³⁵ Although the Namibian media frequently carry reports of alleged corruption in the public sector and in semi-state enterprises, only the magazine *Namibia Insight*, whose former editor Tangeni Amupadi is the current editor of *The Namibian*, can be credited with attempts at critical and analytical coverage of political trends and developments.

¹³⁶ Cf. Botha, "Constraints": 18-22. Especially active were community-orientated organisations like Bricks, church groups and the Namibian Union of Mine Workers. The Legal Assistance Centre was also a notable organisation involved in providing legal advice and assistance to people.

¹³⁷ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 30 May 1961.

¹³⁸ Gerald Shaw wrote in an obituary in the 11 August 2010 edition of the *Cape Times* that Basson "brought rare distinction to membership of Parliament which in his time was often more notable for cynicism and self-serving mediocrity. He was a free spirit who spoke his mind and could not be easily bracketed in any political ideology."

Namibia. He was director of the Namibia Economic Policy Research Unit (Nepru) from 1992 to 2000 when he resigned to take up the position as Research Director of the Dag Hammerskjöld Foundation in Sweden and, until 2012, its Executive Director. Since then Melber has clearly become disillusioned with the former liberation movement now in office. During the last decade he systematically subjected the current government's policies and the actions of individuals to critical scrutiny. His analysis led him to conclude that a key feature of post-independent Namibia was the persistence of inequality and the growing culture of conspicuous consumption and corruption displayed by the new elite, who have merged seamlessly with the pre-independence elite. An oft-stated criticism of his is that independence in Namibia was the outcome of an elite compact. Another worrying trend for him was the culture of intolerance displayed, especially since the turn of the century. The campaign against Gwen Lister and *The Namibian* caused him to comment that those in power who target opponents who do not share their limited political perspectives, now act in the same manner as pre-independence power brokers to "exclude, marginalize, ridicule and offend".¹³⁹

Attorney Dave Smuts defended *The Namibian* and its editor in most of the cases brought against them in the 1980s. He was intimately involved in the case brought by the then interim government when it sought to impose a deposit of R20,000 on the paper, against the usual R10 for most newspapers. The end result was a landmark judgement in which Judge H. Levy ruled against the interim government, arguing that "constructive criticism was fundamental to a healthy democratic society."¹⁴⁰ Smuts started the Legal Assistance Centre in 1992 which provided advice and assistance to people unable to afford it. In 1990 he received an award for human rights activism from Human Rights Watch. He is currently serving as an acting judge on the Namibian Supreme Court.¹⁴¹

Outside the fields of politics, human rights and legal issues, there were also individuals concerned with establishing contacts in a professional context. Charles Truebody was instrumental in the creation of the Private Sector Foundation, a body aiming to promote African participation in private enterprise. Notable instances of women active in the local community were Olga Levinson, author and patron of the arts and Mrs. Joey Schoeman, who served for many years in the South African Foundation. Both were involved in initiatives designed to establish contact with leading African personalities. These people, and many others could be added, were liberal-minded and concerned with normalising relations with their African counterparts. Christopher Saunders has mentioned the role of people like Robert Mize, bishop of Damaraland and head of the Anglican Church between 1960 and 1968 when he was deported, bishop Colin Winter, who succeeded Mize and was himself deported, Michael Scott and lawyer David Soggot who wrote *Namibia. The Violent Heritage*, apart from others such as O'Linn, Lister, Goldblatt, Anton Lubowski and Dave Smuts and whites involved in NPP 435. He raises

¹³⁹ Henning Melber, "Media and democracy: the struggle continues", *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 25.

¹⁴⁰ *The Namibian. 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2000: 43.

¹⁴¹ *The Namibian 1985–2010. 25th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine*, Windhoek, 2010: 18.

the question how significant the role of these and others have been in developing “a non-racial ethos” in present-day Namibia.¹⁴² A mere survey of the ideas and work of a small number of individuals, as set out in this paper, is unlikely to answer this question. At least though, the ideas and work of these individuals are available for scrutiny, as well as their commitment to the creation of a democratic ethos and a more just society.¹⁴³

Conclusion

As this paper has attempted to demonstrate it is very difficult to assess the impact of liberal ideas in Namibia, precisely because, unlike in South Africa, few persons actively set out to promote liberalism in an organisational framework. Nevertheless, the personalities that feature in this paper shared certain convictions and ideas: they were acutely aware of the damaging effects of apartheid on both coloniser and colonised; they were keen to break down the imposed shackles inhibiting contact between black and white people and they actively promoted the creation of a society based on liberal values such as the rule of law, democracy and freedom of speech and association. If it is difficult to measure the exact impact of the activities and ideas of these persons, it is nevertheless instructive to note that the challenge to the status quo, which institutionalised the denial of basic human rights, and the fight for democracy and freedom in Namibia spanned the political, religious, academic, legal and media spectrum. Of particular significance is how much the ideas and beliefs of these persons reflected the core values of the Namibian constitution. In this sense their work had an element of consistency that is lacking in that of the majority of political leaders who tended to be opportunistic, shaping policies and beliefs according to changes in the political landscape.

One might ask whether the sustained criticism of Swapo by these figures since the year 2000 can be ascribed to a desire to promote the public interest or was due to frustrated ambitions. At least one informant has suggested that at least some of these individuals were disappointed at not having been recognised for their opposition to the previous dispensation by, for example, being elevated to senior government posts, or being acknowledged in other ways. Even if this is true, it is still incumbent on critics to assess the relevance of their work, not their alleged frustrated ambitions.

There is an opinion that Namibia’s liberal constitution is the outcome of Swapo’s long association with and exposure to liberal ideas. The liberation movement’s own history is of a more chequered character, however, veering between an embrace of socialist ideas and more liberal opinions. It may simply be a case of Swapo having realised at the time that the adoption of a liberal constitution would be most appropriate for purposes of stability, reconciliation and investor trust. Inevitably though, questions may be raised about whether core liberal values such as tolerance and understanding would prevail

¹⁴² Saunders, “Voice from Namibia”: 2010: 88.

¹⁴³ Wide-ranging interviews with a cross-section of Namibians with experience of developments since the 1960s, Africans in particular, may be the way to shed more light on this issue.

over countervailing tendencies. On a positive note, reference can be made to the incremental changes that have taken place over the years to render Namibia's whites in particular, more accepting of majority rule. In the final analysis at least some credit should be given to those who laboured continuously to challenge racism and intolerance and helped to prepare the ground for a change in attitudes.

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