# Colonial Aspects of Finnish-Namibian Relations, 1870–1990

*Cultural Change, Endurance and Resistance*

Edited by
Leila Koivunen and Raita Merivirta

Studia Fennica
Historica

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Historica 28

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FI-00171 Helsinki
www.finlit.fi

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Finnish Literature Society • SKS • Helsinki • 2024

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The publication has undergone a peer review.

The collection of archived publications of the Finnish Literature Society is included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

This book project has been supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.



Series Cover Design: Timo Numminen
Cover Layout: Eija Hukka
Series Layout Design: Markus Itkonen
Layout: Sisko Honkala
EPUB: Tero Salmén

ISBN 978-951-858-885-9 (Print)
ISBN 978-951-858-886-6 (EPUB)
ISBN 978-951-858-887-3 (PDF)

ISSN 0085-6835 (Studia Fennica. Print)
ISSN 2669-9605 (Studia Fennica. Online)
ISSN 1458-526X (Studia Fennica Historica. Print)
ISSN 2669-9591 (Studia Fennica Historica Online)

DOI https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28



A free open access version of the book is available at https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28 or by scanning this QR code with your mobile device.

BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt, Germany 2024

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A Bibliography is available at
URN:NBN:fi-fe2024040214102 or by scanning
this QR code with your mobile device.

# From the Arrival of First Finnish Missionaries in Owambo to Collaborative History-Writing[1]

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The question of Finns' complicity in colonialism has surfaced in public debates, academic texts and social media with increasing frequency in recent years. Two edited volumes – *Finnish Colonial Encounters* and *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America* – as well as a special issue of the journal *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* have addressed this contentious topic since 2020.[2] A further edited collection has been devoted to colonialism in the Finnish borderlands.[3] As part of this emerging scholarly field and amidst increased popular interest in Finnish colonial entanglements, this edited collection focuses on the colonial and anti-colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations from the late nineteenth century until Namibian independence in 1990. The area constituting present-day Namibia, and especially Owambo, has played a central role in the Finnish imaginary and understanding of all matters African since the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) started its work there in 1870. Furthermore, it can be argued that although Finland never held any overseas colonies, the area that presently constitutes Namibia, and especially the Owambo region in the north, may have had a similar status vis-à-vis Finland in the past as colonies to colonising powers in the area of knowledge formation. At the very least, the possible colonial – as well as anti-colonial – aspects of this relationship merit further examination. This edited collection focuses on Finnish-Namibian relations between 1870–1990, and, with the aid of different case studies, sheds light on the linkages, resemblances and differences of this long bond between the two countries in terms of a colonial dynamic.

When the first Finnish missionaries arrived in Owambo in 1870, the area was ruled by local kings, some of whom – King Shikongo of Ondonga, King Shipandeka of Oukwanyama and King Nuujoma of Uukwambi[4] – had invited European missionaries to their respective realms. The German missionary Hugo Hahn, who worked among

1. The editors wish to thank the Finnish Cultural Foundation for supporting this book project.
2. Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä (eds.) 2021; Andersson and Lahti (eds.) 2022; Kullaa and Lahti (eds.) 2020.
3. Kullaa, Lahti and Lakomäki (eds.) 2022.
4. There is variation in the spelling of some Owambo names for places, individuals and kingdoms. This is due to many reasons: words are pronounced and spelt diversely in various Oshiwambo dialects and not all dialects have a written standard. At times Finnish missionaries also created their own versions based on how they heard a word. Therefore, early texts on Owambo often contained different forms of the same word and this has also had an impact on modern scholarly works in which different spellings of names are used. This volume also includes examples of such variation.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

the Herero people further to the east and to whom the Aawambo[5] kings had made their request during his travels in the area, informed the FMS of this invitation,[6] as he felt that the Rhenish Missionary Society, which he himself represented, would be kept busy by the growing needs of the work among the Herero people.[7] The FMS, founded in 1859, had originally planned to start missionary work among Finno-Ugric peoples in Siberia and elsewhere in the Russian Empire, but as these plans had to be abandoned, it welcomed the invitation sent by the Rhenish colleagues and sent a group of seven missionaries to Owambo. In the early twentieth century, the FMS also began its work in other parts of the world, especially in China. Among the first Finnish missionaries in Owambo was one Martti Rautanen,[8] who was to stay in the area until his death in 1926. Rautanen made a name for himself not only as a missionary but also as a translator and the creator of written language for Oshindonga, an Oshiwambo dialect.[9]

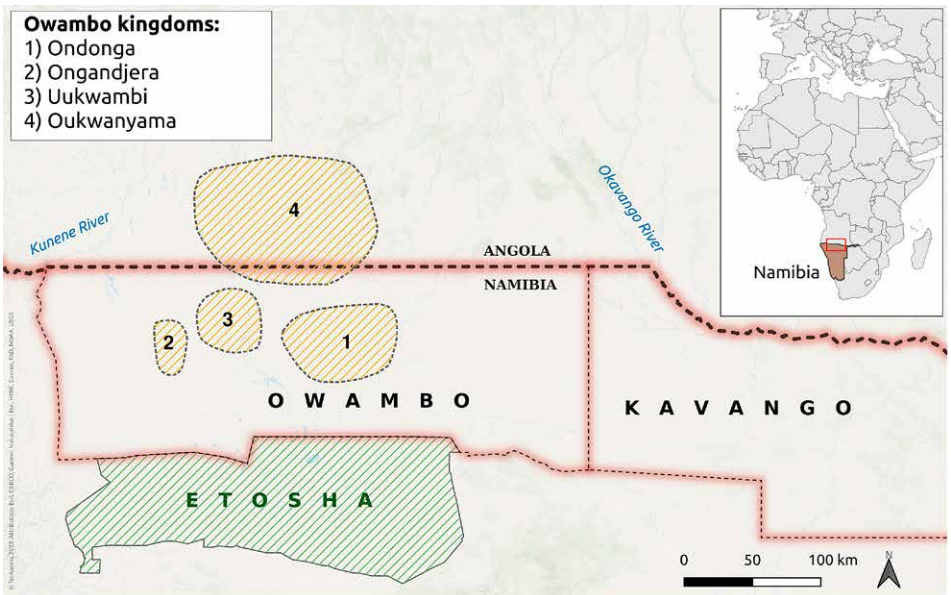


Figure 1. This indicative map shows the location of the Owambo region in present-day northern Namibia and the four Owambo kingdoms in which the Finnish missionaries started their work in the 1870s. Their work in Kavango began in the 1920s. Map: © Henrikki Tenkanen, 2023. Attribution: Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue | Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS.

5. We use the word Aawambo, which refers to an ethnic group who live in the Owambo region. Due to the colonial connotations of the name Ovamboland, we use the form Owambo, unless referring to the bantustan of Ovamboland that the South African government established as a 'homeland' for the Aawambo as part of its apartheid policy. Authors of the anthology sometimes also refer to Namibia and Finland even when discussing a period of time when they were not yet independent countries.
6. The predecessor of present-day FELM, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.
7. Paunu 1908, 79–80, 107, 112; Peltola 1958, 28–31; Miettinen 2005, 87–88.
8. Throughout this volume we use the Finnish form of his name Martti, even though his name has also been spelled as Martin especially in Swedish sources.
9. Peltola 1958, 31–32; Miettinen 2005, 88; Löytty 2006, 38.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Finnish missionaries began their work in four Owambo kingdoms – Ondonga, Oukwanyama, Uukwambi and Ongandjera – in 1870, but by 1872 they had already been expelled from all bar Ondonga. The kings had had high hopes of benefitting from the presence of Western missionaries and thus strengthening their position in comparison to neighbouring communities. The reality proved otherwise, and suspicions grew on both sides that quickly led to problems and conflict. Moreover, in Ondonga, where the missionaries were able to establish relatively stable relations with the local ruling families, occasional conflicts occurred and restricted the spread of Christianity. The first Aawambo people were baptised in Ondonga only in 1883, and the number of baptised people remained modest until the 1920s, when conversion on a larger scale began to take place. This was also connected to the territorial expansion of Finnish missionary activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to re-establishing its activities at mission stations that it had abandoned, the FMS now began its work among several other communities.[10] The FMS introduced its first pastoral courses in the early 1920s, and as the number of ordinations and local pastors began to increase, the Finns fostered indigenous leadership. The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church, established in 1925, was first led by missionaries but gradually they stepped aside and assumed more of an assisting role.[11]

For a long time, Finnish missionaries were the only large group of Europeans that resided in the Owambo region. In 1884, Germany declared the area that forms present-day Namibia as its colonial possession, calling it South West Africa, but the grip of the German colonial administration in Owambo was weak or even non-existent. Finnish missionaries acted as middlemen between German colonial officers and the Aawambo.[12] South African troops took over the land in 1915, during World War I. In 1920, after Germany was forced to relinquish its colonies as a condition of the Treaty of Versailles, South Africa began to undertake the administration of South West Africa under a mandate granted by the League of Nations. South Africa continued to rule the region, even in the face of resistance by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) from 1966 until Namibian independence in 1990. A notable figure in securing independence for Namibia at this time was the Finn Martti Ahtisaari, who had an influential role as the UN Special Representative heading the UN Transition Assistance Group.[13]

At the time of the first contact of Finnish missionaries with the Aawambo, the latter formed independent kingdoms, whilst Finland was still an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire and Finns were increasingly agitating against imperial control from St. Petersburg. The establishment of the FMS can be viewed as one manifestation of the wider Finnish desire to become a civilised and civilising European people in their own right. As Ulla Vuorela argues, the willingness to be accepted by and belong to the white, European centres led to Finns accepting hegemonic discourses and becoming complicit in European colonial ideas. This was at odds with late nineteenth-century European racial theories that posited that

10. Miettinen 2005, 89–90. See also Peltola 1958.
11. Buys and Nambala 2003, 162–163.
12. Peltola 1958, 85–88; McKittrick 2002, 17.
13. Soiri and Peltola 1999.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Finns were ethnically Mongols.[14] Central to these ideas was the 'coloniality of power,' which was constructed on the European idea of race and racial hierarchy with white Europeans at the top.[15] Finns rarely recognised this complicity.[16]

When Finland gained independence in 1917, South West Africa had been a colony for more than three decades. In newly-independent Finland, a four-member delegation led by Professor Gustaf Komppa approached Undersecretary K. G. Idman at the Finnish Foreign Ministry in 1918 and requested that the ministry should begin to work towards acquiring Owambo as a colony for Finland. Nothing came of this plan, but the fact remains that some people in Finland actually gave serious consideration to this colonial enterprise.[17] Finland never came into possession of any overseas colonies and this, combined with the history of having been subsumed into the Russian Empire in 1809, contributed to the Finnish self-understanding of their own colonial innocence. However, the broadening definitions of colonialism, whereby it is not only seen as the conquest, settlement, continued rule and economic exploitation of an overseas area by a (European) state, but also includes more cultural components, has prompted historians to examine the relationship of Finns to colonialism. This scholarship has attracted a great deal of attention but has also been met with criticism.

The potentially colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian history have only been briefly discussed in the edited collections mentioned above, as their focus has been on other regions and issues rather than Finnish missionaries abroad.[18] This edited collection continues to probe questions of colonialism in relation to the shared Finnish-Namibian history: Did the Finnish presence in (present-day) Namibia include colonial or anti-colonial aspects at some point? How did the peoples living in the area that constitutes modern-day Namibia respond to the presence, influence and activities of Finns? Did the Finnish missionaries' formulation and dissemination of knowledge concerning Owambo include colonial aspects, and, if so, what were these aspects? What kind of roles did Finland and individual Finns play in the Namibian struggle for independence?

The Finnish presence in Namibia began as missionary activity in Owambo, and the legacy of this Christian presence is still strongly evident in the area. As this edited collection examines the potential coloniality of Finnish-Namibian historical relations, the colonial connections of the root cause of the Finnish presence in Owambo need to be scrutinised. Were Christian missionaries, including missionaries from countries without colonies, complicit in colonialism in areas colonised by European powers? This question will be discussed in relation to Finns in Owambo in some of the chapters that follow, but a brief general discussion of the topic is in order prior to this.

In discussing the question of whether missionaries were colonisers, Danish historian Karen Vallgårda has noted that, in the context of colonial India, there is a continuum of scholarly views. At one end, there are researchers who have focused on

14. Vuorela 2009, 20.
15. Quijano 2000, 533.
16. Vuorela 2009, 20.
17. Peltola 1958, 182; Löytty 2006, 14.
18. Napandulwe Shiweda's chapter on the Finnish missionaries' photography of the Aawambo is an exception. See Shiweda 2021.



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more traditional mission history, that is, the missionaries' theological views, beliefs and official policies. These researchers often do not see missionaries as complicit in colonialism to any great extent nor do they necessarily discuss colonialism in connection with missionaries. At the other end of the continuum, there are mainly 'postcolonial researchers who are interested in the cultural and social labour of the missionaries' and in examining the many ways colonial power was exerted.[19] Vallgårda notes that the latter kind of researchers usually view colonialism in broader terms, as 'a cultural, epistemological and even psychological – as well as economic and military – endeavour,' whereas the former type of scholars see colonialism in narrower and more traditional terms.[20] She asserts that denying or downplaying missionaries' colonial complicity means overlooking 'the subtle aspects of colonialism,' that is, the cultural and epistemological aspects that supported the conquest, rule and exploitation of overseas areas and peoples.[21]

However, the European cultural labour that supported colonial rule in overseas areas could and did take place also in Europe, and missionaries were no strangers to this labour. Especially before the twentieth century, mission discourse had elements of and contributed to what we have elsewhere called 'cultural colonialism.'[22] Writing about the missionary work of Norwegians among the Zulu people in South Africa, Hanna Mellemsether argues straightforwardly that (Norwegian) mission discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of wider European colonial discourse and categorises mission journals as colonial texts. She also points out that the influence of the descriptions of Africa contained within mission journals at the time was particularly great. This stemmed from the fact that Norway possessed no colonies and therefore it was missionaries rather than colonists, explorers or scientists that produced most of the colonial discourse in Norway. The readers of these magazines rarely read texts that complemented or contradicted the narratives laid out in the journals.[23] Mellemsether argues that, although the mission discourse is distinguished by its ideological base from other forms of colonial discourse at the time, it is not separate from them: 'The mission discourse, the missionaries, their texts and their practices occur in a colonial reality and thus within a colonial discourse.'[24]

In Finland, awareness of Owambo and Africa grew gradually over the course of several decades. The FMS diligently distributed information about Owambo and the progress of the missionary work there to the supporters of the cause. Touring around the country and speaking about the missionary work in parishes, schools, garrisons and on the radio was almost obligatory for missionaries after they returned to Finland. It can be and has been argued that the various materials, including mission journals, educational materials, novels, photographs, maps, graphs and displays of African objects produced and circulated by the Finnish Missionary Society to distribute information about Owambo and the progress of their missionary work

19. Vallgårda 2016, 868–869.
20. Vallgårda 2016, 870.
21. Vallgårda 2016, 870.
22. Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä 2021.
23. Mellemsether 2001, 185.
24. Mellemsether 2001, 191.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

to the supporters of the cause were partly and to various degrees influenced by and contributed to colonial discourse.[25]

This does not mean that the presence of Finnish missionaries in what is today Namibia should be labelled as wholly and uniformly colonial without any exceptions or changes over time. Instead, a nuanced examination of sources is called for. The Finnish literary scholar Olli Löytty has advised caution when examining Finnish missionary texts for colonial traces. One of the central questions Löytty posed in his dissertation on the representation of Owambo in Finnish missionary literature concerned the applicability of a postcolonial framework and theories to Finnish missionary texts on Owambo. He emphasised that one needs to be cautious with this approach because the postcolonial theoretical framework developed for postcolonial discourse analysis entails assumptions about the quality of the discourses under examination that may not be suited to analysis of Finnish texts.[26] Löytty pointed out that the Owambo of Finnish missionary literature is an ambivalent place, full of contradictions. The Eurocentrism and othering discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century become significantly less pronounced towards the latter half of the twentieth century when Owambo was more familiar to Finns and times and discourses had changed. Furthermore, Finnish missionaries did not form a unified bloc in terms of their ideas, views and discourses about the Aawambo. Indeed, their writings contained significant differences.[27]

In this edited collection, we acknowledge that there is a need to be cautious when labelling Finnish missionaries as colonially complicit and in applying the postcolonial theoretical framework to the history of Finns in Namibia. Yet, we follow in the footsteps of Karen Vallgårda and other researchers who argue that European missions in Africa and Asia often involved at least 'subtle aspects of colonialism.' This book has been informed by a broader, cultural definition of colonialism and the concept of *colonialism without colonies*, developed by Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk and Patricia Purtschert in the Swiss context.[28] They note the following, which we view as particularly relevant to the present edited volume:

> By pointing to the epistemological dimensions of colonialism, postcolonial studies has shown how the justification, the embodiment and the perpetuation of colonialism have been structured and supported by specific European systems of knowledge which have had a long-lasting effect, and not just on European societies.[29]

Finns have arguably acted in a colonial manner at least in the area of knowledge production on Africa/ns – much like the Swiss, another small European nation, which has held no colonies or a population of slave-descent.[30] Finnish missionaries brought about transformations in Aawambo culture as they introduced Western

25. Löytty 2006; Koivunen 2011; Harju 2018; Merivirta 2019; Shiweda 2021; Skurnik 2021.
26. Löytty 2006, 285.
27. Löytty 2006, 165–167, 214, 279–283.
28. Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert 2016.
29. Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi 2015, 8.
30. For the Swiss missionaries and colonial knowledge formation in Southern Africa, see Harries 2007. For Swiss colonialism without colonies, see Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi 2015 and Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné (eds.) 2015.



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modes of education, medicine, material culture and social practices, particularly Evangelical Lutheranism and literary languages. The work in Owambo set in motion complex epistemological processes that subsequently influenced the formation of both Finnish and Namibian conceptions of the world and of each other. Due to the imbalance in power positions throughout much of the common history of the two nations, Namibian voices and agency have often been subsumed by Finnish voices and narratives. The aim of this edited collection is to combine different perspectives, by including writers not only from Finland, but also from Namibia and South Africa as the latter form a central colonial context for shared Finnish-Namibian history.

While Finnish missionary activity in Owambo was central to the shared history of Finns and Namibian peoples for decades, the latter half of the twentieth century was mainly characterised by other kinds of shared history in connection to colonialism, as cultural colonialism gradually faded and the Namibian struggle for independence from South Africa grew in strength. A number of Finnish missionaries and other actors engaged in solidarity work in support of the struggle for Namibian independence. As mentioned above, Martti Ahtisaari held an official UN role in the process. While three of the collection's four sections focus on the interaction between Finnish missionaries and the Aawambo and the San people, the fourth section consists of articles examining this phase of the shared history of Namibia and Finland.

* * *

Studies on the historical relationship between Finns and Namibians have previously been written in both countries. In Finland, research began in the early twentieth century and was conducted by theologians and church historians. In 1908–1909, Uno Paunu, a missionary and later the director of the FMS, published a description of the beginning of Finnish mission work in Owambo. The first overall history of the African work of the FMS, *Suomen Lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia*, was published in 1958 by the missionary and missiologist Matti Peltola.[31] In her unpublished licentiate thesis (1989), Tuula Varis examined what she called pastoral power and power relations within missionary work through the occupational practices of the Finnish missionaries in Owambo. The material of her thesis consisted of the correspondence between the missionaries and the FMS directors in Finland, reports, diaries, textbooks and other writings by the missionaries.[32] In the 1980s, with the aid of significant funding from the Research Council of Finland, historians were able to deepen earlier scholarship by focusing on questions of cultural and societal change that took place in the Owambo region from the latter part of the nineteenth century. This wave of research resulted in publications that were central in charting the main political and economic developments that took place in the area. For instance, Harri Siiskonen (1990) examined the patterns of trade and socio-economic change in Owambo between 1850–1906 in his doctoral dissertation and Martti Eirola (1992) focused on the beginning of the German colonial rule in Owambo between 1884–1910 and local responses to it in his doctoral thesis. These studies were based on diverse archival

31. For studies on the history of the FMS, see Kemppainen 1998; Kena 2000.
32. Varis 1989.



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material, especially the extensive collection of the Finnish Missionary Society, but also German missionary and administrative primary sources.

The research of Frieda-Nela Williams and Patricia Hayes has played a pioneering role in the use of oral tradition to write histories of Owambo. Williams employed oral tradition in her *Precolonial Communities of Southwestern Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms 1600–1920* (1991), noting that the sources for precolonial African history are mainly oral. Williams also made use of the material in the Emil Liljeblad Collection. This unique ethnographic material includes written folklore narratives of over one hundred Oshiwambo speakers, which were gathered in the early 1930s by Liljeblad. He was a former missionary who returned to Owambo after receiving a grant from the Finnish Academy of Science.[33] The Liljeblad Collection was also an invaluable source for Maija Hiltunen (née Tuupainen), who examined marriage customs among the Ondonga people in her doctoral dissertation[34] and used the collection to undertake research for her monographs *Witchcraft and Sorcery in Ovambo* (1986) and *Good Magic in Ovambo* (1993). Patricia Hayes utilised both archival records and oral interviews conducted in Owambo in 1989–1990 for her doctoral dissertation entitled *A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c. 1880–1935* (1992). The second volume of her dissertation includes valuable reflections on the methods of using oral sources for historical research as well as transcripts of select interviews.

The history of Christianity in Owambo and the changes in traditional belief systems have also garnered interest among subsequent generations of scholars. In her book *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (2002), Meredith McKittrick examined the trajectories of Christianisation and change before colonialism and during the colonial period. G. L. Buys and Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala wrote a history of the church in Namibia (2003), whereas Kari Miettinen examined the motivations for and social consequences of conversion in colonial Ovamboland (2005). Lovisa Tegelela Nampala explored the effect Christianity has had on the Aawambo culture/s (2006) and Märta Salokoski (2006) focused on rituals concerning Aawambo kingship and ritual change. Vilho Shigwedha (2006) examined the changes in Aawambo fashion brought about by Christianity and colonialism. Many of these scholars combined archival research with oral history interviews that they conducted themselves, thereby highlighting local perspectives.

The Namibian struggle for independence was studied in Finland by Iina Soiri, whose MA thesis was published under the title *The Radical Motherhood: Namibian Women's Independence Struggle* (1996). Together with Pekka Peltola, she also examined how and why Finland supported the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa (1999). Chris Saunders has investigated the transition from apartheid to democracy in Namibia and South Africa (2016). Christian Williams has studied SWAPO's exile camps and the experiences of Namibians who lived in exile during Southern Africa's anti-colonial struggles (2015).

33. On the character of the collection, see Salokoski 2006, 51–54. The original narratives and their Finnish translations are stored at the Finnish National Library, but copies can also be found at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek.
34. Tuupainen 1970.



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In recent decades, a number of studies have also been written on the growing awareness of Owambo and Africa more generally in Finland and the impact of missionary publications and other material on Finnish self-understanding and worldviews. As mentioned, Olli Löytty (2006) studied the representation of Owambo in Finnish missionary literature and Teuvo Raiskio has examined the San people (1997). Studies have also drawn on other materials and themes. Leila Koivunen (2011) and Kaisa Harju (2018) have examined the history of collecting Owambo artefacts among Finnish missionaries and the practices of putting them on display in Finland. Raita Merivirta (2019) has written about the ways that Finnish youth novels conveyed information about Owambo to young readers in Finland. Johanna Skurnik (2021) has investigated missionary maps circulated by the FMS and Essi Huuhka has written about the discussions of Finnish missionaries to provide the Aawambo with Western clothing (2019).

As discussed above, oral history material has played a pivotal role in examining Finnish-Namibian relations. In recent years, memory and remembering have also become important topics of research. Kim Groop, for instance, has studied the ways Finnish mission work is remembered in Aawambo culture (2017, 2018) and Ellen Ndeshi Namhila has explored colonial gaps in the post-colonial National Archive of Namibia and the possibility of finding material on certain persons and topics (2015).

* * *

The present book has its roots in two recently edited collections: *Intertwined Histories: 150 Years of Finnish-Namibian Relations* (2019) and *Finnish Colonial Encounters: From Anti-Imperialism to Cultural Colonialism and Complicity* (2021).[35] A partnership agreement between the University of Turku (Finland) and the University of Namibia brought historians from Turku and Windhoek together in 2018. The following year, to celebrate the 150 years of Finnish-Namibian relations, researchers from Finland and Namibia compiled a popular festschrift entitled *Intertwined Histories*, which analysed existing historical knowledge on the topic from both perspectives. The collaboration between the Universities of Turku and Namibia has borne fruit and helped us realise the great potential of working together in approaching, conceptualising, examining and (re)writing our intertwined history. It has also made us better understand the local circumstances in Finland and Owambo that resulted in a special relationship between two culturally and geographically distinct people.

Editing *Intertwined Histories* evinced that novel scholarship on Finnish-Namibian relations – informed by current debates on the coloniality of knowledge and decolonisation – is greatly needed to produce historical knowledge that answers the call to decolonise existing modes of scholarly knowledge production. Soon after, when the editors of this volume circulated the call for papers for *Finnish Colonial Encounters*, we solicited and received some chapter proposals from Namibia and South Africa, addressing questions related to the shared history of Finns and Namibians. This stressed the need to examine Finnish-Namibian history collaboratively and from the perspective of its possible colonial aspects. Without denying the importance of earlier studies in laying a firm grounding for our understanding of Finnish-Namibian

35. Kaartinen, Koivunen and Shiweda (eds.) 2019; Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä (eds.) 2021.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

historical interactions, it is useful to ask what can be achieved by connecting two different perspectives and sets of sources more closely together. How can we combine different cultural knowledge and language skills in order to conduct research collaboratively? While we may not yet have all the answers to these questions, we have worked towards these goals in this edited collection.

Examining colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations does not, however, mean that all the chapters in this collection see Finnish missionaries as complicit in colonialism. Rather, many of the texts discuss how colonial ideas or practices, as well as resistance to these, may or may not have been factors in Finnish-Namibian encounters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both Finns and Namibians expressed a range of views on and reactions to their mutual interactions and cultural exchanges, and these views are explored in this collection. Furthermore, the volume also discusses Finnish and Namibian resistance to South African colonial rule.

Universal history was told in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the perspective of Western civilisation, which gained the 'epistemic privilege of narrating its own local history and projecting it onto universal history.'[36] In the twenty-first century, Walter Mignolo notes, there have been strong and diverse tendencies to write local histories disattached from Western universalist models:

> Nevertheless, non-Western local histories (and knowledges) cannot be constituted without entanglements with Western local history. Border thinking becomes, then, the necessary epistemology to delink and decolonize knowledge and, in the process, to build decolonial local histories.[37]

Border thinking refers here to knowledge and actions that aim to eliminate coloniality.[38] The current volume acknowledges that the work of Finnish missionaries as well as South African rule in South West Africa influenced the formation of Namibian conceptions of the world and that this work was informed by European hegemonic discourses. In order to produce decolonising histories, this collection has been written as a collaborative effort of scholars from Namibia, Finland and South Africa. The authors and editors convened workshops, commented on each other's papers, became more closely cognisant of the history and circumstances of the other authors and the sensitivity of some of the topics in the past and in the present. The collaborative working mode also made it possible to share sources and other material, knowledge, ideas and language skills. It also laid the ground for further collaborative research and lasting friendships. The project of examining the colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations and of decolonising Namibian history is in no way completed by this single volume, but it is our hope that it marks the beginning of a long and beautiful collaborative process.

The anthology is based on diverse source materials. The authors have made extensive use of archival material related to the activities of the FMS, found in Finnish and Namibian archives. Administrative documents, missionary correspondence and diaries have been particularly useful in our research. A great variety of FMS

36. Mignolo 2012, ix.
37. Mignolo 2012, x.
38. Mignolo 2012, xviii.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

periodicals, children's and youth novels, missionary memoirs and other publications produced by the FMS, as well as non-religious newspapers and magazines, have been examined. In addition to textual material, the authors have analysed photographs, maps and other visual materials and investigated traditional artefacts and handicrafts. Several chapters are based on already existing ethnographic or oral history material, and numerous new interviews have also been conducted to gather information on different aspects of traditional cultures in Namibia. In researching the fight for freedom and international efforts to promote the independence of Namibia the authors have used letters, personal archives and autobiographical works of those who were involved, as well as Finnish government records.

In geographical terms, the focus of the anthology is on both Finland and the Owambo region, which extended beyond the border of modern-day Angola. The Ondonga Kingdom is more frequently discussed than other Owambo kingdoms, because the presence and influence of the Finns was felt strongest in this area. Examples are also cited from the Kavango region further to the east, where Finnish mission began in a later phase.

## *Structure and Content of the Book*

This edited collection is divided into four sections each of which approaches the common theme of colonial aspects in Finnish-Namibian relations between 1870–1990 from a different angle. The first section focuses on various forms of interaction, collaboration and confrontation encountered by the Finnish missionaries active in Owambo. The first chapter, written by Kim Groop and Anneli Ndapandula Haufiku, investigates the Oshiwambo name for Saturday, *Olyomakaya*, which translates as tobacco day. The name derives from the practice of Finnish missionaries to distribute tobacco on Saturdays and encourage the recipients to come to church the following day. Groop and Haufiku explore the practice of distributing tobacco, but also how tobacco use and *Olyomakaya* is remembered in contemporary Aawambo culture. In her chapter, Meameno Aileen Shiweda analyses the role of Finnish missionaries in teacher training education in northern Namibia between 1920–1970. A special emphasis is on the education of local girls and women and the new social positions and challenges they encountered. Shiweda explores the accounts of three pioneering women, focusing mainly on their educational and professional journeys. Some Finnish missionaries initially resisted women undertaking teacher training. However, those eventually trained as teachers would inspire other women to follow in their pioneering footsteps.

In his chapter, Martti Eirola examines an incident in 1886 when Martti Rautanen, a Finnish missionary, and Dr Hans Schinz, a Swiss explorer and botanist, broke off three pieces from the sacred power stone of the Kingdom of Ondonga, thereby violating the law of the kingdom. Two fragments of the stone ended up in the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of Finland. The Ondonga fragments were cut off in a colonial context from their sacred mother stone and the information it contained. Eirola describes how the stone incident happened and analyses what it meant locally and for the interaction between Finns and the Ondonga people. Lastly, he discusses the repatriation project that was completed in April 2023.



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In the last chapter of the section, Harri Siiskonen examines the dreams and reality of the Finnish mission work among the hunter-gatherer San groups in North-Central Namibia between the 1950s and 1970s. The chapter discusses how the reality encountered by missionaries working among the mobile Sans corresponded with a documentary film that was produced in 1967 by the FMS to be shown in Finland. The strategy of sedentarising San groups did not proceed as expected, and missionaries learned from setbacks that understanding the worldview of nomadic hunter-gatherers was necessary.

In the second section, the focus is turned to Finland and the ways that knowledge on Owambo that had been collected and formulated by missionaries was disseminated to a wider Finnish audience. As a result of this new information, Finns came to know more about Owambo and Africa in general and many felt that it was necessary to support the Christian work being carried out in this faraway region.

In her chapter, Leila Koivunen examines the construction of the public story of an Aawambo girl among the Finnish mission community. Nanguroshi, a foster child of a Finnish missionary family, was brought to Finland in 1875. She was subsequently baptised and renamed Eva Maria, and sent back to Africa in 1879. The chapter focuses on mechanisms by which it was hoped that promotional efforts, closely related to Western colonial worldviews, would generate donations and support for mission work. Nanguroshi's story tells us about the need to direct attention to named African individuals as representatives of their people and the effects of mission work.

Essi Huuhka's chapter examines the famine in Owambo in 1908–1909 and the ways in which it was reported in the FMS periodical in order to raise awareness and funds among Finnish mission friends. While international humanitarian campaigns, aiming to alleviate distress on the African continent, were already common in the Anglo-American world, the FMS's fundraising effort was the first of its kind in Finland. Donations were small, but indicate that famine relief in Owambo was seen as a worthy cause by FMS supporters.

In their chapter, Raita Merivirta and Johanna Skurnik explore how Owambo and the Aawambo were represented in the FMS's missionary magazines for children in the first decades of the twentieth century. The authors analyse how the magazines familiarised their child readers with Owambo space and geography and how ideas of blackness and 'heathenism' were associated with Africa and the Aawambo in particular. The chapter also examines the Q&A column of a Finnish-language magazine to learn how the child readers processed the given information and what kind of questions they wanted answered.

The third section of the collection focuses on forms of cultural change and resistance that the interaction between the Aawambo and Finnish missionaries gave rise to. The first chapter, written by Napandulwe Shiweda and Lovisa Tegelela Nampala, examines the factors that led to the survival of some of the Aawambo healing traditions and practices despite the influence of Finnish missionaries and the conversion of the Aawambo people to Christianity. The authors demonstrate how a number of Aawambo traditional cultural and social norms that missionaries rejected persisted and eventually became assimilated into what is seen today as traditional healing practices and part of the new social order.

In the last two chapters of this section, the focus is turned to changes in cultural adornments and clothing. Maria A. N. Caley discusses the traditional *yihiho* headdress



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of Vakwangali women of the Kavago West Region from the perspective of cultural identity formation both in the past and in the present. *Yihiho* is a unique headdress embedded with cultural value which was eradicated with conversion to Christianity through 'cultural colonialism.' Caley employs a practice-based research methodology where in-depth knowledge regarding the traditional headdress is first extracted from oral history narratives and a textile print is then designed and presented to the Vakwangali community at the Ukwangali Cultural Festival.

In her chapter, Loini Iizyenda concentrates on traditional metal bead (*uuputu)* artefacts and documents different insights and experiences regarding their cultural usage and production, and the misconceptions of the missionaries regarding traditional ornaments. Iizyenda uses oral history descriptions about *uuputu* artefacts and their production to show how advanced the Aawambo people were in technological and cultural terms prior to their encounters with Finnish missionaries.

The fourth and last section of the edited volume concentrates on the Finnish-Namibian interactions at the time of the fight for independence. The section begins with Christian A. Williams' chapter on the Nordic-Namibian solidarity work of Salatiel Ailonga, a Namibian refugee pastor, and Anita Ailonga, his Finnish missionary wife, just prior to and during their exile in Finland from 1976. Williams examines letters received, written and circulated by the Ailongas aimed at selectively publicising the detention of Namibians in Zambia and Tanzania during the SWAPO crisis of 1976. The letters contributed to protecting and freeing detained Namibians and to articulating an alternative to SWAPO's exclusive nationalist discourse.

In his chapter, Chris Saunders examines the memoir of Sam Nujoma, the first President of Namibia, and studies his account of Martti Ahtisaari in the process that led to the independence of Namibia in 1990. Nujoma, who was the leader of Namibia's liberation movement SWAPO from the mid-1970s, had a complicated relationship with Ahtisaari. The chapter reflects on why the two men brought different perspectives to bear on the way in which Namibia's decolonisation process unfolded.

The last chapter of this section and the book is by Jerkko Holmi and analyses the Finnish stance towards Namibia through foreign policy statements and documents published by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1985. The Namibian campaign for independence was a major subject in international discourse in the 1980s and also an important foreign policy issue in Finland. The Finnish stance was influenced by the long history of Finnish-Namibian relations, international decolonisation consensus and the acceleration of calls for Namibian independence.

An extensive bibliography *Oshigwana Hashi Lesha. A Bibliography of 150 Years of Writing on Namibia,* compiled by Professor Joel Kuortti, will be published in the Doria Repository in conjunction with this edited collection. The bibliography contains a wide range of entries for scholarly works and other writings on the historical relation between Finland and Namibia, making it an invaluable tool for students and scholars.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Finnish Missionaries at Work in Owambo

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# *Olyomakaya*: A 'Smoking' Memory of the Early Finnish Mission in Northern Namibia

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*Abstract*

This chapter studies the Oshiwambo name for Saturday, *Olyomakaya*, which translates as tobacco day. The name *Olyomakaya* derives from late nineteenth-century Finnish missionary activity among the Aawambo. Missionaries distributed tobacco on Saturdays and encouraged the recipients to come to church the following day, and soon people started calling it *Olyomakaya*. This chapter explores the history of Aawambo and the missionary use of tobacco, but also how tobacco use and *Olyomakaya* are remembered in contemporary Aawambo culture. The missionaries did not introduce a new custom when they donated or traded tobacco, but they made use of a local tradition of smoking and chewing tobacco, as well as using tobacco as a means of payment, and sharing it as a sign of friendship. While some missionaries opposed the use of tobacco, the Owambo kings and chiefs were adamant that they should be supplied with the product. Indeed, a failure or refusal to provide them with the commodity often angered them and had the potential to jeopardise the entire mission endeavour. In Aawambo cultural memory, *Olyomakaya* is also remembered in terms of local culture; as the missionaries' pragmatic extension of indigenous tobacco practice and as a means of fostering companionship and unity.



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The aim of this chapter is to scrutinise a weekly occurrence in northern Namibian cultural tradition, namely *Olyomakaya*, which is the Owambo name for Saturday.[1] *Olyomakaya* means tobacco day – a name derived from the late nineteenth century and, more specifically, from the distribution of tobacco at Finnish Lutheran mission stations. This chapter has both historical and contemporary dimensions. On the one hand, we will study the role that tobacco played in the opening decades of the missionary presence in what was then called Ovamboland, in modern-day northern Namibia. On the other hand, we will attempt to grasp how the concept of *Olyomakaya* is understood in contemporary Aawambo culture. Our aim in the present study is not only to bring about new insights about the use of tobacco in the context of the intersection between early Finnish missionaries and Aawambo, but also to shed light on the contemporary understanding of a little scrutinised part of Aawambo history and cultural memory. Our intention, therefore, is not to investigate tobacco use in Aawambo culture in a broad sense. With this in mind we allow ourselves to make a time leap from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to our own era.

From the perspective of cultural memory research, *Olyomakaya* can be placed somewhere between a cultural memory and what Jan Assmann calls a communicated memory. Although more than 100 years old, *Olyomakaya* is of sufficiently late origin for some people in the community to remember it, or at least to have grown up at a time when many contemporaries had experienced tobacco distribution. In other words, to some extent its memory is still communicable. One of our interviewees was 99 years old at the time of the interview. On the other hand, *Olyomakaya* can no longer be vividly remembered. Its age has inevitably led to a gradual deterioration in its cultural memory. Hence, without institutionalisation in the form of a day of the week, it will soon disappear.[2]

The written sources examined in this study consist of missionary periodicals, with a particular emphasis on the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) magazine *Missionstidning för Finland* between 1870 and 1904.[3] Furthermore, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women from the Oshikoto and Ohangwena regions in northern Namibia.[4] We asked the interviewees to explain what *Olyomakaya* is, what they knew about the Finnish and Aawambo use of tobacco in the early mission (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and encouraged them to talk freely about tobacco and the concept of *Olyomakaya*. The intention with these rather simple and open interviews and the discussions that they gave rise to was to assess what is still remembered about the origin of the concept of *Olyomakaya*.

1. Monday to Sunday in Oshindonga reads: *Omaandaha*, *Etiyali*, *Etitatu*, *Etine*, *Etitano*, *Olyomakaya*, *Osoondaha*.
2. For theories of cultural and communicated memory, we refer to the works of Jan and Aleida Assmann. See Assmann 2017 and Assmann 2018.
3. The Finnish Missionary Society periodical was published both in Finnish and Swedish with mostly identical content. The Finnish version of the periodical was named *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*.
4. The research aims, consent form and ethical considerations were explained to each participant before they agreed to be part of the study. The participants in the study ranged in age from 19 to 99 years. The participants included five men and three women. While all eight interviews have been of value for this research, six have been directly quoted.



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Finally, literature written about the Finnish missionary work in northern Namibia has also been consulted.

## *Aawambo, Missionaries and Tobacco*

In the reports published in the FMS periodicals from the early so-called Ovamboland mission (established in 1870), the missionaries frequently wrote about tobacco. The missionaries reported about the smoking and chewing of tobacco, the use of tobacco as a trade commodity and attempts to grow tobacco. Several of the missionaries smoked. Indeed, the most famous Finnish missionary of all time, Martti Rautanen[5], was often portrayed with a pipe in his hand. Among the Aawambo, both men and women smoked, typically pipes, but some preferred to chew or sniff their tobacco.[6] Tobias Reijonen observed that tobacco played a large role for the Aawambo – too large in his opinion. They explained to him that tobacco bestows intellect upon them and cures coughs as well as chest and stomach sicknesses.[7] The notion of intellect or wisdom finds support in Aawambo cultural memory, and one interviewee recalled a proverb stating that an elder smoking a pipe is speaking wisdom to the rest.[8] In 1870, Reijonen had already recognised that the Aawambo grew tobacco. When tobacco plants had matured, the leaves and stalks were collected and pounded. According to Reijonen, the tobacco was 'of lower quality' than the imported tobacco that some of the missionaries smoked.[9] The missionary did not elaborate on how the tobacco was handled after it had been pounded, but it is likely that it was rolled into balls before being bartered. Such a process was reported by David Livingstone among the Toga peoples of present-day northern Zimbabwe.[10]

That the Aawambo also preferred the missionaries' tobacco quickly became apparent, and it was turned into a desired trade commodity and gift. The Finns brought tobacco with them wherever they went. Upon request, they would give a piece of tobacco as a token of friendship, while at the same time regarding the encounter as 'an opportunity to teach' the person receiving the gift.[11] In 1872, Gustaf Skoglund wrote about how he had met a group of people who were afraid of him. After a while, one of them approached Skoglund and asked for tobacco and he gave him some. The missionary described how this small gift completely changed the situation. People gathered around his ox wagon and he heard them tell each other that it was not true

5. In this volume, the Finnish form of his name Martti is used, even though his name has also been spelled as Martin especially in Swedish sources.
6. Rautanen 1893, 182; Wehanen 1899, 137; Reijonen 1875, 51.
7. Reijonen 1874, 140 (translation by Groop). The original word for 'intellect' used in the article in Swedish is *förstånd* and *ymmärrys* in Finnish.
8. Mb 2019. In Mb's recollection the proverb reads 'Omukuluntu ngele owu wete ombiga ye yi li pokati komayego osha hala kutya ota popi oshinima shoondunge.'
9. 'Owambo-Landet' 1870, 23; Saari 1904, 6–7.
10. Livingstone 2011, 317.
11. Reijonen 1872 (translation by Groop), 88.



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what they had heard about how he would kill people.[12] If a missionary did not give tobacco to those asking for it, as for instance Tobias Reijonen reported, those left without tobacco complained that 'you do not love the people!'[13] This perception of the act of sharing tobacco as a sign of friendship was not restricted to the Aawambo. As reported by Karl Leonhard Tolonen, the Damara and Herero also regarded a piece of tobacco as a sign of friendship and could accuse a missionary of hating them if he refused to hand over the product.[14]

Due in part to low salary levels, the early Finnish missionaries were dependent on trade for their own survival. While this trade is not elaborated on in detail in the periodicals, we can learn more about it from the missionaries' letters and diaries. Here, they frequently describe the form of payment they used for goods and services, such as (glass) pearls, steel wire, lead, gunpowder and percussion caps for firearms. While weapons and ammunition were held in particularly high esteem, tobacco appears to have been among the most frequent means of payment.[15] Sometimes missionaries even had to buy tobacco from across the Kunene River in present-day Angola to acquire the currency needed to buy *mahangu* (millet) from their neighbours.[16] Tobacco also appears in the missionaries' writing as something of an additional payment. This was the case when Karl August Veikkolin paid his neighbours for tending to his cattle and bringing him milk every morning and evening. For this service he paid them one head of cattle every four months, according to what he described as 'the law of the kingdom.' On top of this, he also gave them a piece of tobacco every week. For this extra payment, the neighbours kept his cattle near their homes, as the missionary requested, instead of grazing them further away.[17]

Tobacco played a crucial role in the relationship with political leaders. In 1870, the Finnish missionaries had already learned through their encounters with the Herero paramount chief Maharero kaTjamuaha that they had to provide him with tobacco and that it had to be what he referred to as 'the expensive tobacco from the Cape [Colony].'[18] As a rule, the missionaries always brought tobacco when they met rulers. Moreover, should a king run out of quality tobacco he sent someone to the mission to request more. Naturally, the missionaries also provided the royals with other commodities, but tobacco was generally one of the gifts that were exchanged. When Tolonen visited Oukwanyama in 1871, he twice brought gifts to King Mweshipandeka yaShaningika: first he presented pearls, a blanket and two pieces of tobacco, and later gunpowder, lead and two more pieces of tobacco.[19] King Nehale lyaMpingana, who reigned over eastern Ondonga, continued to ask for tobacco even after he had chased away missionaries from his territory. This should be viewed as a sign of at least

12. Skoglund 1872, 80. See also Tönjes 1996, 237. Hermann Tönjes writes about a similar occasion and the joy that it brought when, during a visit to a Kwanyama homestead, he offered his cigar to the head of the homestead.
13. Reijonen 1874, 140.
14. Tolonen 1871, 160–162.
15. Skoglund 1878, 13; Reijonen 1874, 109; Pettinen 1889, 118. See also Siiskonen 1990, 129–130.
16. Veikkolin 1881, 8. Compare Peltola 1994, who writes that tobacco was still used to buy milk in 1909 during a famine.
17. Veikkolin 1874, 80.
18. Kurvinen 1870, 142.
19. Tolonen 1871, 136.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

some kind of friendship from the king, who has otherwise been remembered for his aversion to European influence.[20]

According to Alpo Hukka, the Finnish missionaries systematically started to distribute tobacco at the mission station on Saturdays in the 1870s. This was an efficient way of gathering people to welcome them to Sunday service the following day.[21] Similarly, in his biography about Martti Rautanen, Matti Peltola describes this custom as 'an attempt of the early years [of the missionary] when the number of visitors coming to hear the Word was still small.' Soon, writes Peltola, 'the people started to call this day "tobacco day" (*Olyomakaya*) and its name remained the same from this day forth.'[22] Tolonen clearly indicated that the distribution of tobacco on a Sunday was not an option. For the missionaries it was important to show to the people that Sunday was a holy day when it was not appropriate to pursue trade or exchange tobacco.[23] Eino Pennanen provides another clue as to the origins of the Finnish custom of distributing tobacco on Saturdays, asserting that it was inherited from the German missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society when they worked among the Herero. In an article in a FMS periodical for young people he writes as follows: 'Among these tribes, Saturday bears the name "tobacco day." It is a memory of a time when German missionaries working in Hereroland handed out tobacco to people on Saturdays so that at least some listeners could be brought to church on Sunday.'[24] It is likely, as Pennanen suggests, that the idea to distribute tobacco as a means of promoting the mission was taken from the German mission further south. Yet, the actual name 'tobacco day' is more likely an Aawambo invention. The naming of Saturday after tobacco distribution is not found in the Herero language, nor did the long-serving Rhenish missionary, Hugo Hahn, write anything about systematic tobacco distribution in his diaries.

The missionaries also occasionally withheld tobacco from the local population as a punishment for misconduct or for failing to attend church. Botolf Björklund refused to give tobacco to a man who had approached him for some. The reason for the denial was that the man told Björklund that he had no interest in hearing the Word that the missionaries had been sent to preach.[25] In 1882, Martti Rautanen wrote about his own similar experience:

> I have tried to test many neighbours by not giving them tobacco when they have come and asked for it, and I have explained to them that it is because they do not come to hear the Word, but they would rather be without tobacco than come [and listen to] the preaching of the Word, and thus they become almost completely alien to the Word.[26]

20. Pettinen 1892, 68.
21. Hukka 1954, 26–27.
22. Peltola 1994, 220. See also Hukka 1954, 27. Neither Peltola nor Hukka provide any sources for their notions on the background to *Olyomakaya*, nor is the name *Olyomakaya* mentioned in any of the periodical articles, although a great deal was written about tobacco.
23. Tolonen 1873, 140.
24. Pennanen 1937, 6.
25. Björklund 1878, 164.
26. Rautanen 1882, 154 (translation by Groop); Reijonen 1877, 151.



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Until 1900, the missionaries rather uncritically used tobacco as a gift and a means of payment. Tobacco was regarded as an adiaphoron, that is, an entity that was neither forbidden nor enjoined by Scripture. This would change in 1900 with the arrival of the missionary Emil Liljeblad. He was against the habit of smoking and refused to give tobacco to those asking for it. Furthermore, he angered his colleagues by teaching his pupils that smoking was wrong and smokers would not go to heaven. When Liljeblad refused to give tobacco to King Nehale in 1902, despite undertaking an ambitious project to build a new mission station in the monarch's domains, the other missionaries decided that it was time to ask the board of the missionary society to intercede. Hence, in 1903, the board concluded that trade with tobacco, though undesirable, was still permissible since there were no good alternatives. This did not convince Liljeblad, who was determined to continue his fight against the custom. He subsequently endangered the future of his own mission station by refusing to bring tobacco to King Shanika of Ongandjera in the latter part of 1903. The other missionaries' good relations with the king (and the fact that they brought him a few packets of tobacco) saved the day.[27] Liljeblad was irritated with both the custom and King Shanika's attitude. The king had made it clear that he had not requested missionaries to convert his people, but because he wanted them to bring him tobacco, wine, clothes and guns. Liljeblad would rather be banished than to give the king and his subjects what they demanded:

> For my part, I cannot at all accept the use of the first two commodities [tobacco and wine] in the mission field neither as gifts nor in barter, and therefore I have often heard both the regent and his subjects wonder what kind of a teacher I am who does not give tobacco. Nehale also said the same thing to brother Glad and me. My conscience, however, does not allow me to use these pleasures, which do so much evil, also here in Ovamboland, nor to give it to others. I believe that the Lord will move his cause forward even without these means. If it were also the case that I was expelled from the land because I do not provide them, I would understand it in the way that the Lord has not yet given open doors to this kingdom.[28]

## *Recalling the Use of Tobacco*

In the interviews carried out for the present study, the informants shared information about the various uses of tobacco according to Aawambo tradition. They were in agreement with the missionaries' observations that tobacco was used for smoking, but also that it was often chewed or sniffed. Moreover, they also agreed that Aawambo used tobacco to establish friendships, and as a means of payment.

27. Saari 1904, 6–7; Peltola 1994, 220–221. It is unlikely that Liljeblad's aversion to tobacco was linked with any medical knowledge about the dangers of smoking (of which relatively little was known at the time). Rather, Liljeblad's reaction was likely to have been linked with contemporary opinions in Europe and the US about tobacco (and in particular cigarette smoking) and sexual promiscuity. See, for instance, Tinkler 2006, 140.
28. Liljeblad 1904, 56 (translation by Groop).



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While it was apparent from the interviews that these various uses of tobacco had a long tradition, it is difficult to ascertain how long this had been going on for. In the interviews, the expression *ombandu yekaya* (tobacco roll) is frequently used instead of *omakaya*. It is apparent that the interviewees are referring to a local tobacco tradition, which is still in use today, rather than to a custom introduced by missionaries. One of the interviewees (Ks) described the procedure of making *ombandu yekaya*. When tobacco leaves have grown sufficiently, he explained, they are stored in *okayuma*, a traditional clay pot. After a few days of fermentation, the leaves are removed and pounded. The pounded tobacco is moulded into a shape called *ombandu yekaya* using a traditional mat made from palm leaves.[29] According to Ks, the users of *ombandu yekaya* break a piece of tobacco from the *ombandu* and smoke it in their pipes. This explanation of the production and use of local tobacco corresponds with the reports of the missionaries about tobacco use in the early 1870s. It also accords with contemporary reports by David Livingstone about the process of growing tobacco and subsequently forming it into balls in other areas of southern Africa. It seems apparent that the Aawambo memory of tobacco does not only relate to the distribution of tobacco (*omakaya*) by missionaries, but also to local production and use (*ombandu yekaya*).

The use of tobacco as a symbol of friendship was recalled by several interviewees. One individual brought up the expression *okutulilathana kombiga* (union or accord) to explain the sharing of a piece of tobacco in Aawambo tradition.

> They [the Aawambo] are noted for having a strong need for tobacco, which they utilise not just for smoking, but also as a symbol of friendship [*pendje mo omakaya, tulila ndje kombiga*]. *Mbono ohaya tulilathana kombiga* is a phrase that means 'they are friends and there is harmony between them.' This is known as *okutulilathana kombiga*.[30]

Tobacco was used to symbolise how peace had returned when people had been at war. It exemplifies harmony. The notion of *okutulilathana kombiga* validated what the missionaries called a symbol of friendship. In general, the interviewees confirm the missionaries' observation that Aawambo utilised tobacco to foster companionship and unity, and the missionaries' distribution of tobacco as being consistent with local customs.[31] As Skoglund's encounter with the group of people who were afraid of him demonstrated, tobacco allowed missionaries to form friendships with the Aawambo. Similarly, King Nehale lyaMpingana continued to ask the missionaries for tobacco after chasing them out of his realm. A shared piece of tobacco allowed missionaries to befriend the Aawambo. What appears clear is that the missionaries made use of a local tradition of gift-bearing that existed well before their arrival.

29. Ks 2019.
30. Mb 2019.
31. One of the interviewees goes as far as connecting the sharing of tobacco by Aawambo with the missionaries' more systematic distribution of tobacco. 'Every Saturday,' stated Ng, 'the missionaries began distributing tobacco [taye ya tulile koombiga], and this is where '*okutulilathana koombiga*' was born.' This reflection does not seem to harmonise with Mb's understanding of *okutulilathana koombinga* as a pre-missionary custom, yet, at the same time, it demonstrates how effective the systematic use of an existing custom was in missionary work. Ng 2019.



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As for the use of tobacco as a currency, the interviewees confirm, and even expand our understanding, of the early Finnish missionaries' reporting vis-à-vis the use of tobacco as a means of payment.

> Tobacco was also utilised for payment, particularly by traditional authorities. When buying or paying for a field [*epya*], people used to give *ombandu yekaya* to the village headman – in particular tobacco […] Again, *ombandu yekaya* was utilised for *lobola* [*iigonda*] engagement, particularly in Uukwambi, where they do not provide cattle or hoes as in Ondonga. Because they do not donate cattle or hoes, *ombandu yekaya* is viewed as a significant factor. People believed that once someone is given *ombandu yekaya*, they are respected.[32]

Mb recollected that the Aawambo not only used tobacco as payment and compensation, but that it also entailed aspects of dignity and respect. While the payment of tobacco would in some situations merely be a matter of paying for a commodity, at other times it was more than a mere payment. For instance, when a man approached the parents of a girl and presented them with tobacco it was not regarded as pure payment, but rather a sign of respect.

Some of the interviewees also recalled the traditional use of tobacco as a medicine. The missionaries wrote very little about Aawambo use of tobacco for medical treatments, and when they did, it was largely with disdain. When the Finns gave the kings homeopathic treatments, the former believed that smoking destroyed the effects of these remedies.[33] One interviewee described how tobacco smoke was utilised to treat newborns, helping to ease the symptoms of babies with breathing problems.[34] Another interviewee recalled that people used to smoke tobacco to alleviate nausea after eating food that smelled foul or had gone bad.[35]

## *Remembering Olyomakaya*

How then are contemporary Aawambo remembering *Olyomakaya*? It is not only 'tobacco day' that has a formalised relation with early Finnish missionary activity in Namibia, but there are several examples of local terms and names in Aawambo language that refer to the early Finnish mission. For instance, Martti Rautanen was referred to as *Nakambale* (the person with the hat). August Pettinen was called *Nandago* (*ondago*, according to Saarelma-Maunumaa, being 'a bulbous plant with small edible bulbs').[36] The name *Olyomakaya* is interesting due to its centrality in everyday language, while its origins are remote and its linguistic or cultural relevance today can be regarded as insignificant.

32. Mb 2019.
33. Rautanen 1871, 177.
34. Mb 2019.
35. Ks 2019.
36. Pettinen 1892, 7; Pettinen 1889, 120. Nakambale literally means the person with the hat. Saarelma-Maunumaa translates *ondago* as 'a bulbous plant with small edible bulbs.' See Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 125.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

All but one of the interviewees knew the provenance of the word *Olyomakaya*. Their answers to the question about the origins of 'tobacco day' clearly illustrate this, as they were able to explain it by tying it to the free distribution of tobacco. The following reply demonstrates a good awareness of the term:

According to what I have heard, the term *Olyomakaya* comes from the missionaries' tobacco distribution. When the missionaries came to Ovamboland, they saw that the Aawambo people like tobacco, so they utilised tobacco to entice them to church services. The church service was held on Sunday, so they used to invite people to come to get tobacco the day before Sunday in order to entice them to attend the next day's service.[37]

According to Mb, missionaries simply made use of a commodity that they saw was enjoyed by the Aawambo. He recalled that the missionaries invited people to come to the mission to obtain tobacco. He thereby suggested that the active and conscious employment of tobacco as an enticement was deliberately undertaken, rather than simply choosing to distribute tobacco on Saturdays without any particular invitation being extended. Ks, who concurred with Mb, underlined that 'people were called on Saturday afternoons to come to get tobacco and then return the next morning to attend the church service.' In fact, Ks, who was born in 1920 and baptised by Martti Rautanen, asserts that it was Rautanen at Olukonda Mission who distributed tobacco – a statement that finds support in a separate interview with Ii.[38] The memory of the interviewees tallies with the missionary sources that describe how missionaries supplied tobacco on Saturdays to invite people to church the next day. Yet, in the memory of the Aawambo that were interviewed in the present study, the missionaries not only distributed tobacco but also turned it into a distribution event in which they invited or called on people.

One of the interviewees returned to the missionaries' utilisation of tobacco to entice people: 'They tried to think of ways to get people to come to the service. *Ohaka yulwa nashi haka li* is an Oshiwambo proverb that basically means "one can entice you with what you eat or like." Tobacco was the most significant crop for the Aawambo people at the time.[39] According to Ng, the missionaries were aware of the Aawambo fondness for tobacco and used it as a kind of bait. What is interesting is that two of the interviewees employed a fishing analogy when speaking of bait, although the typical way of fishing in the region used baskets and not a rod with bait attached at the end. According to the interviewees, the distribution of tobacco was a successful method and appreciated by the locals. This was affirmed by Kk: 'Eee [*Olyomakaya*] is the day when people are given free tobacco and they say things like today is tobacco day, let's go to our tobacco day.'[40] Not only did he portray the tobacco distribution in positive terms, but also described it as a recurring event that served the purpose that the missionaries had anticipated.

This rather pragmatic attitude was also supported by Alpo Enkono, the former General Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. Enkono highlighted how the distribution of tobacco on Saturdays fulfilled a practical function.

37. Mb 2019.
38. Ks 2019, Ii 2021.
39. Ng 2019. All translations of interviews by Haufiku.
40. Kk 2018.



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First, he too maintained that it was a decoy. The missionaries were 'fishers of men,' who had to find a way to make people come to Sunday services. Second, he provided a stronger frame for what Kk indicated above, by calling the distribution of tobacco 'the first Owambo calendar.' The Aawambo did not have a calendar system that would help them to distinguish days (which systemised the work of the missionaries). Thus, the distribution of tobacco on Saturdays was a simple way of pinpointing at least one day of the week.[41] It is probable, but difficult to prove with absolute certainty, that the name *Olyomakaya* was the first day that was given a local name, and that the subsequent weekdays were named at a later stage.

Some of the interviewees also remembered the fact that the missionaries did not give tobacco to everyone that showed up at the mission: 'You will not receive tobacco if you do not attend a religious service,' said Ng, who added that 'tobacco distribution was primarily intended to entice individuals to attend church services.'[42] Although Ng explained that tobacco was distributed free of charge, he also remembered the conditional nature of these transactions: it was denied those who showed up to get tobacco but who had no intention of attending the Sunday service.

Ng also remembered that missionaries 'showed them how to grow tobacco plants in the pond [*pomithima*].'[43] This seems to contradict early missionaries' claims that Aawambo were already cultivating tobacco when they arrived. However, Ng's claim may also be viewed through the early missionary sources that suggest that some missionaries who had learned how to grow tobacco in the arid local climate instructed less experienced farmers, and encouraged others who did not grow tobacco to start doing so.[44]

While the interviewees remembered *Olyomakaya* as a missionary invention, they remembered the name *Olyomakaya* as a local invention:

> In most circumstances, an outsider is involved in naming a place or giving a person a nickname, depending on the situation. The day was not named *Olyomakaya* by the missionaries in this circumstance. This was the Aawambo people themselves, following the start of tobacco distribution on that particular day before Sunday church.[45]

According to Mb, 'the missionaries couldn't name a day after tobacco.'[46] It remains unclear in what way he found it far-fetched for the missionaries to come up with the name *Olyomakaya*. However, he is clearer in his opinion of the Aawambo role in the naming of Saturday, meaning that 'most place names are provided by locals based on a specific scenario and then used.'[47] In Mb's view, the Aawambo created names based on what they saw and experienced. This tallies with the historic re-naming of missionaries instead of learning to use their 'real' names. Ks agreed that it was the Aawambo who came up with the name, simply because 'they were the ones who

41. Enkono 2018. This view of 'tobacco day' as the dawn of the western calendar among the Owambo is also suggested by Hukka. See Hukka 1954, 26–27.
42. Ng 2019.
43. Ng 2019.
44. Reijonen 1874, 121.
45. Mb 2019.
46. Mb 2019.
47. Mb 2019.



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got *omakaya* on that day of tobacco.'[48] While the interviewees did not seem to recall this event as particularly strange, to the Aawambo in the late nineteenth century it must have been an odd experience. The Saturday visitors at the mission where, as Mb insinuates, outsiders who had a peculiar experience in a new and strange environment, where those who promised to come to church the next day received free tobacco. Others who did not intend to attend Sunday service were denied tobacco, which was likely to be regarded as a rather unfriendly gesture. Lastly, Mb was of the opinion that the usage of the name *Olyomakaya* today is proof that the name itself was a local invention. Had it not been so, the Aawambo would hardly have accepted it to the extent that they would continue to use it in the same way for 150 years.[49]

## *Conclusion*

Tobacco was frequently used among the Aawambo before the arrival of the first missionaries in 1870, and the Finns – probably based on experience from the German mission further south – were quick to make good use of this tradition. The missionaries reported that both they and the Aawambo used tobacco as a means of payment but also as a way to cultivate friendships. However, the sources suggest that the growth, preparation and consumption of tobacco was established well before the missionaries arrived in Ondonga. Likewise, it is apparent that the missionaries made use of the well-established local custom of sharing tobacco as a sign of friendship. However, the missionaries did bring imported tobacco with them, which many considered to be of higher quality than the *ombandu yekaya* produced by the Aawambo.

While Martti Rautanen admitted that he made use of tobacco as a carrot and a stick strategy in relation to religious services, none of the missionaries discussed the name *Olyomakaya* itself in the missionary periodicals. The origin of the name for Saturday would probably have been considered controversial. However, the origin of *Olyomakaya* is mentioned indirectly in a few FMS texts, first time in 1937.

In Aawambo cultural memory, the origin of *Olyomakaya* appears to be well established. All but one interviewee could describe how Saturday became *Olyomakaya*. Their narration is largely in line with the account of the FMS and its missionaries. While the interviewed women and men were aware that the missionaries had used tobacco as a decoy, they did not judge it as inappropriate, but discussed it in rather neutral terms. There may be several reasons for this rather indifferent attitude, including the temporal distance to the early missionary activity, the integral role of tobacco in Aawambo culture and a widespread rather affirmative view of missionary history in northern Namibia. The same interviewees also agreed with the early missionaries' reports about the use of tobacco as a means of payment and as a symbol of friendship and harmony. Finally, it seems to be a generally held view that the name *Olyomakaya* did not originate with the missionaries but was adopted by the Aawambo.

48. Ks 2019.
49. Mb 2019.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# The Roles of Finnish Missionaries in Teacher Training Education in South West Africa, 1920–1970

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*Abstract*

Finnish missionaries engaged in both proselytising and educational activities after their arrival and settlement in Owambo. Both male and female missionaries played a major role in spreading the gospel and ensuring literacy among the locals, especially in terms of the teacher training they offered to local women. Accounts of three pioneering women – Johanna Kristof, Emilia Nhinda and Rauna Haifene – are examined in this chapter over the course of half a century between 1920 and 1970. A focus is placed on their educational and professional journeys. The discussion undertaken in this study is in terms of the challenges they faced in being accepted into teacher training, the traditional roles that they were expected to assume, and how their own newly-acquired lifestyles as teachers impacted other local women. Archival material, oral historical accounts of community elders and interviews with family members of the three women help to shed light on the types of education locals received from Finnish missionaries, as well as how the establishment of schools in Owambo was carried out. Historical conversations with the elders also focused on early Finnish missionaries' education of the Aawambo and how it subsequently evolved. Furthermore, information about the traditional roles performed by women in the past showed how locals came to regard the assumption of a professional role that had hitherto been mostly dominated by men. Although local women initially faced resistance by some Finnish missionaries when they sought to enter teacher training, once qualified, they became a source of inspiration for other women to follow in their pioneering footsteps.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

The Finnish missionaries' activities, including education in Namibia, have been investigated by many researchers. However, previous studies have primarily concentrated on the establishment of schools in Owambo,[1] and have not focused on oral accounts of community elders. For this study, the reminiscences of clergymen and those who were educated by the Finnish missionaries in Owambo from the 1930s until the 1970s are examined, especially in terms of the role played by Finnish missionaries in teacher training. This chapter focuses on the educational journeys of three Aawambo women – Johanna Kristof, Emilia Nhinda and Rauna Haifene – following the arrival of Finnish missionaries in Owambo in 1870. It was from this time that all the major social and developmental aspects of both informal and formal education programmes began to develop. Despite the initial humanitarian and proselytising motives that led the missionaries to come to Owambo, they also came to influence the establishment of formal education.[2] The missionaries emphasised that converts needed to be literate so that they would be able to read the Bible, hymn books and other evangelical literature.[3]

Furthermore, in this chapter, I examine how girls and women were educated. This is to ascertain the kinds of difficulties they experienced in trying to gain an education. The chapter will also explore whether girls and women needed to justify their wish to be educated. What is more, this chapter examines if there was a conflict between more traditional roles ascribed to girls/women and becoming a teacher, with a special focus on Kristof, Nhinda and Haifene, who helped to pioneer teacher education in northern Namibia. This chapter therefore undertakes a brief analysis of these three women to give an account of their biographical and educational background and the roles that they played in educating other women. It is important to study the early years of the girls' school mission, because this provides important historical insights into how the structures of 'modern' schooling in northern Namibia were established by the missionaries. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the education of girls became possible across Owambo.[4]

This chapter follows in the footsteps of other authors who have analysed issues of gender and religion in the context of missions that were not formally part of any colonial authority. A particular focus is placed on exploring the impact that Finnish missionaries had in the teacher training education of women. Fiona Bowie, who writes about women who have been active participants in the modern missionary movement, states that their experiences cannot simply be subsumed under those of men. She stresses the need to enable the voices of women who were recipients of missionary activities to be heard. Bowie further states that missionaries treated male and female converts differently, according to their own understanding of 'proper' gender roles.[5] In this chapter, I attempt to dismantle these ideologies, which prioritised the careers of men over those of women. I therefore deemed it to be of vital importance to engage community elders in oral-historical conversations about the development of schools

1. Lehtonen 1999; Helander 2006; Nangula 2013.
2. Helander 2006, 65.
3. Cohen 1993.
4. Leach 2008, 336.
5. Okkenhaug 2003, 9.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

in Owambo: from Bible study to the inclusion of women in teacher training and the establishment of separate schools for men and women.

This chapter relies on oral history accounts collected through semi-structured interviews with community elders and from archival material. Oral history interviews entail asking questions that include facts and information about the interviewee, their perceptions and attitudes, their specific points for or against the proposals, the interviewee's embedded expertise and local knowledge and their policy recommendations. Oral history has been described as a bottom-up research method and even as a 'decolonising' approach that restores power to the voiceless and the dispossessed.[6] Furthermore, utilising semi-structured interviews, which are often open-ended, allows for flexibility in the accounts told by the interviewees.

Interviewees were selected based on their clerical positions in society. They were also considered due to their age and the era when they were educated, as most received their education in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the women examined in this study were born earlier than the interviewees. I am aware of the subjective nature of the interviews and balance the narrated accounts with published material. The first interviews were carried out by Vaino Kambungu, who regards himself as a young reformer within the Lutheran Church and who has written various religious articles. He is also a final year, pre-service student at Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus. Kambungu has personal relationships with the interviewees, so he was best suited to obtain the required information from them. Interviewees were asked to discuss how girls and women were educated and what troubles they experienced when seeking to gain an education, and if the more traditional role of girls/women conflicted with their wish to become teachers. Most of those interviewed are qualified theologians and historians within various denominations in Namibia. These include four bishops: Bishop Vaino V. Nambala, Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, Bishop Apollos Kaulinge and Bishop Veikko Munyika. Other clergymen consulted were Reverend Eino Nangula and Pastor Laban Mwashekele.[7] Reverend Absalom Hasheela, whom I contacted personally, identified local authors and suitable sources for me to interview. His references led me to *Meekulu* Ester Mutileni, as well as to *Meekulu* Emilia Ismael yaNhinda, who is a namesake of Emilia Nhinda. Pashukeni Johanna Shoombe received her schooling at 'Okaumbo' in Okahao, as Tsandi Girls' School was affectionately known. Additionally, she is also a namesake of Johanna Kristof, the first qualified female teacher. The author had a face-to-face interview with Bishop Kaulinge and spoke with Pashukeni Johanna Shoombe by telephone. The second batch of oral accounts was collected by Kleopas Nghikefelwa, an intern curator at Onandjokwe Medical Museum. Those interviewed by Nghikefelwa were mostly the relatives of the three women.

6. Hoffman 2017, 5.
7. Reverend is a title mostly given to Lutheran leaders in charge of congregations or already retired whereas pastor is used to address leaders of Pentacostal or Revival churches, though Lutheran leaders can also be referred to as pastors.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

## The Establishment and Development of Schools in Owambo

The primary aim of the Finnish missionaries in Owambo in setting up schools was to encourage the spread of Christianity among the local population. However, apart from their focus on spreading the gospel, Finnish missionaries began interacting with the locals by teaching them how to read and write in their local languages. The early schooling that commenced when Finnish missionaries settled in Owambo in 1870 mainly focused on basic literacy, singing and Bible stories.[8] As time progressed, subjects like arithmetic, carpentry, agriculture and animal husbandry became part of the curriculum.[9] Although the education of locals was left in the hands of missionaries, the South African administration, which had taken control of South West Africa in 1915, also demanded that certain values and technical subjects be taught.[10] Consequently, a new syllabus was devised in 1928 for training schools, which consisted of subjects like story-telling, the theory of music, hygiene and Afrikaans.[11] It was evident that the locals' education became more complex over time.

The Finnish missionaries' endeavours in developing schools faced challenges which were not merely structural in nature. Indeed, some difficulties also stemmed from other factors, such as the missionaries being hard-pressed to find the time to give lessons, as well as a lack of interest among some. Other factors included the pupils' agency and attitude towards learning. Lahja Lehtonen was one of the Finnish missionaries who left her mark in the form of written sources, such as the book *Schools in Ovamboland from 1870 to 1970*.[12] She came to Namibia in 1954 and served as a teacher and then principal at Oshigambo Training School in the mid-1970s. She reported that when she began teaching, locals found it tiresome to learn the letters of the alphabet and that writing often made their fingers stiff. Locals had false expectations regarding the timeframe in which they could learn something. After a few days of struggling, some locals chose to drop out of school.[13]

The Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) started to educate the Aawambo people in Oniipa in 1903. The missionaries who came to Owambo also imported their Western ideas, which influenced the way of life of the Aawambo.[14] Just as education is valued in Finland,[15] the missionaries also made it an essential component in the Namibian communities where they settled. However, they first needed to get the people to understand the content of the Bible. Formally educating the Namibian people, especially the Aawambo, was not a priority for the Finnish missionaries, though their teaching laid the basis of formal education.[16] Upon the arrival of Finnish missionaries in Owambo, literacy education received a great deal of emphasis, while congregations (churches) were established to spread the gospel.

8. Lehtonen 1999, 14.
9. Lehtonen 1999, 14.
10. Brunette 2006, 27.
11. Brunette 2006, 27.
12. Lehtonen 1999, 13.
13. Lehtonen 1999, 18.
14. Hiltunen 1986, 14–15.
15. Tavi 2020.
16. Hiltunen 1986, 14–15.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Although Finnish missionaries played a major role in the creation of schools, which later led to teacher training, these learning institutes mainly served their own goals. Their initial intention was to preach the gospel, which they could only do if the locals were able to read the Bible. However, the language barrier was a challenge. Hence, the missionaries had to learn the local language, and they went the extra mile in developing the orthography of the local languages, mainly Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama. Consequently, the Finns valued the indigenous languages of the Owambo people from the very beginning of their missionary work in the region.

It is likely that Finnish missionaries did not choose to instruct African people badly out of a lack of desire to impart their knowledge or abilities, but rather because they were ignorant of better methods. Many of them came from poor and uneducated families in Finland, and they were not necessarily very strong themselves in writing, reading and mathematics. Another important point to consider is that missionaries followed the European education models of their respective countries of origin when they established schools in Africa.[17] Thus, they simply replicated what they knew best from their homelands.

Individual missionaries also took up roles that they excelled at. The specialised skills possessed by Finnish missionaries indirectly led to differentiated education for women and men. In Owambo, school work was initiated by a single female, Hilja Lindberg, who arrived in February 1899 for the purpose of teaching and weaving.[18] The female missionaries focused on teaching the girls the alphabet, Bible stories, songs, cleanliness and housework, while the male missionaries taught the local men how to build, thatch, construct wagons, carpentry and smithery.[19] Locals who got this vocational training, which Bishop Nambala termed 'psycho-motor skills,'[20] were appreciated for the work that they did as it benefited the community.[21] They could not pass on their skills to other locals, however, due to the unavailability of the necessary materials required for such apprenticeships. The demand for assistant teachers grew due to the scarcity of Finnish missionaries who were able to teach. The wives of the missionaries were often involved in teaching.

## *The Paths Taken by Pioneering Owambo Women to Education and Teacher Training*

Women's entry into teaching did not prove to be smooth. Initially, male Finnish missionaries did not wish to train women as teachers, as they considered too much education for women a bad thing. However, the situation changed when women slowly but surely immersed themselves in teacher training, despite the opposition of some Finnish missionaries. The accounts of Kristof, Nhinda and Haifene will demonstrate the educational and professional routes they went through, as well as the challenges women faced and the roles they played in teacher training education.

17. Helander 2006, 65.
18. Lehtonen 1999, 35.
19. Lehtonen 1999, 18.
20. Nambala 2022.
21. Lehtonen 1999, 23.



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Kristof is said to be the second-born in Kristof Ndengu's family. Her parents were Kristof Ndengu and Hanna Shipombo. Some of her siblings were Jesaja, Jakob, Martin, Lydia and Enos.[22] She was named after her father's mother. Johanna Kristof was born on 12 December 1901 in Ondangwa. Growing up, she assisted her father, who was a teacher, which sparked her interest in also becoming a teacher. She succeeded in entering the Oniipa teacher training seminar in 1925 and completed her studies in 1928.[23]

Johanna Kristof was the first qualified female teacher in Owambo. Ngula describes how Kristof, as the only woman student, experienced alienation and mistreatment from her male peers. Upon the completion of her studies, she was kept in Oniipa to determine how the community would receive her as a female teacher. She was then sent to teach in Onayena and Oshigambo. In 1946, Kristof was teaching in a kindergarten in Oshitayi.[24]

While other women wanted to take up traditional roles as housewives, it is recounted that Kristof renounced this option when she chose to become a teacher. Thus, she took an oath not to get married or bear children, an oath she kept until her death. As a woman studying among men, she was often isolated because she could not sit with the male students. However, their teacher Hilma Kupila often let her sit and study in her office.[25] This is another example of women being treated differently from men by the men. Kristof did her work diligently, earning a reputation as a capable, skilled and hardworking teacher, yet someone who was also single. Due to the role that she played in pioneering teacher education she has earned herself many namesakes. Pashukeni Johanna Shoombe recollected that many children and even a kindergarten in Ongwediva were named after her. The kindergarten was established by a group of women who were trained at Okahao Girls' School with the support of a foundation under the leadership of Pashukeni Johanna Shoombe.

Ester Mutileni narrates that Emilia Nhinda was born in the village of Omupanda, which is situated between Namakunde and Ondjiva in Kunene Province in Angola. Her father was Thomas Nhinda, and her mother, Maria Abraham Shigwedha, came from Ondonga.[26] Some of her siblings were Johanna, Saara, Paavo, Josafat and Ismael Nhinda. It is also documented that Emilia Nhinda began her primary schooling at Onamulunga in the Olukonda district, as she was living with her aunt, Martha Abraham. One of her teachers was Tomas Uukunde, who was also a headmaster. After some time, Emilia returned to her parents in Ondangwa and continued her education. Due to the long distance, her teachers established a school at Okapya when she moved there from Ondangwa. She attended the girls' school at Onghala when her parents relocated to Angola. She was taught by her own father, Thomas, who had just completed his education in Okahandja, and also by Josia Ndafohamba in 1919. Tomas' religious views and practices became a source of hatred for Onghala, the headman of their village. This resulted in him being severely beaten up. The news reached the missionary Hananen in Engela, who sent an ox cart to bring Thomas

22. Ngula 2021, 22.
23. Ngula 2021, 66.
24. Ngula 2021, 66.
25. Lehtonen 1999, 82.
26. Mutileni 2023.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Nhinda to him. Emila remained for some time in Onghala with her siblings, but they all moved to Engela in 1923.[27] She then proceeded to undertake her teacher training at Oniipa from 1929 until 1931. From 1932–1938, she taught at a school in Engela. In 1939, she completed further studies at Stofberg in South Africa. Upon her return, she taught at a primary school from 1940–1945. As a trained teacher, she was then sent to Okahao in 1946 and taught there until 1950. In 1950, she was tasked to establish a school at Ondobe, where she taught until 1982. Emilia, like Kristof, opted not to marry. According to the interviewees, these ladies chose to remain unmarried just like their teachers.[28]

Ester Mutileni's account of Rauna Haifene's biographical information is just as limited as the information provided by the earlier interviewees. She had heard that Rauna was born on the Angolan side of Oukwanyama. When Rauna settled in Eenhana she was already no longer a young child and, being related to royalty, grew up in a palace that was situated in Onekwaya. Her known relative is Jonas Taukuheke, a resident of Oheihana.[29]

Little information is given in the elders' accounts regarding Rauna Haifene's educational journey. It is said that she successfully completed her teacher training in 1934. Unlike Johanna and Emilia, Rauna did not remain single as she married Gabriel Taapopi, a fellow teacher.[30]

A number of women followed in the footsteps of these three pioneers. Hence the training of women to be teachers led to a change in the traditional social structure, whereby a new social category of financially independent career women was formed.[31] As alluded to above, children were named after these women as they were accorded respect in society. However, some women who wished to follow in their footsteps were not as lucky, as tradition prevented them from doing so. In some cases, parents prevented them from pursuing their dream of becoming teachers because they felt that they would decide not to have families,[32] as Johanna and Emilia had opted to do.

It is not surprising that missionary women made special efforts to recruit candidates for teacher training. Helander's article shows that missionary women prepared aspiring women students for teacher training seminar entrance exams to improve their chances of success.[33] One can conclude that Finnish missionaries wished to have more females trained as teachers because they wanted to advance their careers so that they could compete with their male counterparts – hence the extra efforts that were undertaken to try and make sure the girls succeeded in securing admission. Women who attended the female teachers' seminary at Okahao, which was run by the FMS between 1947–1967, disclosed that 'when the seminary for women was to start at Okahao, special training in Afrikaans was given at many girls' schools, including the school at Engela, to those girls who had expressed interest in

27. Hamata 2002, 17.
28. Nambala and Munyika 2022.
29. Mutileni 2023.
30. Kaulinge 2022.
31. Helander 2006, 67.
32. Mutileni 2023.
33. Helander 2006, 68.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

becoming teachers.[34] As Eila Helander notes: 'Such encouragement was perceived as being important, especially at a time when girls were to embark on a career and a consequent public social position and role which among the Africans had belonged almost exclusively to men.'[35]

Becoming a teacher was considered a step up, and women who did so undermined the perception that they belonged in the kitchen. There are indications that conflict surfaced between the more traditional role of a girl or a woman and the desire to become a teacher. This can be observed, for example, in the case of Johanna Kristof. Women were often shielded from strenuous jobs, such as cattle herding and house construction.

As Meier zu Sellhausen has shown, missionaries in Uganda also engaged in the education of local women. Although the mission education raised women's literacy skills markedly above the national average, they were mostly omitted from colonial labour markets, with the exception of mission work.[36] Their employment opportunities were restricted to religious services (at the mission schools or homes), schooling (as indigenous teachers) and medical care (as nurses). Meier zu Selhausen argues that the education that the locals received from the missionaries benefitted the former because 'missionary societies also had an emancipating aspect, furthering female African's formal education and occupational skills through the creation of mission employment opportunities.'[37] However, some of these employment opportunities simply involved cleaning the homes of missionaries, tending to families as well as sewing and basket weaving. Prior to the arrival of missionaries in Africa, women knew how to sew and tend to their families, so the skills they learned were not completely new. However, being in a predominantly all-female learning environment made it possible for women to study without having to waste energy justifying their right to education and accomplishment,[38] especially to men who expected them to tend to them at home instead of taking up careers.

Forgoing marriage for the sake of becoming a teacher was one of the problems encountered by women who gained an education. In the girls' schools and later in the seminary, girls were mainly taught by unmarried, female teachers. Thus, they indirectly demonstrated the possibility to refrain from marriage, a choice that Johanna and Emilia opted to emulate. Consequently, female seminary students had to make a choice that would permanently affect their sexual lives.[39] The decision to study at the seminary bound graduates to serve the church. One consequence of this is that they were not allowed to marry as per the instructions of the Finnish missionaries.[40] This decision had a lasting impact on several teachers, such as Johanna Kristof and Emilia Nhinda, who never married.

Another challenge faced by women was that they were regarded as inferior to their male colleagues. Lehtonen states that a teacher who taught a mixed class initially

34. Helander 2006, 68.
35. Helander 2006, 68.
36. Meier zu Selhausen 2014, 11.
37. Meier zu Selhausen 2014, 4.
38. Helander 2006, 69.
39. Helander 2006, 69.
40. Both Lehtonen and interviewees make references to it.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

elicited the answers from males. Furthermore, in most cases girls were routinely ignored.[41] Missionaries here followed established discriminatory patterns and thereby strengthened the tradition of treating women as second-class citizens. Not surprisingly, educating the locals first commenced with boys or men, especially at formal schools. At mission stations, lessons on singing or Bible scripture were given to both girls and boys, or women and men, at the same time in the same venue. The girls' formal schools were only established at Engela and Oshigambo in 1924, as opposed to boys' schools, which were in existence from the time that the missionaries first arrived in Owambo.

It is vital to note that most of the early single women who came to Owambo were trained teachers, unlike their male counterparts. They were involved in education at different levels from primary schools to teacher training seminaries. They inspected schools and arranged further training for teachers. Their impact was reinforced by the length of their service, as many of them worked in Owambo for 20–30 years, some even longer.[42] Therefore, it could be argued that the likelihood of Aawambo women wishing to become teachers stemmed from the dedicated Finnish teachers whom they observed in their midst. This is despite the fact that for a number of years after the inception of schools by the Finnish missionaries, the education of the locals was mostly overseen by men, as they were the only Finnish missionaries residing in Owambo at that time.

Bishop Kaulinge and Johanna Pashukeni Shoombe both referred to the claim that Finnish missionaries were opposed to women training as teachers, especially with regard to Johanna Kristof.[43] She vowed never to get married because this was a condition stipulated by the missionaries for being admitted to the teacher training seminar. The Finnish missionaries felt that women would waste their time if they studied, as their focus should mainly be on their families.[44] Irrespective of the veracity of this claim, it is clear that the Finnish missionaries had no intention of training women in practical subjects. In 1927, Kalle Koivu established the Ongwediva Industrial School of the Finnish Mission. The school catered solely to boys and focused on practical skills, such as joinery, carpentry, bricklaying and tailoring.[45]

Community elders gave differing accounts as to the type of education that the Finnish missionaries and teachers gave the locals. Emilia Ismael yaTomas yaNhinda, who is named after Emilia Nhinda, indicated that the type of education given by the Finnish was seen as a replacement to the traditional, informal teaching that the Aawambo had practised. This traditional form of education took place around open fires at night, where girls were instructed about housekeeping and the bearing and rearing of children. Practical skills were also passed on, including the crafting of fishing equipment, traditional beer brewing, etc. This education was passed on in the form of songs (*Tanauka okaana*), folktales (*Omavukule*, *ooShimbungu nooKavandje*) and poems.

41. Lehtonen 1999, 57.
42. Helander 2006, 67.
43. Pashukeni Johanna Shoombe is a namesake of Johanna Kristof. She played a pivotal role in establishment of the Johanna Kristof Foundation in Ongwediva, Namibia.
44. Dumeni 2022.
45. Shiweda, Heita and Mwetulundila 2021, 8.



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Maria Hamata comments that the pioneering women teachers are remembered for their courage, as they did not let themselves be discouraged by their male counterparts who believed that a woman could not effectively carry out the duties of a teacher. It was believed that the job of a woman was to tend to her household, to rear children, pound *mahangu* and to take care of her husband.[46] One wonders, therefore, what made men so special that they could serve two roles – as husbands and careerists – while women were not? Was this the result of religion informing gender relations, which could be translated into the encounter between colonising and colonised women? In other words, an obstacle to meaningful interaction between men and women.[47] Hamata also states that although life was extremely hard for the three pioneer women, and especially Emilia, they persevered and learned to adjust to the hardships at the seminars, where they endured cold and hunger.[48] These conditions might have put off other women interested in teaching, but not Johanna, Emilia and Rauna.

## *Conclusion*

All the interviewees agreed that Finnish missionaries were indeed instrumental in pioneering teacher training education in northern Namibia. The quality and complexity of this training would change over the years and especially after Namibia became independent in 1990.

Although missionaries began by offering gender-specific forms of education, this practice gradually came to an end as both men and women were able to opt for any field of study. Hence, the educational and professional journeys of Johanna Kristof, Emilia Nhinda and Rauna Haifene demonstrate how missionary education allowed them to rise from their own sense of cultural inferiority by being empowered to become teachers. Additionally, their education served as an emancipatory tool for others, as they did not merely become homemakers, but also embraced professional careers.

It is interesting to note that Johanna and Emilia conformed in cultural terms to the Finnish teachers' notion of femininity, which dictated that they remain unmarried.[49] The role model offered by the unmarried missionary woman championed a life-long dedication to spreading the gospel.[50] In short, the missionaries wanted the converts to dedicate their whole lives to Christianity in the same way as they had done.

The Finnish missionaries should therefore be highly appreciated and noted for their contribution to the development of female teachers in Namibia. Above all, however, one should honour the first female pioneers of teacher training in northern Namibia: Kristof, Nhinda and Haifene.

46. Hamata 2002, 3.
47. Jalagin 2005, 45.
48. Hamata 2002, 17.
49. Jensz 2012, 309.
50. Jalagin 2005, 70.



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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Ondonga Power Stone Fragments Repatriated from Finland to Namibia

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*Abstract*

In 1886, Dr. Hans Schinz, a Swiss explorer, and Martti Rautanen, a Finnish missionary, broke off three pieces from the sacred power stone of the Kingdom of Ondonga, violating the law of the kingdom. Two fragments eventually ended up in the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of Finland, which returned them to Namibia in April 2023. Based on primary sources, research literature and other information, this chapter aims at completing the story of the Ondonga power stone fragments up to the present day, including their historical and ritual context. It analyses the initial theft of the fragments and subsequently the kingdom's severe response to the perpetrators, showing the functional importance of the sacred stone to the kingship and community of Ondonga. The chapter further examines the fragments' time in Finland, where they were primarily utilised to serve missionary interests. Lastly, the chapter examines the repatriation project that was completed in April 2023. In terms of provenance, the Ondonga fragments belong to the cultural heritage of Namibia and particularly the 'descendant community' of the Kingdom of Ondonga. It is up to the Ondonga Traditional Authority, elders and community to sanction the restitution of the two fragments with their presumed mother stone into the community. The Ondonga fragments were cut off in a colonial context from their sacred mother stone and the information it contained. The chapter concludes that the restitution will complete the decolonisation of this information for Namibians.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

On 16 February 1886, Dr. Hans Schinz, a young Swiss botanist and explorer, and Martti Rautanen, a Finnish missionary, broke off three fragments from a stone in Ondonga, northern Namibia. It was a sacred power stone (*emanya lyoshilongo*) of the Kingdom of Ondonga, and to touch it was considered a serious taboo (*oshidhila*) and a crime against the kingdom.[1] Two pieces, called the Ondonga fragments in this study, eventually ended up in the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of Finland (NMF), which repatriated them to Namibia in April 2023.

Ondonga is situated in central northern Namibia, at the southern part of the Cuvelai River Basin where the ground consists of very fine sand without stones. The few exceptions are stones which had possibly been brought in by communities at a time of migration from the north. They often had a ritual meaning.[2]

This chapter analyses how and why the stone incident took place and led to a severe response of the kingdom. Furthermore, it examines the fragments' time in exile in Finnish museums, and their repatriation. My inspiration to write the article**,** and thereby contribute to the fragments' repatriation and restitution, derives from the visit of a team from the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN) to Finland in 2015. They identified one of the two Ondonga fragments at the NMF and recommended further research to ascertain their provenance.[3]

The origin of the Ondonga fragments is known due to the published letters and field diary extracts of Schinz,[4] his travel report,[5] and the unpublished diary of Rautanen.[6] As the letters and diaries are written by the actors themselves and soon after the events, they contain the most reliable information available. However, a critical approach is required, for as private documents they are subjective by nature. In particular, they represent the views of the European writers which would differ from the accounts given by Africans if the latter were available. The sources also differ from each other in the details they provide. Therefore, for a balanced picture it is necessary to use all available sources.

Other primary sources include ethnographic works by early missionaries and researchers. While research literature related to Ondonga exists, there is little on the tradition of sacred stones. Information from the Aandonga people themselves is largely missing.[7] Toivo Tirronen and Matti Peltola, Finnish biographers of Rautanen, and Dag Henrichsen, who has written on Schinz, describe the early history of the fragments. Jeremy Silvester, a Namibian historian, has also played a pioneering role in undertaking research regarding the provenance of the Owambo power stones.

Based on primary sources, research literature and other information, this chapter aims to complete the history of the Ondonga fragments up to the present, including their historical and ritual context. Further studies are needed to examine the repatriation and restitution process in its entirety and to draw lessons from it for wider discussion.

1. Eirola 1992, 49; Williams 1991, 188.
2. Savola 1916, 8; Huttunen 1955, 29–31; Salokoski 2006, 82.
3. Silvester et al. 2015, 35.
4. Henrichsen 2012, 60–105.
5. Schinz 1891, 329–335.
6. Martti Rautanen Diary (MRD), MRC, NAF.
7. For oral traditions, see Williams 1991, 29; Salokoski 2006, 52–54.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

The NMF indeed possessed two Ondonga fragments. The fragment with the inventory no. VKSLS5620, rediscovered by the MAN team, had long been known about, as the label seen in Figure 3.1. indicates. The second fragment, listed in the NMF inventory as VKSLS9433, was identified during the writing of this chapter. A geological analysis confirms that both pieces likely originate from the same mother stone and are marble, which is a metamorphic limestone.[8] They also both bear the inscription '1886.' As this chapter will demonstrate, one fragment was taken by Rautanen and the other by Schinz, although it is not known which one was taken by whom.

Figure 3.1. Ondonga fragments. No. VKSLS5620 on the right is 4.9 cm long and 4.2 cm wide. No. VKSLS9433 on the left is 8.3 cm long and 6.7 cm wide. Photograph: Ilari Järvinen, Finnish Heritage Agency (2022). CC BY 4.0.

## *Origin of the Ondonga Fragments*

Hans Schinz was the *primus motor* in the incident that resulted in the theft of the stone fragments. He worked for German colonial interests. He had joined an expedition sent by the German merchant Adolf Lüderitz to explore his colonial acquisitions in South-West Africa, which were to become a colony of Imperial Germany. Schinz collected information on everything, including ethnography and religion. His informant was the missionary Martti Rautanen, who was called *Nakambale* by the Aawambo people. He had lived in the region since 1870. Schinz stayed at Rautanen's Olukonda mission station during the rainy season of 1885–1886. At the time, Ondonga and the

8. Email by Pilvi Vainonen to author 6 September 2022, including the analysis report of the Finnish Museum of Natural History, 6 September 2022.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

neighbouring communities were not under any colonial control, and instead existed solely under their own sovereign rulers. On the arrival of Schinz in August 1885, King Kambonde kaMpingana (reigned 1884–1909)[9] had permitted the Swiss to stay in his kingdom, but their relations were to deteriorate.[10] Schinz represented the colonial approach of not submitting to the authority of any traditional African rulers.

On the morning of 16 February 1886, Schinz set off on an exploratory trip with Rautanen on the latter's ox-wagon to search for a meteorite northeast of Ondonga. Schinz had heard from local people in October 1885 about a large stone in a field near Omandongo, said to be deep in the ground, too heavy to lift, and sent by *Kalunga* (God). The fact that nobody wanted to talk about this mysterious stone, possibly a meteorite, had piqued his curiosity. Guided by Nambahu, Rautanen's baptismal pupil and servant, who had been to the stone before, they first travelled to the wooden grave monument (*ompampa*) of King Nembungu lyaAmatundu (reigned 1750–1810),[11] at the sacred site of his court.[12]

Rautanen and Schinz were received in a friendly manner in the homestead, which guarded the sacred site. The elderly host and his son told them about three stones: one in a field not far from the grave but not visible as it was buried under the sand; a large stone far away to the north; and a small stone inside the homestead. The small stone, measuring slightly larger than an average hand, was lying on the ground in the front yard. It was said to be a fragment of the stone that was located in the field outside. According to Schinz, the piece had been knocked off by their guide Nambahu, and it was used for sharpening knives and hatches. Schinz was also permitted to break off a piece for himself. As he notes, the fact that he could touch and break the piece may indicate that it had lost the *oshidhila* status of its sacred mother stone and had therefore become a profane household item. The host nevertheless clearly hesitated to discuss the mother stone or the piece. The visitors were also not allowed to look inside the two *ompampa* style rainmaking structures in King Nembungu's field, seen in Figure 3.2.[13] To touch such a sacred object or place (*oshimenka*) was a taboo (*oshidhila*).[14]

Concerning the large stone to the north, the homestead head said it was located in an open field about two hours away and assured the visitors that they could go and see it without danger of offending the people's religious feelings. However, instead of continuing to the north they went to the nearer stone called *emanya lyaShapapa*, which was about fifteen minutes away. Schinz was disappointed it was not a meteorite. Instead, he saw what was a flat, white and gneiss-like stone, partly buried in the sand, and with the top surface carefully polished. As the upper part of the stone was free of

9. Namuhuja 1996, 27.
10. Henrichsen 2012, X–XV; Schinz 1891, 220–222, 266–269, 335; Tirronen 1977, 53–56; Peltola 2002, 118; Namuhuja 1996, 32–33; Schinz to his mother, Olukonda, 24 October 1885, and 14 January 1886, and to his brother, 12 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 80–81, 85–88, 90.
11. Namuhuja 1996, 9.
12. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, and a diary entry from 19 October 1885, and 16 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 93, 141–143; Schinz 1891, 329; MRD, 16 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.
13. Ibid. The sources do not seem to support Peltola's note that Rautanen knew of a stone inside the structures. Peltola 2002, 115.
14. See Pettinen 1891, 3; Savola 1916, 185–188; Hopeasalmi 1946, 55–61; Salokoski 2006, 147.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Figure 3.2. Burial site of King Nembungu IyaAmatundu. The two rainmaking structures in the front and the *ompampa* grave farther away have been recently renovated by the Ondonga Traditional Authority. Photograph: Martti Eirola (2023).

sand, he believed that it had been periodically lifted. Estimates of its size differ in the sources from between 25 to 46 centimetres long and between 13 to 30 centimetres wide, and between 4 to 10 centimetres thick. To ascertain what type of stone it was the men excavated it from the sand, turned it on its side and broke off three pieces. Rautanen took one piece and Schinz took two pieces. Finally, they put the stone back and covered its sides with sand, leaving it as it had been before (minus the fragments).[15]

Thus, at least five fragments existed that originated from the same sacred mother stone: one previously removed piece in the nearby homestead, one fragment taken from this piece by Schinz, two pieces broken off by Schinz, and one piece broken off by Rautanen. Two of the last-mentioned pieces, taken by Schinz and Rautanen, are the Ondonga fragments that came to be in Helsinki.

15. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 94; Schinz 1891, 330; MRD, 16 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.



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## Severe Response of the Kingdom of Ondonga

Schinz and Rautanen had been lured into theft by their curiosity, but they were soon going to learn about the extremely serious repercussions of their actions. In 1886, the political atmosphere within the ruling family of Ondonga was tense, and the stone incident increased the sense of unease. In principle, King Kambonde was the supreme authority, but being young, his mother Namupala gwaNangombe ruled the kingdom as a regent with her husband Mpingana yaShimbu. In the Ondonga matrilineal system, the king's mother was a royal person and her husband put her will into action.[16] The parents managed the stone case within the royal family and the kingdom's high council conferred at their court.[17]

First, King Kambonde visited Rautanen on the afternoon of 16 February to hear about the incident. The day after, Mpingana and his investigators subjected Rautanen, Schinz and their employees to a thorough interrogation. Rautanen denied having taken the stone. He said he had previously heard about it from various Aandonga people and explained what had happened, including how Nambahu had guided them. Schinz reports Mpingana saying to them: 'This is a big crime that calls for blood. You saw the *ompampa* graves, visited the stone, and destroyed it. I see that *Kalunga* had led you to the place for committing the crime.' According to Rautanen and Schinz, they now understood that they had broken the law in a highly religious issue, for which they could potentially be subjected to the death penalty. Hence, they truly feared for their lives. In their defence, Rautanen explained they had acted out of ignorance and promised to compensate the kingdom for their crime. According to him, they agreed to jointly pay compensation worth about £13, consisting of 35 pounds of powder, 40 pounds of lead and 2,200 percussion caps, plus 10 pieces of tobacco.[18]

On 19 February, the high council decided to restore the sacred mother stone that had been tampered with. An elderly woman was assigned to collect it and other sacred stones, including those from the time of Jonker Afrikaner's raids into Ondonga in 1858–1862 when many *oshimenka* objects had been destroyed and the stones had been scattered. An ox was also slaughtered as a sacrificial gesture. In Rautanen's mind the stone issue was now settled.[19]

However, the high council of the kingdom was divided about Schinz's punishment. He was accused of desecrating the stone to overturn the ruling family as well as skeletonising a human body he had found, and of photographing. Mpingana and other traditionalists wanted to sentence him to death. However, the more moderate king's party wanted merely to confiscate his cattle and other property, particularly his ethnographic collections that they regarded as magic, and to expel him from the country. On 23 February, the king finally got his way and Schinz left Ondonga for

16. Eirola 1992, 45–46, 57–60; Williams 1991, 145–146.
17. MRD, 18 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.
18. MRD, 17–18 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF; Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, and a diary entry dated 18 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 93–95, 143; Schinz 1891, 331–332.
19. MRD, 19 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF. For the raids of Jonker Afrikaner see Williams 1991, 142–144.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

the Upingtonia Boer Republic in Grootfontein.[20] His life had been saved, but he was expelled from the kingdom, like the European explorers Francis Galton and Charles John Andersson in 1851, and the missionaries Hugo Hahn and Johannes Rath in 1857.[21]

His guide, Nambahu, also survived. He was arrested but managed to escape to Oukwanyama. However, all his relatives' property was confiscated.[22] His expeditionary assignment to the sacred stone exemplifies the process of Christianisation in which local people at the mission stations came under the authority of the missionaries.[23] Even the king was alleged to associate with Christians, which his parents opposed, and some people had expected all the missionaries and Christians in the realm to be killed or expelled after the stone incident.[24]

The incident strained the relationship of Martti Rautanen, and his wife Frieda, with Schinz.[25] Indeed, the scandal jeopardised the entire work of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) in Ovamboland mission field, because all four missionaries present at the time were stationed in Ondonga.[26] Rautanen was the head of the mission and had he been killed or expelled, other missionaries would have found it extremely difficult to remain in the country.

As part of the compensation deal reached on 17 February, Rautanen and Schinz were ordered to return the sacred stone fragments to the ruling family. However, when Nambahu took them to the rulers' envoy he demanded a sacrificial ox instead. Rautanen had given Nambahu the sacred stone fragment in his possession, and Schinz had given him two stones. One was an original sacred stone piece, but the other was a fake.[27] He perpetrated an act of deception as he had swapped the other original fragment in his possession with a rock sample from Hereroland and kept the original for himself.[28] Nambahu apparently brought the pieces to Rautanen, his employer, who informed the king the following day of the envoy's refusal to accept the pieces. However, the monarch merely replied that Rautanen should not worry.[29] In this way, the two Ondonga fragments remained with the missionary. The fragment that Schinz reportedly brought to Zurich has remained untraceable.[30] Schinz and Rautanen stole the sacred stone fragments – they took them from the stone without the permission of the stone's legal owner.[31] However, it seems that Rautanen at least tried to return

20. Schinz 1891, 259–260, 332–335; Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, and a diary entry dated 20 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 94, 143–144.
21. Williams 1991, 119–120.
22. MRD February 18, 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF; Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, and a diary entry dated 18 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 95, 143; Schinz 1891, 332.
23. Eirola 1992, 51–52.
24. MRD, 14 March 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.
25. Schinz's diary, 18 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 143.
26. Peltola 1958, 259–260.
27. Schinz's diary, 18 February 1886, and a letter to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 96, 143.
28. Schinz 1891, 332.
29. MRD, 17–18 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.
30. Henrichsen 2012, XXIII; Silvester et al. 2015, 16.
31. For the theft, see also Silvester and Shiweda 2020, 36–37.



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the fragments as ordered, but the king let him keep them. This indicates again that the stone issue was not as important to the king as it was to his more traditional parents.

## *Ritual Functions of the Sacred Mother Stone*

The sources reveal that the sacred mother stone had three intertwined ritual functions: it was a power stone, a rainmaking stone and a sharpening stone. According to oral tradition, a stone was brought from Kavango River during the migration at the end of the seventeenth century,[32] and its keeper was associated with rainmaking. The leader carried the stone, which he also used to sharpen his axe and which was believed to have special powers. It was then kept in northern Ondonga at *Omukwiyu gwemanya* of Oshigambo, the site of the only solid limestone rock in the region.[33]

As Henrichsen indicates, Schinz, and undoubtedly Rautanen as his informant, was aware of the sacred nature of the burial site of King Nembungu and the three 'holy stones,' as he called them, already when visiting the place on 16 February.[34] Apart from the possibility of finding a meteorite, Schinz was intrigued by the mystery surrounding the large stone that he had heard about in 1885. It linked him with Ondonga religion and culture, which was a focus of his research. His exploration turned to be more of an ethnological enterprise rather than of geological interest.[35] Rautanen wrote afterwards of having hesitated before setting off to the burial site, as he knew it was an *oshimenka* place.[36]

To tamper with a stone in the knowledge that it was culturally taboo illustrates a typical colonial attitude to local religions, cultures and rules. However, it is possible that Schinz and Rautanen were unaware at the time of the expedition of the sacred stone's political function and power. Schinz refers to this function only afterwards,[37] and Rautanen also calls the stone '*emanya ljoshilongo*' (power stone) for the first time when Nambahu was asked whether they had been sent to take the stone to a rival to the throne.[38]

The power stone played a legitimising role in succession disputes over the throne. It was attached to King Nembungu's burial shrine place, Iininge, where all his successors went to collect their royal insignia and receive blessings from ancestors.[39] Schinz tells of a belief that as long as the power stone remained intact and untouched, the kingdom would prosper. But if somebody took the stone (or even a fragment of it), he would remove power from the kingdom. A rumour circulated that King Kambonde himself wanted the stone but was unable to go to it or send his people, for *Kalunga* was believed to punish with death anyone who looked on the stone. Accordingly, the

32. Namuhuja 1996, 6–7.
33. Salokoski 2006, 82, 222.
34. See Henrichsen 2012, XIV.
35. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886 and a diary entry dated 16 February 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 9293, 142–143.
36. MRD, 16–17 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF.
37. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 94–95.
38. MRD, 18 February 1886, mf OS 447, MRC, NAF. Spelling by Rautanen.
39. Williams 1991, 117.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

notion of killing Schinz was contemplated as an act that would help to prevent the kingdom from falling.[40]

The power stone was located in an open field. The stories that related it to the ground may indicate its connection with the land. Namibian historian Frieda-Nela Williams refers to the land as one of the five elements that stimulated the foundation of kingdoms (the other elements being people, cattle, corn and religion). The ideology of kingship was based on religion, in which the sovereign maintained the link between the dead and the living through sacrificial ceremonies and other rituals, including rainmaking.[41] The Finnish anthropologist Märta Salokoski has noted that spiritual power resided in power objects or fetishes that enabled access to spirits. Political power could not exist without the support of ancestor spirits.[42]

Concerning rainmaking, only the elders who had passed through the ritual were allowed to see the stone at Iininge.[43] The American anthropologist Edwin M. Loeb reports how the king's mother was responsible for rainmaking rituals at the graves of former kings. Loeb also refers to four sacred stones that were nearby at which people still made sacrifices to the spirits for rain in the 1940s.[44] Besides rain, sharp utensils, such as knives, axes and hoes, were vital for the agricultural community and were hence subject to rituals. As with Schinz, Salokoski also discusses the sharpening function in the ritual use of stone by the Aawambo kings.[45]

There were reportedly multiple ritual stones in Ondonga. Schinz and Rautanen noted three such stones, whilst Loeb wrote of four. The Austrian anthropologist Viktor Lebzelter mentions two sacred stones: a small movable one and the rock at Oshigambo.[46] Another sacred rock was located 175 kilometres south of Ondonga on the road to Okaukweyo.[47]

Concerning the sacred mother stone at King Nembungu's grave, Silvester names the family of Saara Shangula, at the nearby guardian homestead, who were tasked with maintaining the rituals to preserve the grave from generation to generation. He argues that we should link the stone fragment[s] to this intangible cultural heritage.[48] In June 2023, I had the chance to visit King Nembungu's burial site and discovered the flat stone, which I presume to be the mother stone of the Ondonga fragments. It was lying on the ground under an African ebony tree not far from the two rainmaking structures. The current inhabitants of the homestead seemed to recognise it by the name *emanya lyaShapapa*, as Rautanen also referred to it in 1886. The stone is roughly about 24 x 23 x 6 centimetres, and it matches with the descriptions in the sources. However, only a physical test would be able to confirm conclusively whether the fragments fit into the stone. Besides, echoing Silvester, local oral stories and information related to this stone, and other ritual stones, need to be urgently collected.

40. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 95.
41. Williams 1991, 98, 114.
42. Salokoski 2006, 132, 147.
43. Williams 1991, 117; Salokoski 2006, 222–226, 235. For rainmaking rituals, see Salokoski 1992.
44. Loeb 1962, 277–278.
45. Salokoski 1992, 19.
46. Lebzelter 1934, 188. Schinz and Rautanen also refer to a large sacred stone in the north.
47. Rautanen 1904, 6; Hopeasalmi 1946, 56.
48. Silvester 2018a, 62. Schinz also refers to a family assigned to preserve the grave in 1886. Schinz to his mother, Grootfontein, 13 March 1886, in Henrichsen 2012, 93.



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## *Ondonga Fragments in Finland*

The Ondonga fragments in Martti Rautanen's possession began to serve Finnish missionary interests from 1891. At this time Rautanen brought a fragment with him on a visit to Finland and showed it at a mission event as a token of Ondonga beliefs and customs, which the missionaries regarded as heathen and superstitious.[49] Rautanen then took the fragment back to Olukonda. It seems the stone issue made him deepen his understanding of the religious culture of the Aandonga people. The pieces of stone turned into objects of special meaning, and he kept them in his study for forty years. According to Peltola, Dr. Schinz's visit boosted Rautanen's interest in ethnographic research.[50]

The Ondonga fragments likely ended up in Finland in 1928, along with other items from Martti Rautanen's study in Olukonda, after the owner's death in 1926. His study was rebuilt in the FMS Mission Museum, which opened in Helsinki in January 1931. The FMS displayed artefacts that had mostly been brought by missionaries as souvenirs. By displaying ritual objects, the FMS were able to demonstrate to a Finnish audience the important results of their missionary work.[51]

The Mission Museum guide of 1955 presents the Ondonga fragments among the objects on display in Rautanen's study. Figure 3.1. shows fragment no. 187 (later NMF no. VKSLS5620) with the inscription 'Emańa ljošilongo. K'Ošapapa. 1886.' The Mission Museum catalogue entry erroneously describes it as a meteorite: 'Artifact 5620: a piece of an Ondonga sacred stone, Oshipapa. The piece is from a meteorite that fell to Earth in 1883 or 1886. Power stones are believed to symbolise good government, stability and a connection to the forefathers' spirits.'[52] No entry was written for fragment no. 186 (later NMF no. VKSLS9433).

In June 2013, the FELM (the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, formerly the FMS) closed the Mission Museum and in 2015 donated all its collections, including the Ondonga fragments, to the NMF.[53] The NMF currently holds over 2,000 Namibian objects in its two main collections.[54]

The Namibian artefacts on display in the Mission Museum had educated Finns about the wider world. The Danish museologist Mille Gabriel notes that the ethnographic museum was one of only a few such institutions where Western people could get a glimpse of the exotic 'Other.' Today, however, due to the colonial origins of ethnographic collections, source communities are increasingly questioning the rights

49. For the mission event, see 'Uutisia Orivedeltä,' 1891, 2.
50. Peltola 2002, 114–119.
51. Koivunen 2011, 24–26, 132–142, 152–153; Huttunen 1955, 3–4.
52. In Silvester et al. 2015, 16. Translated from Finnish by the NMF.
53. See FELM 2013.
54. Martti Rautanen's Ambo Collection (VK1049c:1–127) includes 126 items that he collected from Ondonga and sold to the predecessor of the NMF in 1892. This collection was never possessed by the FMS/FELM Mission Museum. The former FELM Mission Museum's Kumbukumbu Collection (VKSLS) contains 1,881 objects. The NMF also holds 210 other artefacts from Namibia. Email by Pilvi Vainonen to the author, 5 July 2022. The objects are not on display but kept in storage.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

of ethnographic museums.[55] They are often holding on to what are, effectively, stolen artefacts.

## *Repatriation Project*

The closing of the FELM Museum set in motion a project to repatriate the Ondonga fragments. In 2015, a MAN inventory team, led by the late Dr. Jeremy Silvester, discovered two ritual stones held within the Kumbukumbu Collection of the NMF. One stone was the Ondonga fragment no. VKSLS5620, of which the MAN informed the Ondonga Traditional Authority and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Namibia.[56]

On 15 April 2019, when launching the joint MAN–NMF project entitled *Oombale dhi ihaka* ('A Bond That Cannot Be Broken'), depicting Ondonga artefacts in Finland, Vice-President Nangolo Mbumba of Namibia expressed his wish that the Ondonga power stone be returned to his homeland. He suggested that such cultural artefacts should be placed in museums that serve as educational resources and provide a space filled with memories and stories to inspire Namibians.[57]

Finnish and Namibian authorities prepared for the repatriation of Ondonga fragment no. VKSLS5620 in 2020 to honour 150 years of Finnish-Namibian relations, but the COVID-19 pandemic halted the process. Finally, on 27 April 2023, I witnessed how the NMF handed over both Ondonga fragments to the National Museum of Namibia in Windhoek during the state visit of President Sauli Niinistö of Finland. The event gained a great deal of media publicity in both Namibia and Finland and added to the long and special relationship between the two countries. In the presence of *Omukwaniilwa* (King) Fillemon Shuumbwa Nangolo of Ondonga, President Hage Geingob of Namibia promised to bring the fragments to the Ondonga community for restitution.

The Ondonga fragments were the third ritual stones repatriated from Finland to Namibia. After Namibian independence, requests were made from the communities in northern Namibia for the return of sacred stones from the FELM Mission Museum to restore the kingship in the former Kingdoms of Oukwanyama, Uukwambi and Ombalantu. The Oukwanyama power stone was returned during the state visit of President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland to Namibia in 1995, and the stone of Ombalantu was handed over during the state visit of President Hifikepunye Pohamba to Finland in 2013. The restoration of the Ombalantu Kingdom ultimately failed, however, as the community did not agree on an heir to the throne.[58] I recall a similar failure having occurred among the Uukwambi community in the 1990s, which led to the FELM not returning the stone it possessed.[59]

55. Gabriel 2016, 275, 277.
56. Silvester et al. 2015, 5, 16, 35; Silvester and Shiweda 2020, 35. The other stone was a ritual stone from Uukwambi. The Mission Museum was renamed Kumbukumbu in 2009. FELM 2013.
57. Simasiku 2019.
58. Silvester and Shiweda 2020, 34–35; Kotilainen and Lahdentausta 2018, 136–137.
59. See footnote 56 in this chapter.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

The restitution of the Ondonga fragments could pave the way for the return of more Namibian artefacts from Finland. Thus, it is important to ensure that the claimants are entitled to request the return of such objects and that the objects will be stored or exhibited in appropriate conditions. Alternative solutions could include permanent loans, joint ownership, exchange and digital repatriation.[60] The Finnish museologist Pilvi Vainonen highlights the repatriation of information via widening digital access to cultural heritage.[61] In this respect, the digitalisation of Martti Rautanen's Ambo Collection at the NMF was a significant step forward. Its artefacts are now openly accessible online at www.finna.fi. Because information, including oral traditions, exist in both countries, the repatriation and restitution will also necessitate joint provenance research.

## *Conclusion*

In terms of provenance, the Ondonga fragments belong to the cultural heritage of Namibia and particularly the 'descendant community' of the Kingdom of Ondonga.[62] In 1886, the rulers of the kingdom restored the tainted mother power stone to continue with its sacred ritual functions. Traditions have since changed and rituals have faded. Williams points out that what was indigenous could not survive foreign influences that came about through contact, trade, Christianity and colonialism.[63] It is now up to the Ondonga Traditional Authority, elders and community to determine the status of the fragments and the presumed mother stone, as well as their functions and their mutual relationship in order to restitute and reintegrate them into the community.

As Vice-President Mbumba suggested, the Ondonga fragments could be displayed in a museum to inform the descendant community of their cultural background and history. In a similar manner, the Dutch museologist Paul Ariese argues that the removal of objects from traditional religious or cultural contexts to museums makes them rational instruments for learning, inspiration and conversation. The stories of how religious practices have shaped and still shape the world for both good and bad need to be shared and explored.[64]

Repatriation and restitution are not about the mere objects, but rather about the historical and cultural information they contain. Silvester argues that an object needs to be linked to the place, stories and knowledge that complete it.[65] The story of the Ondonga fragments shows how they were cut off from their sacred mother stone during the colonial era and the information associated with it. The restitution process will complete the decolonisation of this information for Namibians.

60. Kotilainen and Lahdentausta 2018, 137.
61. Vainonen 2019.
62. See Silvester and Shiweda 2020, 36–37.
63. Williams 1991, 168.
64. Ariese 2021, 12. For cultural dialogue, see also Silvester 2018b, 125.
65. Silvester 2018a, 62.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# ‘The Bushmen are Getting a Field’: The Dreams and Reality of the Finnish San Mission in North-Central Namibia, 1950–1976

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*Abstract*

The San are Namibia’s indigenous people. The challenges faced by the San groups for survival as hunter-gatherers since the 1930s are considerable as they live under the constant pressure of the expansion of neighbouring African communities and white settlers. The Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) recognised the worsening situation of the San groups and opened a new mission station in 1959 at Nkongo specifically targeting the San. It was located in the middle of sparsely populated forest savanna between the Ovamboland and Kavango regions. To increase awareness of the San and to obtain extra financial support for the San mission a documentary film, *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* (*Bushmannit saavat pellon*), was produced in 1967 and was shown on various occasions. The aim of this chapter is to compare how the message of the film corresponded with the reality encountered by missionaries working among the San. The documentary underscored the need to sedentarise the mobile San groups, as this was expected to promote their conversion and adoption of Christian values. Relations between the San and Aawambo living in their vicinity were portrayed as harmonious and friendly. In the first stage of the FMS’s mission, the San were attracted from forests to the mission station and were encouraged to take up agricultural work by using a questionable product: tobacco. The apparent success of the San Mission, portrayed in *The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, turned to disappointment by the late 1960s. The language barrier and bad leadership among the FMS, resulted in a decreased level of trust in the missionaries among the San. Discrepancies increased between the harmonious picture presented in the film and the real life that was reported by the missionaries. These antagonisms only worsened in the early 1970s.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

The San are Namibia's indigenous people. The arrival of Bantu-speaking immigrants, who practiced agriculture, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and European colonisers from the mid-nineteenth century, reduced the living space of the small hunter-gatherer San groups in Namibian territory.[1] The survival of the San groups living under the pressure of expansion of neighbouring African communities and white settlement in the present territories of Namibia and Botswana became a concern among the colonial authorities and missionary organisations from the 1930s.[2]

In the early 1950s, the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) prepared plans to open a separate mission field in the eastern parts of Ovamboland for the San. Officially the San Mission began to operate in 1959 when Finnish missionaries settled at the Nkongo Mission Station. The opening of the San Mission coincided with celebrations marking the centenary of the FMS.[3] In colonial sources and literature, the San were called Bushmen, which now has racist and pejorative connotations. The neutral term San that is used in this chapter has been derived from the Khoi speakers that inhabit the Cape of Good Hope. They called their neighbours by the term *Sonqua* (San).[4]

The opening of a new mission field required extra funding that was earmarked to be obtained from Finnish mission friends by introducing the San Mission in the *Suomen Lähetyssanomat* periodical published by the FMS. Almost every issue of the periodical included a long list of private individuals who had donated funds to missionary work. In early 1960, Eino Pennanen, the first Finnish missionary at the Nkongo Mission Station, published an article in *Suomen Lähetyssanomat* in which he described his experiences of his first encounters with the San in a positive and inspiring way. He underscored that there was a huge amount of work ahead and that human and material resources were needed.[5] To increase awareness of the San Mission the FMS released a twelve-minute documentary film in 1967 in Finnish and Swedish, entitled *Bushmannit saavat pellon / Bushmän blir bofasta* (*The Bushmen are Getting a Field)*. The film was presented at a variety of meetings of mission friends to promote fundraising for the San Mission.[6]

The aim of this chapter is to examine how the message of the documentary corresponded with the reality encountered by missionaries working among the San. The other side of the coin is approached through missionaries' annual reports and letters addressed to the board of the FMS in Helsinki. The film was produced at a time when many African countries were taking their first steps as independent states or struggling for independence. Since the late 1950s, the nationalist movement was also strengthening in Namibia, and an open armed struggle for independence began

1. Suzman 2001, 1–4; Lee 1979a, 32–35. Also see, Collins and Burns 2014; Omer-Cooper 1994; Iliffe 1995; Williams 1991.
2. See Gordon 1992, 137–146.
3. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1952, Uukwanyama, Hha: 24, FMS, NAF; MMC at Onayena 9–12 January 1957, §24, Hha: 28, FMS, NAF; A. Hukka, Overview on Owamboland in 1959, Hha: 31, FMS, NAF.
4. For more about the terms Bushman and San, see, for example, Lee 1979a, 29–35; Gordon 1992, 4–5.
5. Pennanen 1960, 32–33.
6. *Bushmannit saavat pellon* (*The Bushmen are Getting a Field*), 1967, NAI.



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in August 1966.[7] The dissolution of the colonial system in Africa is also reflected in the history of the San Mission.

In addition to the film, important primary sources utilised in this chapter include the minutes of the Ovamboland and Kavango missionary conferences, annual reports of the missionaries as well as correspondence between missionaries and the African secretary of the FMS. These records enable an analysis of the contradictions between the public image of the San Mission and the missionaries' experiences from the field. The publications of the anthropologist Richard B. Lee in relation to his research project on the !Kung San of Botswana and Robert J. Gordon's *The Bushmen Myth* (1992) provide valuable information vis-à-vis the position of north-central Namibia's San within the wider southern African context.[8] Teuvo Raiskio has examined the San Mission of the FMS in his doctoral dissertation, in which he focuses on an analysis of the changing image of the San among Finnish missionaries from the early 1950s to 1985.[9]

## *Concern about the Future of San Groups in Namibian Territory*

Gordon has discussed how the image of the San and their culture was constructed by Europeans since the nineteenth century and how it changed from the early twentieth-century perception of them as 'vermin' to 'beautiful people' by Namibia's independence.[10] During the first half of the twentieth century, San groups lived in small, dispersed settlements in the central and northern parts of the country. The South African mandate administration and white farmers regarded these lands as fringe areas between the 'African native reservations.' However, the San did not live in isolation, as they had contacts with other African communities and white farmers via temporary farm work and as servants. All San groups did not behave in the same manner towards other African communities and whites. Those San groups that had longer experience of contacts with white settlers were called 'tamed' by Europeans, whereas others were called 'wild.' The expansion of African and white settlements into the traditional hunting and gathering grounds of the San groups often led to conflict. The so-called 'wild' San were accused of being cattle thieves, and the overall impression of their future was described as being gloomy.[11] Gordon reminds us that despite the San being labelled as thieves, white farmers became dependent on them as workforce on their farms. In 1947, for example, in the Grootfontein district the San accounted for 40 percent of the rural labour force.[12]

In his annual report for 1931, the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland (NCO) highlighted the relations between the San and Aawambo:

7. See, for example, Melber 2014; Thornberry 2004.
8. Lee 1979a; 1979b; Gordon 1992.
9. Raiskio 1997.
10. Gordon 1992, 219.
11. Gordon 1992,137.
12. Gordon 1992,170.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

> There are a good number of families who inhabit the bush country in eastern Ukuanyama and Ondonga, who, when they feel the pinch of hunger, move towards the Ovambo settlements where they generally manage to obtain a little grain or other foodstuffs by barter.[13]

At a general level, the NCO perceived relations between Aawambo and San as being friendly, excluding occasional friction with the 'wild' San related to water rights and hunting grounds in far eastern Ondonga. In his annual report for 1947 the NCO reported:

> The tame bushpeople live amongst the Ovambos in the tribal areas and adopt the customs of the tribe with which they live […] They inter-marry with the Ovambos, and the offspring of these Unions are recognised and accepted as Ovambos, and live the normal present day life of the Ovambo.[14]

The categorisation of San groups as 'wild' and 'tame' is an excellent indication of the colonial attitude of Europeans towards African indigenous populations. In addition to the colonial authorities, European settlers and missionaries used this kind of classification of the San in their everyday speech, and it is also reflected in official population statistics.[15]

The extension of missionary work to San groups living in forest savannas was discussed among the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMC) and Catholic missionaries as early as the German colonial period (1884–1915) and continued during the South African mandate administration in the first half of the twentieth century. The greatest obstacle to successful missionary work had been the difficulties encountered in trying to settle the nomadic San groups. In the 1950s, the RMS reduced its investment in the San Mission, whereas the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) – that was openly sympathetic to apartheid – decided in 1960 to focus their work on the 'primitive Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert.' A year later the first missionary arrived in Tsumkwe, which was to become the centre of the Bushmanland Homeland.[16] In 1963, the South African government published the report of the Odendaal Commission, popularly known as The Odendaal Plan, which resulted in the establishment of so-called homelands for each ethnic group in Namibia starting from the late 1960s. The homeland system was based on the principles of the South African apartheid, promoting the 'separate development' of various ethnic groups, leading to racial segregation and the stringent control of black Africans.[17]

Finnish missionaries working in Namibia were aware of the plans of the South African administration and other missionary societies for 'taming' the 'wild' San groups living outside of the Police Zone, which extended from the Atlantic Ocean

13. Native Commissioner of Ovamboland (NCO), Annual Report for Ovamboland and Kaokoveld for the year 1931, NAO 19, 11/1, v. 4, NAN.
14. NCO, Annual Report: Ovamboland 1947, NAO 21, 12/2, NAN.
15. NCO, Annual Report: Ovamboland 1945, NAO 21, 11/1, NAN.
16. Gordon 1992, 64–65, 177–179.
17. For more about the South African policy of separate development in Namibia, see 'Report of the Commission (Odendaal Plan),' 1964; Wallace and Kinahan 2011.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

to the Botswana border. The Police Zone boundary separated indigenous African communities in north Namibia, such as the Aawambo and Kavango people, from the central and southern parts of the country, which were predominantly settled by whites. This boundary was also commonly known as the Red Line due to its role in efficiently controlling the movement of people from the northern areas into the Police Zone. Another significant function of the Red Line was to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease that is still prevalent in the northern parts of Namibia.[18] The FMS was interested in the San groups living in the forest zone between the colonial Ovamboland and Kavango regions. Missionaries were convinced that successful work among the San required the establishment of a mission station in the area where the nomadic San groups lived.[19]

Even though Finnish missionaries had occasional contact with the San since the former's arrival in Ovamboland in 1870, the latter had not been the target of missionary work. The missionaries' conception of the San, their culture and mode of living was superficial and based on their own slight observations and colonial literature.[20] In the early 1950s, the missionaries' management committee in Ovamboland began to make preparations for opening a separate San mission in eastern Uukwanyama. Indeed, they applied for permission from the South African administration and the headman of the Uukwanyama community to establish a mission station at Nkongo. The necessary permissions were soon received, and an Aawambo clergyman was sent to manage and monitor construction work of the mission station and to undertake other kinds of preparatory work.[21]

The San Mission was officially opened in 1959. In the same year, the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Ovamboland reported that there were 160 whites, 210,000 Bantus and 2,900 San living in Ovamboland.[22] Except for the white population, the presented figures were not accurate. The number of San was closer to 5,000.[23] According to Lee, the maximum size of a vital hunter-gatherer group varied from 50 to 200 persons depending on ecological conditions.[24] In north-central Namibia, the size of a vital San group was closer to 100 than 200, which would have meant that between thirty and forty San groups were wandering in the forest area.

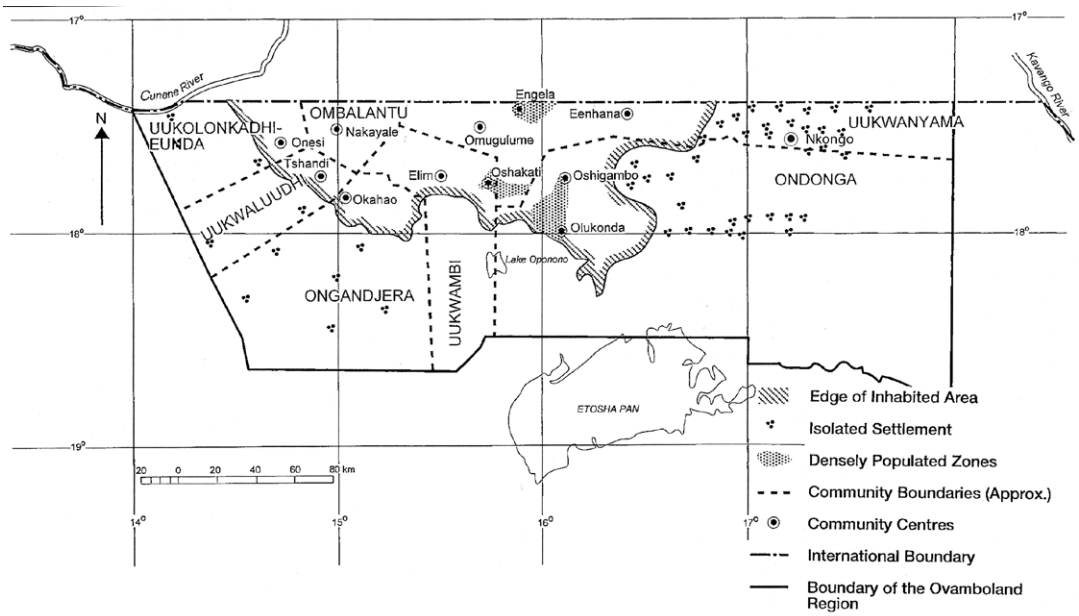
## *Strategic Guidelines for the San Mission*

The strategy and working methods of Finnish missionaries was to attract San groups to the mission station and subsequently to foster conditions for them to reside there permanently. This was the traditional colonial strategy in trying to settle nomadic populations. The crucial elements of the strategy were to teach the San the principles

18. For more about the history of the Police Zone boundary and Red Line, see Miescher 2012.
19. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1958, Uukwanyama, Hha: 30; FMS, NAF; E. Pennanen, Annual Report for 1960, Nkongo, Hha: 32, FMS, NAF.
20. See, for example, Siiskonen 1990, 60–79; Pentti 1959, 188–194.
21. MMC at Olukonda 14–15 January 1953, §19, Hha: 24, FMS, NAF; E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1957, Uukwanyama, Hha: 29, FMS, NAF.
22. Bantoesakekommissaris Ovamboland, Jaarverslag 1959, BAC 55, HN 1/15/6/1/6 (vol. 4), NAN.
23. See, for example, MMC at Oshigambo 26 February–1 March 1965, § 10, Hha: 36, FMS, NAF.
24. See, for example, Lee 1972, 126; Lee 1979a; Lee 1979b.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28




*Source*: Modified from Republic of South Africa, 1971: 10

**Figure 4.1. The Nkongo Mission Station and the administrative division of Ovamboland in the 1960s. Adopted from Notkola and Siiskonen 2000, 15.**

of field cultivation and to change their diet from foraging and hunting products to agricultural products, such as grain and vegetables, that could be complemented by traditional foraging and hunting.[25] Another, optional working strategy for the missionaries was to preserve the nomadic lifestyle of the San by following the wandering groups. However, this option was not seriously considered.[26]

From the point of view of missionary work, severe weather conditions in 1959 promoted contact with the San. Scarcity of water and food led the San from the surrounding forests to seek provisions at the Nkongo Mission Station.[27] The sedentarisation of the San began by clearing forest savanna for fields and by cultivating millet, maize and various kinds of vegetables. The missionaries' annual reports reveal that the settling project was conducted very strategically. In 1962, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC) donated a tractor for clearing forest savanna and for tilling the soil. A second tractor was donated in 1964 by the friends of the Finnish mission.[28] At this time, the tilling of the soil was usually done with hoes

25. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1952, Uukwanyama, Hha: 24, FMS, NAF.
26. Pentti 1959, 193.
27. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1959, Uukwanyama, Hha: 31, FMS, NAF; E. Pennanen, Annual Report for 1959, Nkongo, Hha: 31, FMS, NAF; Pennanen 1960, 32–33.
28. MMC at Kuring-Kuru 29–31 January 1963, §17, Hha: 34, FMS, NAF; E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1963, Nkongo, Hha: 35, FMS, NAF; *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* 1967, NAI.



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and the use of tractors was exceptional. In his annual report of 1963, the missionary Hynönen noted that a field about 40 hectares in size had been cleared in Nkongo, and in the neighbouring Ekoka about 20 hectares of a new field was being prepared. In the beginning of 1966, the cultivated area in Nkongo and Ekoka had grown to 140 hectares and there was still about 250–300 hectares of land that were deemed to be suitable for arable farming.[29]

The building of semi-permanent houses was another prerequisite for sedentarisation. Permanent settlement of the San provided the opportunity to offer health services to them and to open a school for their children. In 1964, about 700 San had arrived at the Nkongo Mission Station, but when good summer rains came, about 120 San followed their traditional seasonal rhythm and returned to the forest. A year later, about 800 San had stayed for some time at the mission station and about half of them had settled down semi-permanently.[30]

The grand idea and the long-term aim of the sedentarisation project was the conversion of the San. At Epiphany in 1961, the first four young San women were baptised.[31] In 1962, eighty adult men attended the baptismal school and fifty-five children started at the recently established private school for the San. The education of children was thought to be the most important task in spreading Christianity in the long term. It was expected that education would promote the adoption of Christian values and speed up the transition from a mobile mode of living to permanent settlement.[32] At the beginning of 1963, sixty-four San children attended school, but by the end of the year, the number had grown to 245.[33] The missionaries' inadequate knowledge of the San language ensured that the mission work and the organisation of school work was a great challenge.[34]

## *The Image of the San Mission Conveyed by the Film The Bushmen are Getting a Field*

The aim *of The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, a short, twelve-minute documentary, was to introduce the new mission field to Finnish mission friends and to promote fundraising for the San Mission. The documentary was planned and produced for the FMS by Osmo Visuri, a distinguished TV editor. His background included working as the head of the documentary production department of the Finnish Broadcasting Company. Visuri planned the film in close collaboration with the Reverend Mikko Ihamäki, who was an experienced missionary who worked in Ovamboland in the

29. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1963, Nkongo, Hha: 35; FMS, NAF; E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1965, Nkongo, Hha: 35, FMS, NAF; *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* 1967, NAI; see also Makkonen 1974, 107.
30. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1964, Nkongo, Hha: 36. FMS, NAF; E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1965, Nkongo, Hha: 36, FMS, NAF.
31. E. Pennanen, Annual Report for 1960, Nkongo, Hha: 32, FMS, NAF.
32. Pennanen 1960, 33; E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1962, Nkongo, Hha: 34, FMS, NAF.
33. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1963, Nkongo, Hha: 35, FMS, NAF.
34. A. Eirola, Annual Report for 1967 from the South-West African mission field, Hha: 38, AFELM.



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1960s. Ihamäki knew the local conditions in the Nkongo area very well and was in charge of shooting the film in the field.[35]

In *The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, which was probably filmed in 1966, Aawambo, San and missionaries were filmed clearing fields and building houses together for the San. The film focused on the unfamiliarity of San men with hard, physical cultivation work, which was taught to them by missionaries and Aawambo. Working in the fields was presented as real work compared to hunting.[36] In the film, the San are portrayed as eager to learn the skills necessary for arable farming. Nonetheless, in the annual reports of the missionaries, attention was also paid to the unwillingness of the San men to do regular work. Such observations were made at the same time as the filmmakers were working in the field.[37]

The inexperience of the San with a sedentary way of life is skilfully emphasised in the documentary, as attention is paid to the adoption of grain products into their diet. The narrator pondered whether San women did not possess the skills and utensils to make millet porridge. This supposed problem was solved by acquiring a mill in which millet was ground into flour. Millet porridge was also prepared in a communal kitchen instead of preparing it as the Aawambo had used to do in individual households.[38] The film effectively revealed the unfamiliarity of missionaries with the social organisation and social life of the San. Lee and Gordon have highlighted the strong bonds among members of San groups and their strong sense of community spirit that missionaries often overlooked.[39] The missionaries' superficial familiarity with San culture was evident both in the film and in their annual reports and correspondence.

The treatment of ailing elders was used as a social argument for the sedentarisation of the San groups. The film underscored that ailing elders were left to die if they could not keep up with the nomadic norms of the group. A special hut was erected at the Nkongo Mission Station for ailing elders, where they could receive food and medical care during the last days of their lives. This treatment of elders helped to visualise in a tangible manner the 'backwardness' of the nomadic way of life of the San and the need for financial support from mission friends to improve their miserable living conditions.[40]

As a whole, the film created the impression of successful advances at the San Mission in collaboration with Aawambo. In Ekoka, near the Nkongo Mission Station, about forty houses were constructed for the San in collaboration with Aawambo and missionaries. Measures targeting a change in the production and housing systems of the San particularly revealed the colonial thinking of missionaries. The film addressed the sedentarisation of the nomadic San groups and argued that it was inevitable that an improvement in their miserable living conditions would occur alongside successful mission work. The Swedish title of the film – *Bushmän blir bofasta, The Bushmen are becoming sedentarised* – directly indicates the main aim of the San Mission. Yet, the

35. *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* 1967, NAI.
36. *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* 1967, NAI.
37. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1965, Nkongo, Hha: 37, FMS, NAF.
38. *The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, 1967, NAI.
39. Lee 1972, 128–130; Gordon 1992, 211.
40. *The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, 1967, NAI.



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film was silent regarding the impact of sedentarisation on the social life and culture of the San.

## *The San Mission from the Missionaries' Perspective*

The portrayal in the documentary of the peaceful coexistence between the San and Aawambo corresponded with the missionaries' annual reports and other reporting to the FMS board in Helsinki during the first years of the San Mission. The first two heads of the Nkongo Mission Station, Eino Pennanen (1959–1962) and Erkki Hynönen (1962–1966), were experienced missionaries and had worked years in Ovamboland. Hynönen's term as the head of the Nkongo Mission Station ended in 1966. He was followed between 1967–1969 by Raimo Luhta, an agricultural expert who had no work experience in Ovamboland and whose knowledge of the San was minimal. In 1969, Luhta was appointed the head of an experimental farm project of the ELOC in the Kavango region, a project which was financially supported by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The successors of Luhta at the Nkongo Mission Station were also novices in regard to fieldwork and had superficial knowledge of Aawambo and San cultures.[41] After Lea Juutilainen left the Nkongo Mission Station in 1974, the leadership role was transferred to the staff of the ELOC.[42] In 1976, the remaining Finnish personnel were evacuated from the Nkongo Mission Station due to the intensification of Namibia's liberation struggle in the forest zone between Ovamboland and Kavango.[43]

Available sources do not reveal why the FMS sent inexperienced novices to lead the Nkongo Mission Station after Hynönen's departure, despite it being well-known that working in a new mission field required a missionary with strong work experience, preferably with Aawambo. One explanation is that missionaries working with Aawambo knew the challenges related to the San Mission and were unwilling to take the risk of moving to Nkongo. All candidates were aware of their superficial knowledge of San cultural traditions, and nobody spoke the San language. Missionary work at the Nkongo Mission Station had been carried out since the establishment of the station in collaboration with the staff of the ELOC. The latter had better knowledge of the San language and culture and could help the Finns in their work. Furthermore, a few San had some knowledge of the Oshindonga language because they had occasionally been in contact with Aawambo. The personnel policy of the Nkongo Mission Station indicated that the FMS was willing to assign greater responsibility to the ELOC due to the language barrier. By the late 1960s, it was understood that an expansion of the mission work among the San required better skills in the San language.[44]

The progress of the San sedentarisation project almost stagnated after Hynönen's departure, even though the LWF began to provide financial support to two projects

41. R. Luhta, Annual Report for 1968, Nkongo, Hha: 39, AFELM; MMC 24–25 October 1969, §8, Hha: 39, AFELM.
42. T. Heikkinen, Annual Report for 1974, Nkongo, Hha: 44, AFELM.
43. MMC 19 March 1976, §43, Hha: 45, AFELM.
44. MMC 6–9 February 1970, §10, Hha: 40, AFELM; O. Seppänen, Annual Report for 1969, Hha: 40, AFELM; T. Heikkinen, Annual Report for 1971, Hha: 40, AFELM.



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in 1966 that focused on the San who lived in the Nkongo area. These projects were entitled 'Bushmen Settlement Scheme at Nkongo' and 'Bushmen School at Nkongo.'[45] However, the number of sedentarised San did not increase and the number of school children began to fall from the mid-1960s. In 1967, Luhta reported the clearing of fifteen hectares of new fields, but thereafter the cultivated area did not increase in spite of the financial support received from the LWF. In 1973, Lea Juutilainen, the head of the Nkongo Mission Station, was aware of a decrease in the cultivated area and mentioned that thirteen families had moved to the forest. In 1975, a decrease in the number of San residents in Nkongo and Ekoka led to a situation in which the cultivated area covered only about a quarter of the total field area. Instead of cultivating their own fields, many San preferred working with Aawambo in their fields or *shebeens* (bars).[46] In a similar way, the number of school children dropped from about 240 in the mid-1960s to 112 in 1970.[47]

What were the main reasons for the slowdown of the San Mission from the late 1960s? An important reason was that Hynönen's successors were novices in fieldwork and their knowledge of San and Aawambo culture was superficial. Due to the language barrier inexperienced missionaries were uncertain and unable to adjust to the local cultural environment and were unable to assume leadership roles in the community. Osmo Seppänen, who succeeded Luhta as the head of the station, admitted that young and inexperienced missionaries, like himself and his predecessor, did not enjoy the trust of the staff members of the mission station. This lack of leadership led to tension and quarrels between the staff, which reflected directly on their work among the San.[48] Furthermore, Hynönen's occasional visits to Nkongo caused confusion both among the station personnel and San residents. In 1973 the African secretary of the FMS, Olavi Ojanperä, frankly advised Hynönen that it was no longer his task to dictate how the San Mission work should be organised.[49]

In his memorandum to the leadership of the FMS, Hynönen, the ex-head of the Nkongo Mission Station revealed a plausible interpretation as to why the San sedentarisation project had proceeded smoothly in the early 1960s. He explained that the life of nomadic San groups was based on three essentials: food, water and tobacco. Alcohol and tobacco were important items that defined the relationship between San and Aawambo. Many San had become dependent on tobacco, which sometimes included small amounts of *dagga* (cannabis).[50] In Ovamboland, Aawambo had previously attracted San to work for them by providing them with alcohol and

45. Letter from A. Eirola to the LWF, 10 June 1966, I: 39, 1966, Documents of the African Secretary and Office, and African Work Secretary (ASTO), AFELM.
46. R. Luhta, Annual Report for 1975, Hha: 44, AFELM.
47. Hynönen 1981, 239; Letter from A. Eirola to the LWF 10 June 1966, I: 39, 1966, ASTO, AFELM; O. Eriksson's Report of the development projects funded by the LWF, 14 August 1970, I: 39, 1970, ASTO, AFELM.
48. O. Seppänen, Annual Report for 1969, Hha: 40, AFELM.
49. O. Ojanperä's letter to Hynönen, 10 April 1973, I:39, 1973, ASTO, AFELM. See also, O. Seppänen, Annual Report for 1969, Nkongo, Hha: 40, AFELM.
50. E. Hynönen to the Secretary of African work at the FMS, a memorandum concerning the situation of the Bushman work in Nkongo relating to my African excursion in 1973, ASTO I: 39, 1973, AFELM.



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tobacco.[51] White settlers and other African communities had used the same method in other parts of Namibia because the San were inexperienced in handling cash and did not understand its value.[52]

In a similar manner Hynönen had provided a small daily portion of tobacco for the San who had arrived at the mission station. He claimed that an important reason for the slowdown at the San Mission after he left was that his successors had refused to provide or to sell tobacco to the sedentarised San. Therefore, many San, who were dependent on tobacco, found their way from the fields of Nkongo to Aawambo farms located near the mission station.[53]

Hynönen considered it acceptable to try and attract the San away from forests by using tobacco. Indeed, he recommended this strategy to his colleagues. However, at the same time he also condemned Aawambo for using the same method to recruit San into their workforce. He argued that Aawambo targeted and tried to subjugate San because they did not accept them as independent farmers, but only as crofters and servants. To avoid the subjugation of the San, Hynönen instructed the headman of the Uukwanyama to reserve a clearly defined area for settlement for the San.[54]

After the end of his term as a missionary, Hynönen went even further and suggested the establishment of a special reservation for the San around the Nkongo Mission Station. He claimed that the establishment of a reservation would protect the San and would enable them to build an independent and separate development that was free of outside pressures. The idea of a reservation for the San appeared to outsiders as a policy that was directly in support of South Africa's apartheid policy, which was based on separate ethnic developments. The policy of separate development in Namibia had been implemented since the late 1960s. It started in Ovamboland and was based on the Odendaal Plan. This plan also included a proposal for the creation of a Bushmanland Homeland, intended for the San people. The Bushmanland Homeland was planned to be situated southeast of the Ovamboland Homeland and to share a border with Botswana. However, the official establishment of the Bushmanland Homeland did not take place until 1976.[55]

Hynönen's idea – supported by the ex-Kavango missionary Makkonen – of the establishment of a reservation for north-central Namibia's San groups was dead in the water from the very beginning and did not represent the policy outline of the FMS. According to Hynönen, the establishment of the San reservation would have solved the prevailing 'racial question' between the Aawambo and San and would have made the San equals with Aawambo.[56] The establishment of a reservation would have meant the resettlement of Aawambo living in the same area. An increasing number of Aawambo had settled near Nkongo since the 1920s due to natural population growth in the densely populated Cuvelai drainage basin. In addition, the demarcation of the international boundary between colonial South West Africa and Portuguese Angola in

51. Pentti 1959, 190–192; E. Hynönen, Annual report for 1962, Nkongo, Hha: 34, FMS, NAF.
52. Gordon 1992. See also Groop's and Haufiku's chapter in this volume.
53. E. Hynönen, A memorandum concerning the situation of the Bushman work in Nkongo relating to my African excursion in 1973, ASTO I: 39, 1973, AFELM.
54. E. Hynönen, Annual Report for 1962, Nkongo, Hha: 34, FMS, NAF.
55. Report of the Commission (Odendaal Plan) 1964; Welch 2018, 26–29.
56. E. Hynönen, Memorandum concerning the situation of the Bushman work in Nkongo relating to my African excursion in 1973, I: 39, 1973, ASTO, AFELM.



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1927–1928 had led to a flow of migrants from southern Angola to Ovamboland. Many of these migrants settled in the same forest savanna inhabited by the San groups.[57]

Challenges related to the missionisation of the San were discussed within different churches from the 1950s. In the 1970s, the DRC named the incapability of the San to distance themselves from their traditional culture and their firm community spirit as the main causes for the deterioration of the San Mission in Tsumkwe, in the Bushmanland Homeland.[58] Accusations directed at the cultural traditions of the San indicate that churches had not grasped the fundamental values of the nomadic culture. Instead, they awaited the day when the San would adopt the thinking and values of sedentarised societies.

## *Conclusion*

The apparent early success of the San Mission, portrayed in *The Bushmen are Getting a Field*, turned to disappointment by the late 1960s. Discrepancies appeared between the harmonious picture presented in the film and the real life that was reported by the missionaries already at the time that the film was shot. These antagonisms only worsened during the late 1960s and into the early 1970s.

The aim of the San Mission was not the preservation of the cultural traditions of the San, but their sedentarisation. The methods used were common to colonial administrations that sought to rein in nomadic populations so that they were under their control. Sedentarisation fostered conditions for the conversion of the San and school work was meant to educate a new generation of Christians. The inadequate language skills of the missionaries hampered their ability to teach their pupils, and many children disappeared with their families to forests when the summer rains came. The temporary residence of the San at the mission station was a great challenge to the missionaries, particularly regarding school work.

In the late 1960s, it was recognised by the FMS that the strategy of mission work based on sedentarisation of the San groups had not proceeded in the expected and desired way. The language barrier, combined with bad leadership, had not fostered confidence in the missionaries among the resident San population. Setbacks in the sedentarisation project taught missionaries that internalising the worldview of nomadic hunter-gatherers took time and required an open mind.[59]

According to Robert Gordon, the image of the San changed among Europeans from the early twentieth-century representation of them as 'vermin' into 'beautiful people' by the time Namibia was on the cusp of independence. The Finnish missionaries never viewed the San groups living in north-central Namibia as 'vermin' but as vulnerable people living miserable lives in forests and a group who were often subjugated by Aawambo. Both *The Bushmen are Getting a Field* and the missionaries' practical work among the San in the 1960s reveal that their sincere intention was to improve the material and mental wellbeing of these vulnerable people. Unfortunately, the actions taken by the missionaries represented colonial values and accelerated the

57. Dobler 2008; Kreike 2004, 72–73.
58. Gordon, 1992, 210–211.
59. See, for example, Heikkinen 1984; Jantunen 1999.



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San's rejection of their already endangered mode of life and culture. It was only in the 1970s that the Finnish missionaries came to understand that successful mission work among the San required an approach that sought to understand them based on their cultural tradition.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Disseminating Knowledge of Owambo in Finland

# II

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# The 'First Fruit' of Owambo: The Public Story of Nanguroshi/Eva Maria in the Promotion of Finnish Mission Work

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*Abstract*

This chapter examines how the public story of an Aawambo girl was constructed and used among the Finnish mission community. Nanguroshi, a foster child of a Finnish missionary family, was brought to Finland in 1875, baptised and renamed Eva Maria and sent back to Africa in 1879. The christening marked an important milestone for the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS). It made Nanguroshi a symbol of Finnish efforts in Africa or the 'first fruit of Owambo' as she was called. The chapter focuses on mechanisms by which it was hoped that promotional efforts, closely related to Western colonial worldviews, would be able to generate donations and support for mission work. The process whereby Finnish mission supporters became aware of the girl was not, however, straightforward but quite paradoxical in many ways. The two phases identified here – before and after her departure from Finland – clearly reflect different attitudes as regards her utilisation for publicity purposes. The initial plans to make use of her corporeal presence in Finland to gain attention to the work being carried out in Africa proved challenging from the outset, and she was mostly concealed from the curious gaze of mission friends. With her departure, however, she became a celebrated symbol of the success of Finnish mission work abroad. She became a print product whose story was easily available. The public image of Nanguroshi/Eva Maria was not in her own hands. Her story was told by utilising textual elements and references familiar from colonial contexts. Her voice was taken into use to thank the Finns for their involvement in Africa, convince them of the legitimacy of their deeds and thoughts and encourage them to continue.



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In the 1880s and 1890s, a young Aawambo woman called Eva Maria was often in the minds of the supporters of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) as they donated money and a large number of material goods, especially clothes and other textiles, to her. Originally known as Nanguroshi, she was born in the Ombadja Kingdom in present-day southern Angola but, after being separated from her family in slave raids, she lived in the household of King Nuujoma of Uukwambi, in the neighbouring Owambo Kingdom. In 1871, when Nanguroshi was approximately eight years old, the king gave her away as a foster child to the Finnish missionary Pietari Kurvinen and his wife Wilhelmiina who lived in Elim, a mission station established by the FMS near to the homestead of the king.[1]

Taking African foster children from local communities was a common practice among Finnish and other European missionaries. African parents could bring their children to live at mission stations, especially during times of famine, but longer foster relations also developed with mission families. Foster children, and children in general, had a special significance in mission work as representatives of future generations. They seemed to provide a relatively easy section of the local population to approach, and, at times, they were deemed to be a receptive group to Christian teachings and values. They were also expected to be of practical help and to assist in various domestic chores at the stations. The foster children typically maintained a connection with their relatives, and hence it was also hoped that they could potentially act as useful intermediaries in reaching and influencing the local adult population. Understandably, this often caused friction in their lives.[2]

What makes the story of Nanguroshi special is that she accompanied her Finnish foster family to Finland in 1875 after they were forced to return to their homeland due to ill health. She subsequently lived in Finland for over four years before returning to the Owambo region. During her stay in Finland, she was baptised as a Christian and renamed Eva Maria. This made her the first African whom the Finnish mission workers had succeeded in converting to Christianity after having proselytized in Owambo since 1870.[3] As Jacqueline Van Gent suggests, missionaries depended on converts for their survival.[4] The christening of Nanguroshi marked an important milestone also for the FMS: it made her a symbol of Finnish efforts in Africa or the 'first fruit of Owambo', as she was called.

This chapter examines how the public story of this individual was constructed and used among the Finnish mission community. It focuses on mechanisms by which it was hoped that promotional efforts, closely related to Western colonial worldviews, would be able to generate donations and support for mission work. As Claire McLisky and Karen Vallgårda point out, Christian missions were crucial sites for the development of systems of knowledge about recently and soon-to-be colonised

1. Estimations of her age in 1871 vary from six to eight but at the time of the baptism (1876), she was said to be 13 years old. 'Owambo lähetyksemme' 1876, 81; Kurvinen 1879 (Part 3), 63; 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 116. For earlier references in research literature to Nanguroshi, see Paunu 1945, 18; Peltola 1958, 81–84; Kilpeläinen 1958, 235–236; Halén 1986, 236–239; Remes 1993, 218–222; Kyläkoski 2018.
2. Kena 2000, 70–77.
3. The first christenings carried out by the FMS took place in 1881 in Hereroland and 1883 in Owambo.
4. Van Gent 2015, 247.



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people and for personalising the new relationships of Europeans with them.[5] This chapter shows how the processes of formulating knowledge were deeply intertwined with ideas concerning publicity and its timing. It proceeds by showing how first the christening of Nanguroshi and then her departure from Finland changed the way in which she was presented to Finns.

The chapter investigates articles and missionary correspondence published on the pages of the Finnish and Swedish language periodicals of the FMS.[6] Booklets and photographs of Nanguroshi that were sold separately will also be analysed. Archival material, especially unpublished letters and minutes of board meetings, are also crucial in examining the public story of Nanguroshi. These materials will be scrutinised and analysed side-by-side, with special attention being paid to mission bias and its effects on the emerging image of an individual.

It is important to emphasise that the chosen focus in this chapter, the public story of Nanguroshi, helps to shed light on her as she was represented by the FMS. Needless to say, this is not the whole truth: she had thoughts, opinions and agency of her own that cannot be known from the analysed material, but which I hope can one day be traced in other ways. I have decided to use the name Nanguroshi[7] when describing events before the baptism and Eva Maria[8] after it. This is in line with the chosen focus in the present chapter but does not necessarily correspond to how she identified herself. It is beyond the scope of this study to give a full picture of the protagonist's life after her return to Owambo. This part of her life deserves further, collaborative research with Namibian scholars.

## *Limited Publicity as a Precaution*

With the arrival of the Kurvinens in Finland in July 1875, Nanguroshi became one of the first Africans to set foot in the grand duchy and most likely the first to stay for a considerable time. While the early history of the presence of people of African descent in Finland remains to be written, we know that people of African origin, especially itinerant artists, entertainers and seamen, occasionally visited coastal towns from the

5. McLisky and Vallgårda 2015, 1–3.
6. References are made primarily to the Finnish-language publication entitled *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* since the Swedish-language *Missionstidning för Finland* was almost identical and included the same articles. On the similarity of periodicals, see Remes 1993, 236, 238.
7. This is how her name was written in Finnish publications and unpublished materials. It follows the way in which the name was pronounced in the Uukwambi region (Otshikwambi dialect). Other Owambo dialects spelled it differently, without the 'r'. In her native dialect of Oshimbadja, the name was pronounced as Nangulohi and in the neighbouring Oshikwanyama dialect as Nanguloshi. It means the one who was born in the evening. There is no written standard for Otshikwambi, so the name Nanguroshi does not appear in written form. Due to the focus of this chapter, I use the Finnish spelling of the name. In his book, Noa Ndeutapo (2014, 146) mentions that her surname was Haikali. I wish to thank Joel Haikali, Petrus Mbenzi and Martti Eirola for their help in this issue.
8. I use the Swedish spelling of the name (Eva) which was commonly used in both Finnish and Swedish material that was published in Finland even though the Finnish spelling (Eeva) was occasionally used. As was customary at the time, it was often spelled with a 'w' (Ewa/Eewa).



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1880s.[9] Moreover, we know that a number of other Aawambo foster children were also brought to Finland after Nanguroshi's visit.[10]

As being able to see an African girl in Finland was an unprecedented event, Nanguroshi's movements and activities were closely observed. In fact, the publicity around Nanguroshi began in a manner that was neither planned by the Kurvinens nor was very flattering to them: very soon after settling in the town of Vyborg, Pietari Kurvinen was forced to publicly explain Nanguroshi's behaviour. A local newspaper published a letter, with the writer using the pseudonym 'Antislafverist' (antislaverist), which described how a young black girl had been seen carrying heavy loads on the top of her head on the streets of Vyborg dressed in clothes that were far too light for the season. The writer went on to suggest that many knew that the poor girl was not being treated in an acceptable manner in her current home and hinted that the local ladies' association could solve the issue with those concerned.[11] Kurvinen's response was published the following day. In it, he distanced himself and the family from Nanguroshi by stating that she had acted against their will and instructions and his wife was too ill to keep an eye on her. He wrote that anyone who thought they would be able to raise her as a decent Christian should contact the Missionary Society so that the Kurvinens could be released from this responsibility – and they would be happy to do so.[12]

These harsh words raise the question of why Nanguroshi was brought to Finland in the first place. Pietari Kurvinen explained this decision to the director of the FMS in a letter he had written during the sea voyage from Cape Colony to England. He stated that he could neither leave the orphan girl in the Cape nor send her back to Owambo without a guardian. Thus, after consulting German missionaries, he had decided to bring her to Finland with the hope that she could be baptised. He further wished that the Finnish mission friends would like to see a living Aawambo and were willing to assist in paying the extra travel costs.[13] Kurvinen later stressed that Nanguroshi had followed the family of her own free will,[14] but it seems evident that neither she, being approximately 12 years old at the time, nor her foster family had much choice.

Kurvinen ended his response to 'Antislafverist' by stating that he would not continue to discuss this issue in public.[15] Thus, contrary to his earlier idea in regards to how the curiosity aroused by Nanguroshi in Finland could somehow be utilised, he was now clearly unwilling to present her to the townspeople of Vyborg or to a broader audience of mission friends. Kurvinen's earlier descriptions and later reminiscences of Nanguroshi reveal an ambivalence that might help explain his attitude. On the one hand, she was said to be interested in God's words, as well as responsive to Christianity,

9. See Hirn 1986; Leitzinger 2008.
10. The story of Rosa (Emilia) Clay, who arrived in Finland in 1888 and became the first African to gain Finnish citizenship, has received the particular attention of scholars. See, for example, Rastas 2019; Namhila and Hillebrecht 2019.
11. 'Antislafverist' 1875.
12. P[ietari] K[urvinen] 1875.
13. Kurvinen to the director, July 1875, Ec 281, Collection of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), National Archives of Finland (NAF). See also the minutes of the brothers' meeting, 8 December 1874 §1, Hb 763, FMS, NAF.
14. 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 42.
15. P[ietari] K[urvinen] 1875.



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and was deemed to be capable of learning quickly, but, on the other, her behaviour was described as bad and unpredictable.[16] Thus, Kurvinen saw potential in her but remained guarded about her future development.

A private letter from Kurvinen to the director of the FMS sheds further light on the events that led to the embarrassing public discussion. He revealed how some unspecified upper-class town dwellers, presumably women, kept an eye on the strange girl as she was doing her daily chores. These individuals tempted her into their houses, offered food, money and pieces of clothing and paid a horse cab to bring her home. Kurvinen was furious and considered this kind of sentiment of pity and extravagant pampering harmful to Nanguroshi. He emphasised that the family had a Finnish maid to do the housework and explained that the daily life of Nanguroshi mainly consisted of reading Catechism and biblical stories, as well as practicing writing, sewing and singing.[17] However, since Kurvinen worked as a travelling preacher in Finland and was mainly absent from home and his wife was severely ill, Nanguroshi must have played a significant role in running the household and taking care of the children of the family.[18] This did not differ from what was expected of foster children at mission stations in Owambo. Yet, in the eyes of Finnish observers, her position resembled that of an unpaid housemaid more than a family member. This ambivalence can also be seen in a family portrait (1876) in which Nanguroshi was included but depicted as a nanny rather than as an older daughter (Figure 5.1.).[19]

To prevent further criticism that might damage the reputation of the Kurvinens and Finnish mission work more generally – and perhaps also to protect Nanguroshi from outside influences and temptations – she was kept away from public scrutiny until June 1876, when she, now approximately 13 years old, was baptised. This marked an important turning point in the history of Finnish mission work. The significance of the event was emphasised by the fact that the FMS had already worked in the Owambo region, mainly in Ondonga, for years and invested a great deal of money without many visible signs of 'progress'. Instead, missionaries mainly reported on their constant struggles, exhaustion, illnesses and insufficient resources. Suspicion and criticism grew among the Finnish supporters, many of whom regarded the work as completely fruitless and thus not worthy of further funding. In this challenging economic situation, the FMS was forced to cut all extra expenses and to stop training future mission workers for an undefined period of time.[20]

In this situation, news about the first baptism of an African child was more than welcome. Indeed, a cynic might think that it was especially calculated by the board to provide anxious mission friends with some positive news. Yet, the initiative came from Kurvinen. As mentioned, he had already referred to this possibility when explaining why he brought Nanguroshi to Finland. After the 'Antislafverist' episode, Kurvinen

16. 'Sanomia weljiltämme' 1872, 68; 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 42–43.
17. Kurvinen to the director, 22 December 1875, Ec 281, FMS, NAF.
18. He is known to have visited around sixty Finnish parishes during the first year after his return from Africa. 'Kotimaa' 1876, 104. On the economic situation and arrangements of the Kurvinen family in Finland, see Remes 1993, 218–219.
19. No doubt, her life was also affected by the strict discipline that Mrs. Kurvinen is known to have maintained at home. Kurvinen 1913, 151. See also Tenkanen 1954, 26–27, 116–117.
20. Paunu 1945, 17–19; Remes 1993, 146–153, 276. The mission school was closed between 1872–1880.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28


Figure 5.1. A group portrait of Nanguroshi and the Kurvinen family was taken by Charles Riis in Helsinki in 1876. Nanguroshi is holding the newborn Naima. Finnish Heritage Agency. CC BY 4.0.

asked the director for permission to baptise Nanguroshi. He referred to her desire to become Christianised and his own evaluations of her development, suggesting that the baptism should take place 'at home, in peace and quiet'.[21] The board soon made a favourable decision.[22]

However, the ceremony did not take place at the Kurvinen home in Vyborg, but in Helsinki and at the time of the annual mission days. These festivities brought a large crowd of mission friends to the city, but the baptism was planned to take place in the presence of a limited group of people.[23] It was explained in *Lähetyssanomia* that this

21. Kurvinen to the director, 22 December 1875, Ec 281. See also Kurvinen to the director, 15 May 1876, Ea 209, FMS, NAF.
22. Minutes of the board meeting, 16 April 1876 §2 (see also June 6, 1876 §2), Ca 53, FMS, NAF.
23. Minutes of the board meeting, 16 April 1876 §2, Ca 53, FMS, NAF. On the ceremony, see 'Owambo-lähetyksemme' 1876, 82–84. Also see 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 43; 'Viisikymmentä vuotta' 1926, 115.



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was considered to be best for the girl.[24] The ceremony was far too significant and symbolic to risk by upsetting Nanguroshi in any way. Later assessments also suggest that exposing the girl to publicity and the 'admiration and pampering' of the audience would have been 'unhealthy' for her.[25]

The advantage of limiting attendance was that the Kurvinens and the FMS could strictly control the publicity surrounding the event. Soon after the christening, the FMS published articles on the front pages of their periodicals that introduced Nanguroshi, now referred to as Eva Maria,[26] to mission friends. These articles told the story of her 'heathen' life and christening, emphasising the broader significance of this 'firstborn' or 'first fruit' to Finnish mission work in Africa.[27] News of the baptism was also circulated by non-religious newspapers in Finland.[28]

Surprisingly, perhaps, news about Eva Maria ceased to be published soon after the ceremony, and, once again, silence fell over her later life in Finland. The Kurvinens are known to have moved to Helsinki, where an African girl was no less exceptional a sight than in Vyborg and must have aroused interest. Yet, the image of the 'first fruit' was protected to such an extent that the FMS did not inform its readers of her subsequent life in Finland.

## *Eva Maria in the Spotlight*

Pietari Kurvinen's frequent enquiries to the FMS show that he and his family planned to return to Owambo as soon as possible. Mrs. Kurvinen's health did not improve, however, and the board decided that the family could not be sent back to Africa.[29] The situation of Eva Maria remained unclear until the decision was made to settle her with another Finnish missionary couple, the Weikkolins, as they embarked for Owambo in September 1879.[30] The reasons given to the mission audience for sending her to Africa were essentially practical: Eva Maria's ability to read and write was foreseen as a useful skill in terms of her being able to assist in teaching small children at the mission stations that lacked Finnish workers.[31] Missionary wives and female mission

24. 'Owambo-lähetyksemme' 1876, 82.
25. In 1945 the then director, Uno Paunu, speculated about how 'a festive celebration of the christening of a heathen girl in front of the Finnish mission community would undoubtedly have had an inspiring effect and raised its sunken spirit'. Paunu 1945, 18. Translation by Leila Koivunen. See also 'Viisikymmentä vuotta' 1926, 115; Remes 1993, 219. A special cantata was composed to be performed during the ceremony. 'Wiisikymmenwuotisjuhlamme' 1909, 51.
26. Eva (Eve) and Maria (Mary) are important biblical names. Eva Maria was also the name of Mrs. Kurvinen's mother. The new name was also explained symbolically: Eva referred to the beginning of time and sin, whereas Maria marked the beginning of grace and blessing. 'Eewa Maria' 1879, 140.
27. 'Owambo-lähetyksemme' 1876, 82; 'Kotimaa' 1876, 104; 'Katsaus Suomalaisen' 1876, 182.
28. 'Finska Missionsällskapets' 1876; 'Suomen Lähestysseuran' 1876; 'Också en frukt' 1876a, 1876b.
29. Minutes of the board meeting, 4 May 1877 §9, September 29, 1877 §6, 3 February 1879 §4, April 28, 1879 §3, Ca 54, FMS, NAF.
30. Minutes of the board meeting, 5 September 1879 §3, Ca 54, FMS, NAF. Her Christian faith was confirmed in a farewell ceremony two days before her departure. 'Afrikaan matkustajamme' 1879, 136–137.
31. 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1878, 122. See also 'Afrika' 1880, 85; 'Weikkolinin kertomus' 1884, 6.



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workers were generally considered to be able communicators of Christian feeling.[32] Moreover, it was clearly hoped that Eva Maria, as an indigenous person, would be able to establish a special relationship with her fellow Aawambo. It was emphasised that the decision to send her to Africa had been made after consulting the foster parents, foreign colleagues and the girl herself. It was now admitted publicly for the first time that she had felt like a stranger in Finland.[33]

While the publicity surrounding Eva Maria was limited during the years she had lived in Finland, the situation changed drastically with her departure. In the next few years, numerous articles and missionary letters were published in the periodicals of the FMS that described her life in Finland and Africa. Copies of her photographs (Figure 5.2.) were printed, circulated in periodicals and sold separately with the hope that 'looking at the image would evoke a feeling of love.'[34] Furthermore, Pietari Kurvinen published his missionary memoirs, including his recollections of Eva Maria's life.[35] The FMS printed both Finnish and Swedish versions of a booklet entitled 'An Aawambo Child' which combined and circulated earlier texts of Eva Maria with the specific goal of 'further disseminating her story in our country.'[36] It went through numerous reprints in the early 1880s and sold at least 30,000 copies.[37]

Figure 5.2. A wood engraving was commissioned of a *carte-de-visite* portrait taken of Eva Maria at Daniel Nyblin's studio in Helsinki. It was used to print her image in the periodicals of the FMS and was sold separately. See 'Owamboflickan Ewa Maria (Nanguroshi)' 1880, 41.

32. McLisky and Vallgårda 2015, 7.
33. 'Afrikaan matkustajamme' 1879, 137; 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 116. See also 'Se ainoa' 1879. See also the minutes of the board meeting, 5 September 1879 §3, Ca 54, FMS, NAF.
34. 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 42. Cf. Halén 1986, 139.
35. Kurvinen 1879–1880 (parts 3–4).
36. *Eräs Owambolapsi* 1881, 5.
37. 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 151; 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1881, 119. This equals the total number of publications produced by the FMS in 1879. 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 151.



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Why was Eva Maria brought into the spotlight at this time? Based on previous events, it seems that the FMS could act more freely after saying farewell in Helsinki and sending her back to Africa. As she was absent, talking about her in public became less risky and did not expose her to any harmful effects. Besides, her public persona became easier to control since observant townspeople – or Eva Maria herself – could not provide conflicting information.

In this situation, the story of Eva Maria became a useful means to inform Finns not only about this individual but also about the challenges and expected results of mission work more generally. It must be emphasised that the board of the FMS did not make any formal decisions concerning how to publicise Eva Maria. Rather, the publications formed their own narrative roadmap. The story of Eva Maria seemed to provide suitable material for creating an identifiable and exemplary case to provide a concrete demonstration that the efforts of the FMS among the Aawambo were worthwhile and deserved support. The articles repeated a narrative where an African king gives a dirty, smelly, miserable girl as a gift to a Finnish missionary family who teaches her new skills and introduces her to the Christian faith. This story goes on to describe her innate, 'heathen' reluctance and foolishness, her 'devilish lies' and her proclivity to steal and to be enticed into all kinds of trouble that caused anguish to her foster family. Yet, everything changed when she humbled herself and came to the decision that she wanted to become a Christian.[38]

This narration provides a classic example of the representation of the relationship between Africans and Europeans of the colonial era.[39] Members of the white Finnish family were portrayed as knowledgeable, benevolent and altruistic saviours who were willing to share their life and home with an African child whom they had encountered by mere accident. The story of Eva Maria became emblematic of a broader development anticipated to occur all over Owambo, Africa and the non-Christian world. Eva Maria was portrayed as living evidence, or proof from God himself, that the work carried out by the FMS had not been wasted. Things could – and would – improve in the future, as the 'seeds' of new 'fruits' had already been planted.

The descriptions of Eva Maria were influenced by prevailing European racist attitudes regarding the relationship between Africans and Europeans, but they also included direct references to the role and responsibility of Finns in the colonial world. Especially interesting in this regard is a long poem, published in July 1879, and said to be written by a young mission friend who had had the opportunity to spend time with Eva Maria and learn about her life. In the poem, written from the perspective of Eva Maria, she begs the wonderful Finnish people to accept her lavish thanks for its work in Africa and for bringing light to her miserable people.[40] The readers were thus encouraged to think of themselves as parts of a nation that had an important mission abroad.

Similar discussions continued when readers were asked why they too could not come to love a place in Africa, which God had specially assigned to the Finnish

38. See, for example, 'Afrikaan matkustajamme' 1879, 137; 'Eewa Maria' 1879, 138–140; Kurvinen 1879 (part 3), 63–64; 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 41–44; 'Kotomaa' 1880, 6–8.
39. See, for example, Vallgårda 2016, 876.
40. 'Eewa Maria' 1879, 138–140.



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mission.[41] Thus, leaning on the idea of Christian love,[42] the story of Eva Maria sought to awaken a sense of belonging to a certain section of Finnish people that could supposedly make a difference in Africa.

As Olli Löytty has described, nationalistic rhetoric was frequently used when discussing the founding of the FMS in the 1850s. The mere existence of the society was regarded as evidence or an expression of national strength in a situation in which Finland was still part of the Russian Empire: Finnish people were finally ready to work among other nations to help those in need and to participate in steering the world towards a better future.[43] A similar sense of national pride and responsibility can also be found interwoven in the public story of Eva Maria. Her voice was used to describe Finns as an exemplary people whose efforts in Africa should be acknowledged.

Another striking feature in the story of Eva Maria was that she was presented to Finnish readers as a person whom many already knew well and loved dearly.[44] Her visit to Finland had made her a very special African: in contrast to the mass of unknown Aawambo, who constituted her people, she was a known and named individual. She was thus a useful figure for the FMS to address the mission community and to make the hard-to-define mission field a bit more intelligible. Supporters of the cause were constantly reminded to pray for Eva Maria and not to forget this 'black sister', as she was called.[45]

These descriptions followed a more general Nordic and European pattern where a real or imagined African child was evoked as an example of the character of African children and their potential for change. A contemporary, well-known example was the song *Musta Saara* ('Black Sarah'), which related the story of a black girl whose skin turned white at the moment of her death when she became cleansed of her sins. Originally composed and published in Sweden in 1865, the song also became popular in Finland in the 1870s. Ruut Lemmetyinen has noted how Saara provided the mission friends with a figure whose experiences were relatable and could be empathised with.[46] The story of Eva Maria also became part of this transnational exchange as a Swedish mission periodical published an illustrated article about her in 1881.[47]

Having an identifiable and seemingly familiar person somewhere in Africa made the connection between mission friends and the target population more personal and binding. The FMS nourished this relationship by actively providing news about Eva Maria up to the mid-1880s and periodically thereafter until the 1920s.[48] To deepen this attachment, the FMS's periodical also published letters signed with the name Eva Maria. The origin of these letters remains uncertain, but they closely conform to the conventions of mission correspondence.[49] In this instance, the writer directly

41. *Eräs Owambolapsi* 1881, 3–5. See also 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 116.
42. Haggis and Allen 2008, 694–696; McLisky and Vallgårda 2015 3–5, 9–10.
43. Löytty 2007, 264. See also Huhta 2008.
44. See, for example, 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 41; 'Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1880, 116.
45. 'Afrikaan matkustajamme' 1879, 137.
46. Lemmetyinen 2010, 102–109. Also see Raita Merivirta's and Johanna Skurnik's chapter in this book.
47. 'Ewa Maria' 1881. Thanks to Kim Groop for sharing this information.
48. Nanguroshi died in 1929. Peltola 1958, 232.
49. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse these letters in detail here. On the genre of convert letters, see Acke 2015, 204–206.



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addresses the readers and calls them beloved friends whom she wants to greet and thank. She begs the readers not to forget her and to keep her in their hearts and prayers.[50]

Prayers were welcomed, but it was hoped and expected that the Finnish mission friends would provide financial support too. Descriptions of Eva Maria did not include direct requests for donations, yet in practice the number of financial gifts that were designated to her increased as a result of the publicity. Public requests for financial donations and various goods had been fundamental for the work of the FMS since its establishment,[51] and the mission community was quick to take heed of the unspoken hints and donate to the subjects that were being promoted.

Eva Maria received her first donations when she lived in Finland, and it was suggested that she had returned to Africa with two trunks full of clothes and textiles.[52] However, lists of donations that were regularly published in mission periodicals reveal that she received most of the gifts during the period between her departure in 1879 and the mid-1880s – exactly the time when her life was being actively reported upon in Finland. The number of donations gradually decreased after this and largely ceased by the turn of the twentieth century. Among the donated items were dozens of stockings, shirts, aprons, skirts and other pieces of clothing as well as large amounts of fabric, linen and tablecloths. In addition to everyday textiles, Eva Maria also received dresses and luxury items, such as a silken scarf and a decorated comb. With her marriage to a baptised Aawambo man and the birth of children, donations became increasingly diverse and also included trousers and children's clothing.[53] The predominance of clothes and textiles was related to them being relatively easy to transport, but it also reflects the general significance that was attached to Western-style clothing in mission work.[54] Indeed, donated textiles ensured that Eva Maria and her family stood out from the rest of the community as an exemplary indigenous Christian family in Africa – the first of their kind in Owambo.

## *Conclusion*

Eva Maria became a well-known figure among the Finnish mission community. Many thought about her when knitting a sock in a mission sewing circle or when attending Sunday school. She became a target for material aid and a magnet to attract new supporters both young and old. This public awareness could not have been achieved without her journey to Finland, which, from her point of view, must have been both exciting and frightening, possibly even traumatic. The process whereby Finnish mission supporters became aware of her was not, however, simple and straightforward but in many ways quite paradoxical.

50. See, for example, 'Kirje Ewa Marialta' 1880, 8–9; 'Owambo-tyttö' 1880, 44.
51. Remes 1993, 23.
52. Ida Weikkolin to the director, January 27, 1880, Ec 281, FMS, NAF. See also 'Kesä-, Heinä-' 1881, 7.
53. Lists of donation, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* and *Missionstidning för Finland* 1879–1901.
54. Huuhka 2019; Koivunen 2018.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

The two phases identified here – before and after the departure of Eva Maria from Finland – clearly reflect different attitudes and approaches as regards her being utilised for publicity purposes. The Kurvinens had plans to make use of the corporeal presence of Nanguroshi in Finland to gain attention to the work being carried out in Africa. This initially proved challenging, and she was mostly concealed from the prying eyes of mission friends. Indeed, only the key piece of news, her baptism, was reported. Thus, even when she was present in Finland, Nanguroshi was not very easily or broadly exploited for promotional purposes. This differed considerably from how Rosa Clay, who followed Nanguroshi to Finland, was treated and exposed to the public interest.[55]

The publicity around Nanguroshi/Eva Maria was minimal, cautious and controlled during her stay in Finland, but with her departure she became a celebrated symbol of the success of the Finnish mission work abroad. She was turned into a print product whose story became easily available in the form of articles, published letters, portraits and booklets. The FMS controlled this publicity, whereas Eva Maria became increasingly detached and unaware of the material that was being produced and distributed about her.

Nanguroshi/Eva Maria had no control over her public image. Her story informs us about a more general need to bring attention to named African individuals as representatives of their people and the effects of mission work. Mission friends craved concrete examples and certain individuals became instruments of such efforts. The story of Nanguroshi/Eva Maria was told by utilising textual elements and references familiar from colonial contexts. Her voice was taken into use to thank the Finns for their involvement in Africa, convince them of the legitimacy of their deeds and thoughts and encourage them to continue.

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55. Rastas 2019.



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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# For Our Distant Neighbours: The Finnish Missionary Society's Fundraising for Famine Relief in Owambo, 1908–1909

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*Abstract*

The famine in Owambo in 1908–1909 was reported in Finland when *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, the main periodical of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), published letters written by missionaries. Readers could learn about the circumstances surrounding the famine and also about the poor relief efforts by the missionaries in the field. A few months after the onset of the famine, the FMS started to collect donations to support relief work in Owambo. While pictorial elements used to be an important part of humanitarian campaigns in other parts of the Western world, the FMS did not follow this trend, as the impact of the famine was mainly transmitted through written accounts. Judging by the published donation lists, financial gifts were generally quite small. Nevertheless, they point to the fact that famine relief was considered a worthy cause by FMS supporters. While international humanitarian campaigns were already common in the Anglo-American world, this was the first time a Finnish fundraising effort targeted the unfortunate plight of individuals and communities on the African continent. As the FMS had worked in Owambo for almost forty years it is understandable that famine in the well-known mission field led to a fundraising endeavour that motivated supporters to donate in Finland.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

In July 1909, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, a periodical of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), published a brief announcement: it reported that a famine had hit Owambo and that the missionary society welcomed donations to alleviate the plight of the local population. In this chapter, I examine how the FMS reported on the famine in Owambo in 1908–1909 to Finnish readers and how the society raised donations to alleviate the suffering. This was the first famine that was reported intensively in the FMS periodical, and also the first to create a small-scale fundraising campaign for Africa in Finland.[1]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, charity in Finland was typically directed at alleviating the suffering of the poor within the country. Fundraising to help suffering people in other parts of the world was not common. The work of the FMS in Owambo was funded by private donations, with the principal aim of spreading the Gospel rather than improving material welfare. Even though foreign catastrophes were reported in Finnish newspapers, they did not foster large campaigns or stimulate empathy leading to donations. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Finnish missionary work developed more clearly in the direction of development aid and humanitarian relief.[2] Thus, the campaign launched by the FMS in 1908 ranks as one of the first examples of this trend in Finland. With widespread poverty and even local famines in Finland, donating money to relieve the plight of distant people on the African continent needed to be carefully argued for.

My analysis is based on FMS publications, especially *Suomen Lähetyssanomia,* and focuses on the period 1908–1909. The FMS's main periodicals were *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* and *Missionstidning för Finland,* which were essentially identical Finnish and Swedish editions of the same publication.[3] They were established in 1859 and published monthly. Until 1902, when the FMS China mission was launched, it concentrated on reporting on the African mission. One means by which information was disseminated to Finnish readers was via missionaries' letters.[4] As Jensz and Acke state, such letters allowed readers to 'follow the lives of individual missionaries and converts, as well as the routines of certain mission stations in other parts of the world over extended periods of time.'[5] It has been suggested that published letters by missionaries were probably the most popular texts in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*.[6] To create a broader understanding of this issue, I also include secular newspapers to discern whether information regarding the famine in Owambo was limited to the

1. In the field in Owambo the famine of 1908–1909 differed from previous crop failures and food scarcity. Missionaries wrote that it was the worst famine they had faced. It also became the first famine when the German administration sent food relief to Owambo. See Huuhka 2018.
2. Jalagin et al. 2015, 285–289. See also Nielssen et al. 2011, 19–20.
3. In the footnotes, I will refer to *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*. The content of *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* and *Missionstidning för Finland* was mostly identical. It will be noted if there are clear differences between the periodicals.
4. Saarilahti 1989, 311–312. In 1908, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* had a circulation of 19,000, whereas the circulation of *Missionstidning för Finland* was 3,000. The editor of these periodicals was Uno Paunu, who also worked as a teacher in the missionary school and was a member of the FMS's board.
5. Jensz and Acke 2013, 372.
6. Löytty 2007, 265.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

FMS periodicals and religious networks or whether it was more widely reported in Finland.

## *Poor Relief from the Field to the Pages of Finnish Periodicals*

In 1908, fourteen Finnish missionaries were stationed in Owambo. From the point of view of these Christian proselytizers, their work was steadily expanding.[7] South West Africa had become a German colony in 1884, but German rule was mostly focused in the middle parts of the region and did not initially extend to northern Owambo. In July 1908, the German military officer Victor Franke visited the north to meet Owambo kings. The Finnish missionary Martti Rautanen was his interpreter and guide.[8] Famine hit the region a couple of months after the visit.[9] Consequently, Rautanen wrote to Franke and asked if the Germans could send some relief aid. For the missionaries, the Germans were seemingly the only means to secure support for the relief work and Franke's recent visit made this request quite logical. Franke agreed, and the German colonial administration sent food (mainly rice and flour) for the missionaries to distribute to local people. The missionaries then dispensed food at the mission stations.[10] The missionaries appreciated the German effort, but it did not solve the problem, as the famine continued for months and the food sent by Germans was insufficient.

The Finnish missionaries reported on their work and activities to the mission director every month. The letters were carefully examined in Finland and excerpts were occasionally published in the FMS periodicals. These extracts usually described the local cultures of the Owambo or recited anecdotes with Christian overtones. Finnish newspapers commonly recirculated information originally published in the FMS's periodicals.[11] In 1909, the famine in Owambo was discussed monthly in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia,* notably in letters written by the missionaries Anna Glad, Reinhold Rautanen, Oskari Tylväs and Eemi Nenye.[12] A request to donate money to alleviate the hunger in Owambo was published in July 1909. Thus, I would argue that the FMS not only offered information but also provided a way to help and to express Christian compassion. When the situation in Owambo gradually improved, other themes replaced the famine.

The first three letters published in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* in February, March and April 1909 were written by Glad and Rautanen and entitled 'In the middle of hunger.' The missionaries described the situation in November and early December

7. Peltola 1958, 138–156, 163.
8. Oermann 1999, 220–223. Oermann argues that after 1904 Finnish missionaries became the main source of information on Owambo after 1904 for the German administration.
9. On environmental stress and the reasons behind drought and famines, see Kreike 2013.
10. In detail, see Huuhka 2018. Also, 'Otteita Suomen Lähetysseuran' 1909; Peltola 1958, 138; McKittrick 2002, 136–140.
11. For example, 'Ulkomaalta' 1909, 3; Maa- ja kansatieteellisiä havaintoja' 1908, 3. This phenomenon will be discussed later in this chapter.
12. Letters by Anna Glad were published in February, March and May 1909. Letters by Reinhold Rautanen, Oskari Tylväs and Eemi Nenye were published in April, May and June 1909 respectively.



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1908. A cover letter, written by the FMS board and attached to the first letter, remarks: 'Unfortunately, our brothers have informed us so late that our fundraising would not be able to alleviate this distress.'[13] This indicates a slight judgement by the board towards the missionaries, the undertone being that the missionaries should have informed the board much earlier. This might be linked to the fact that there had been some distrust between the missionaries and the board.[14] However, it is also important to remember that news did not travel fast at this time, as it took two or three months for a letter to travel from Owambo in South West Africa to Helsinki. Therefore, news published in Finland always reported circumstances that had prevailed a few months earlier.

These three letters described the worsening food scarcity in the region and how local people were gathering at the mission stations to ask for food. They also recounted in detail the missionaries' practical efforts to provide food relief. In May, *Lähetyssanomia* included two articles about the Owambo famine: Glad's 'On famine' and parts of a letter by Tylväs. Both texts continued to touch on the same themes as the previous letters as they informed readers about the circumstances in Owambo from the missionaries' point of view.[15]

This series of famine letters continued in June 1909 with Eemi Nenye's text. It was the first piece illustrated with photographs, and it had a strong religious message. While religion was always present in the texts published in *Lähetyssanomia*, Nenye's letter is much more religious in tone than the previous letters, which tended to focus more on the famine itself. Nenye described how local people suffered from two kinds of hunger: hunger for food and hunger for the Gospel. He also wrote that providing relief should be understood as a practical side of the Gospel. Nenye argued that people in Owambo would understand this kind of practical action better than more overt religious messages.[16] It was common that heavenly and worldly themes overlapped in both the minds of the missionaries and in their practical work, as they saw the world through their Christian faith. Famine and poor relief were also interpreted within this mindset.[17]

The voices of the Aawambo were seldom directly heard in the periodicals,[18] where the narration was dominated by the missionaries. Famine descriptions were powerful, as they depicted the situation in detail. Bodies and suffering were transmitted to the Finnish readers. It is worth bearing in mind that there had been a major famine in Finland as recently as between 1866–1868 and severe food shortages were still experienced in eastern and northern Finland at the turn of the twentieth century,

13. 'Lähetysalaltamme Afrikassa,' 1909, 54–55. Translated by EH.
14. Simo Heininen has argued that many of the disagreements between the missionaries and the board were linked to money, as the latter did not have a realistic view on the needs and costs of the practical mission work in the field. This was especially the case in the nineteenth century. The mission directors visited Owambo in 1900 and 1911, which improved things somewhat but did not completely end the disagreements. Heininen 2019, 31–34; Saarilahti 1989, 99–101.
15. Glad 1909c, 103 and Tylväs 1909, 100–101.
16. Nenye 1909a and Nenye 1909b.
17. I have analysed the dynamic between heavenly and worldly themes in Huuhka 2018.
18. Some letters claim to be 'greetings from the local kings,' but were in fact written by Finnish missionaries. They were likely based on discussions between missionaries and local kings, but the former wrote them up in a mission format.



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giving rise to fundraising initiatives.[19] Hence it seems likely that many Finnish readers would have been able to comprehend the gravity of the situation in Owambo.[20] Furthermore, the missionaries did not hesitate to describe their own emotions. For example, Tylväs wrote of being so depressed that he had almost burst into tears and had hardly been able to write. His letter was published in *Lähetyssanomia* in May, and it was only slightly edited.[21] Glad wrote on 3 January that she was broken-hearted to see the suffering of the people around her.[22] Thus, these texts created powerful impressions of the distress that might have connected to readers' own experiences of famines in Finland.

Tony Ballantyne has described the way that early nineteenth-century British missionary texts about Māori combined empiricism and emotion.[23] The connection between these two dimensions – details and emotion – was also present in Finnish missionary texts. Hence, these narratives had many similarities with the humanitarian narratives produced by missionaries in other places and situations. The power of emotions was well understood in humanitarian campaigns during the colonial era. Emotions were utilised, for example, in famine relief campaigns in India in the early 1900s.[24] While missionaries described their own emotions, they could also awaken those of the readers, which could help to mobilise the willingness to give.

## *Lack of Pictorial Elements*

As many scholars have demonstrated, the large humanitarian campaigns to combat famines in India and China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries employed both words and images.[25] Images sometimes depicted suffering and need.[26] Yet, this was rarely the case in FMS publications. In *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, the information regarding the suffering in Owambo was mainly relayed via verbal narratives. Although the letters by Glad, Rautanen and Tylväs may have created a strong impression and brought on powerful reactions in the Finnish readers, they did not include any visual elements. The only two famine-related photographs were published in June 1909 and linked to Nenye's text.[27] The first photograph captured local people gathered at a mission station. The caption informs readers that they are 'recipients of relief food at the Ondangua Station.' The second photograph portrayed the local congregation standing in front of a church and lacks clear visual links to the famine. Unlike many images that circulated in the Western world depicting famines

19. Turpeinen 1991, 61–67; Jaakkola 1994, 90.
20. Häkkinen and Forsberg 2015, 106–112.
21. Tylväs 1909, 100–101; Tylväs to the mission director Mustakallio, 31 January 1909, file 290, FMS, NAF.
22. Glad 1909c, 103.
23. Ballantyne 2011.
24. Ballantyne 2011, 240–241; Curtis 2012, 160–166; Twomey 2012, 258–261.
25. See, for example, Vernon 2007; Morgan 2009; Curtis 2012; Twomey 2012. In addition, visual aspects were utilised in campaigns that depicted humanitarian questions other than famines, such as the atrocities that had taken place in Congo.
26. Morgan 2009; Curtis 2012; Twomey and May 2012.
27. Nenye 1909a; Nenye 1909b.



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in India at the turn of the twentieth century, neither of these photographs have any brutal elements. Only the caption distinguishes the first photograph from others depicting people gathered at the mission station.

Heather Curtis has underlined the significance of images and pictorial journalism in harnessing Christian compassion.[28] Yet, it appears that photographs and illustrations did not play an important role when mobilising Finnish donors in 1909. In general, photographs or other illustrations were not common content in the FMS periodicals at the beginning of the twentieth century. There were usually one or two, if any, illustrations in every issue of *Lähetyssanomia*. Another FMS periodical, *Kotilähetys* ('Home Mission'), contained more photographs. It was launched in 1905, and its goal was to inform readers about voluntary work being carried out in Finland. *Kotilähetys* was especially directed at so-called 'missionary friends,' or people who supported the missionaries and perhaps took part in voluntary activities like mission sewing circles. Nonetheless, as *Kotilähetys* focused on domestic matters, it seldom published photographs from foreign climes. The main reason for the absence of photographs of the 1908–1909 famine in FMS journals is that such photographs were not available. While there are some photographs of missionaries from this period in the FMS archives, there are none directly related to the famine.[29]

## *A Sense of Responsibility*

In their letters, the missionaries sometimes appealed to the readers to donate. For example, Glad ended her letter, dated 3 January and published in May, by stating that orphans particularly needed support and pleaded: 'please take this seriously and take real action.'[30] In July 1909, the FMS published an announcement in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* that signalled the start of their fundraising campaign for supporting relief work in Owambo. The announcement first summarised the situation and then stated that because immediate relief could not be sent from Finland, the missionaries had turned to Germans for aid. However, because the need in Owambo continued, it now seemed appropriate to send donations from Finland. The FMS then appealed directly to Finnish missionary friends:

> How could the Christian people of Finland, who love the congregation in Owamboland, stand idle while Christians who we have created and of whom we should primarily take care, suffer? […] Therefore, the Finnish Missionary Society announces that funds to alleviate the hunger in Owamboland will be welcomed with gratitude.[31]

The announcement concluded with a reminder that funds donated for famine relief should not be at the expense of general donations to the missionary society.[32] In practice, most of the donations that the FMS received were given for general purposes,

28. Curtis 2012, 162.
29. Vilhunen, 1995.
30. Glad 1909c, 103.
31. 'Ambolähetyksen ystäville' 1909, 141–142.
32. 'Ambolähetyksen ystäville' 1909, 141–142.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

with only a fraction being directed to specific targets, such as the orphanage in Owambo or the medical mission.

In the announcement, the FMS appealed to the readers' sense of responsibility and invoked the parental relationship between Finland and Owambo. In the FMS's publications and mission narratives, Aawambo were usually referred to as daughters, children or with other names used by family members, which underlined the paternal role of the FMS. In so doing, Finnish missionary discourse renewed colonial worldviews and did not differ from other, international missionary representations. One aim of these representations was to promote the mission to potential donors.[33]

In 1909, the FMS had already worked for nearly forty years in South West Africa. This period had seen many emergencies, such as the famine in 1908–1909. This long relationship was something to refer to when the fundraising began. By this time, the society had already succeeded in creating a lasting relationship between the Finnish mission circles and Owambo. The presence of the FMS in Owambo was not questioned by the Finns, although there was frequent discussion vis-à-vis the limits of the mission and about what working methods should be employed besides evangelisation. As scholars have emphasised, Owambo had become the most familiar African space for Finns,[34] and this relationship was actively maintained. Even readers and missionary friends who did not relate to the Aawambo would have been interested in the welfare and work of the missionaries whose lives they had followed in the pages of the periodicals over many years. Donations not only helped the Aawambo, but also the missionaries.

*Lähetyssanomia* sometimes printed news from foreign mission periodicals, including reports about famines in India or China. The periodical also occasionally described relief efforts carried out jointly by colonial administrators and missionaries.[35] Finnish readers were thus aware of the humanitarian system of the time and could see Finnish missionaries' relief work in the wider context of global humanitarian work.

During the 1890s, there was a public discussion in Finnish newspapers about the meaning of the Finnish mission in Africa. As the congregation did not grow and the number of missionaries on the field decreased, many questioned the purpose of the mission and wondered what happened to the money donated to the FMS. Criticism was toned down at the beginning of the century.[36] However, the question whether Finns should support the African mission and Aawambo did not disappear. In 1907, only a year before the famine, the pastor S. W. Roos delivered a speech at the FMS's annual mission festival. He noted that there was an ongoing public debate about whether Christians should work among non-Christians when there was also poverty in Finland. Roos underlined that a true Christian should follow the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Roos continued that food should be sent to those in need and if one waits until everything is in order in Finland others will never get any bread.[37] The

33. Gregersen 2010, 418; Nielssen et al. 2011, 9–10.
34. Löytty 2006; Merivirta et al. 2021, 9.
35. See, for example, 'Nälänhätä Kiinassa' 1878, 157–160; 'Katsahdus nälänhätään' 1883, 84–87.
36. Peltola 1958, 95–96, 155; Saarilahti 1989, 14–17, 99–101.
37. Roos' speech was summarised in 'Lähetysseuran vuosijuhlat' 1907, 115–118.



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speech can be understood as advocating strong support for the African mission and its relief activities.

Christian values and local realities compelled missionaries to distribute food for the poor in the mission fields. While relief campaigns offered Europeans opportunities to live their everyday faith, relief work also created a dividing line between donors and recipients. By donating money, Finns assumed the role of morally superior Christians and positioned themselves in the colonial world order. Although Finland was part of the Russian Empire and poverty existed within the Grand Duchy, being linked to protestant missionary endeavour made Finns feel part of the Western world that was not at the receiving end of ideas or material relief.

## *Small Streams of Donations*

As in northern Europe, municipalities and local administrators had the responsibility for pauper relief in Finland but parishes had long traditions of charitable activities. Much of this poor relief was funded by voluntary gifts and Christian based charity formed a considerable part of Finnish society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[38] In addition, thousands of Finns participated in the missionary endeavour. The FMS had created an active network with local branches for religious people around the country.[39] Long-established charitable traditions and the extensive network of mission supporters made it possible to launch a campaign for the poor in the mission field on another continent.

The FMS's work was based on voluntary donations, which were listed in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*. Donations were mostly anonymous, or semi-anonymous, with initials and the place of residence published. These lists did not have covering letters, and it is therefore impossible to know the motives of individual donors. As Åsa Karlsson Sjöberg has noted, donating anonymously could have been interpreted as the morally superior way to give.[40] Donations were primarily raised at events, such as sewing circle meetings and annual mission festivals.[41]

The first donations for the famine victims in Owambo, 158 Finnish Marks, were received in May 1909, even before the announcement was published.[42] Other donations of a roughly similar size were received during the following months.[43] Donations peaked during the summer months and in September. In general, *Suomen*

38. Jaakkola 1994, 72, 143–149; Häkkinen and Forsberg 2015, 111; Karlsson Sjöberg 2016, 333.
39. Saarilahti describes the networks and local voluntary work in detail. See, for example, Saarilahti 1989, 132–147, 245–253.
40. Karlsson Sjöberg 2016, 339. Nonetheless, anonymity was not always the goal. Georgina Brewis has noted how 'the rich and famous of the day' wished to have their names associated with famine relief funds. Brewis 2010, 899.
41. People also made material donations – clothes and needlework – that could be sent to Africa or sold in Finland. If food was donated, it usually ended up in the missionary school in Helsinki. Some objects were donated and then sent to Africa, such as a baptismal font donated in 1902. 'Kotimaalta' 1902, 5–6; 'Lähettäjäin osasto' 1908, 63–68.
42. In factories and sawmills, one-day salaries for workers were around 1–2 Marks at the beginning of the twentieth century.
43. June 1909: 153 FM, July 1909: 75 FM, August 1909: 164 FM, September 1909: 220 FM.



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*Lähetyssanomia* gives us few clues about the donors. For example, in June 1909, when the FMS received a total of 153 Finnish Marks for famine relief in Owambo, the most generous donor was a woman named Fanny from Kuusjoki, who gave 100 Finnish Marks (hereafter, FM). In addition, the fund received 6 FM from a wedding party, 30 FM from someone with the initials 'I. A. E.,' 7 FM from a pastor named Meno in Kauhajoki and 10 FM from a mission organisation in Vaasa.[44] The list of donors described above is typical in combining individuals, organisations and money raised at private events.[45] In June 1909, the FMS received 33,828 FM for its general fund. A fund for an orphanage in Owambo received 972 FM and a fund for the medical mission received 118 FM. Hence, donations to the famine relief fund formed a mere fraction of the overall income of the FMS, but was in line with other smaller funds. Perhaps publishing the list acknowledged the famine and kept this distress in readers' minds. According to the donation lists printed in the periodical, the last donation for the Owambo famine relief efforts was received in February 1910, when a widow Maria Fors, donated twenty-five FM.[46]

*Suomen Lähetyssanomia* was the first periodical to inform Finnish readers about missionary work and events in Owambo. However, the news circulated in the Finnish secular media, with other periodicals and newspapers writing small news reports that were based on information originally published by the FMS. Developments related to the Finnish mission in Owambo were reported in newspapers published in many parts of Finland and both insecular and religious publications. This goes for both the African mission in genera and the 1908–1909 famine in particular.[47] As a result, reports from Africa, including those that mentioned the famine and relief work, reached a wider readership than mission periodicals alone could achieve. What is interesting is that donations were also reported in several newspapers.[48] Therefore, the famine and fundraising could get a much wider readership than was achievable through the FMS's own networks alone.

## *Conclusion*

Decade after decade, readers of *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* learned about the mission under the southern sun in Owambo, and the missionaries became familiar to many in Finland, especially through the letters published in the periodical. When a famine hit Owambo in 1908–1909, missionaries' published letters created powerful images

44. 'Tilinteko Suomen' 1909. Kuusjoki probably refers to a small town in Southwest Finland. Kauhajoki and Vaasa are municipalities in Ostrobothnia. These regions were the cornerstone of mission support and religious activity. Thus, they were a good source of donations. See Saarilahti 1989, 147–152.
45. Lists of donations, see *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* 7 (1909): lists of April and May, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* 8 (1909): donations of June, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* 10 (1909): lists of July, and *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* 11 (1909): lists of August and September.
46. 'Tilinteko Suomen' 1910.
47. See, for example, 'Maa- ja kansatieteellisiä havaintoja' 1908, 3. 'Läheltä ja kaukaa' 1909, 2; 'Ulkomaalta' 1909, 3; 'Lähetysaloilta' 1909, 3.
48. Donations were not reported in detail and usually only total sums were noted. See, for example, 'Muualta kotimaasta' 1909, 5; 'Lähetysseuralle' 1909, 3.



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of the suffering, and these stories, together with an appeal to help, motivated many missionary friends to donate money.

At the turn of the twentieth century, international humanitarian campaigns were already common, especially in Anglo-American societies. In Finland, there was a history of local philanthropy, but international relief work had only been read about in newspapers. The FMS's 1909 campaign did not create any groundbreaking new working methods in the missionary society. However, it can be taken as an example of how the humanitarian narrative dimensions of the mission worked for a wider readership. Missionary work developed in the direction of humanitarian and development aid in subsequent decades, and this small-scale campaign in 1909 should be understood in this larger context: it was probably the first humanitarian campaign with an international focus in Finland.

The close relationship and decades-long history of the Finnish mission in Owambo offered natural circumstances for Finns participate in the international humanitarian phenomenon. It seems hard to imagine that a famine in any other geographical space could have resulted in a similar campaign in Finland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Colonising Young Minds? Imagining Owambo in Finnish Missionary Magazines for Children at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

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*Abstract*

This chapter examines how the Finnish Missionary Society contributed to the development of the geographical imagination of Finnish children concerning Africa and Owambo at the beginning of the twentieth century. The primary sources utilised in the study consist of the FMS publications that were distributed to children. A particular focus are the children's missionary periodicals entitled *Lasten Lähetyslehti* and *Barnens Missionstidning* (children's missionary magazine) from the 1900s to the 1930s. The material examined in this chapter includes the texts and stories published about the Aawambo and Owambo as well as the maps that were offered to Finnish children and their accompanying texts. We analyse how Owambo space was conceptualised in the publications and how this helped to consolidate the perceptions of Finnish children. The chapter provides a novel study of the knowledge that was disseminated to Finnish children in order to familiarise them with the sites of Finnish missionary work and the people that Finnish missionaries worked with. Our analysis is complemented by an examination of the questions that were asked by Finnish children about Aawambo people, their culture and the geography of the region in the periodicals' question & answer sections as well as the responses provided by missionaries and other adults. Our analysis shows that the maps and accompanying texts provided a Finnish conceptualisation of Owambo space that was often underpinned by racial and colonial discourses. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the children's missionary magazines deserve to be studied in full to understand how they contributed to the process of socialising Finnish children to an acceptance of colonial and Eurocentric beliefs about Africa and its inhabitants.



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At the beginning of the 1900s, the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) began to publish two periodicals aimed at younger readers: *Lasten Lähetyslehti* (1900) in Finnish and *Barnens Missionstidning* (1904) in Swedish (both translate as Children's missionary magazine). These publications marked the beginning of significant efforts by the FMS to engage younger Finns in its overseas activities, and, consequently, in the broader transnational Christian missionary project. Producing publications for children expanded the cultural labour of the FMS in Finnish society: now young minds were also being systematically familiarised with distant regions inhabited by non-Christian people.[1] With these publications, the FMS joined the transnational and trans-imperial missionary networks in which Europeans produced and shaped ideas about childhood and the religious education of children.[2] The magazines produced images of children from other cultures for young Finnish readers and also participated in the construction of the self-image of their young readers. Whereas the local children in the distant regions were depicted either as poor 'heathens' or as new converts to Christianity who were on the brink of adopting new cultural habits, the young Finnish readers were assigned the role of God's little helpers and white saviours.

An important aspect of this dynamic related to distance: Finnish children were far away from those that the FMS was helping. They could therefore only imagine – based on the content of the magazines – what life was like for a child living in, for instance, southern Africa or China, where the FMS missionaries were based. Reading stories about the habits, beliefs and daily schedules of distant others at missionary schools and what it was like to live at the missionary stations fuelled the geographical imagination of Finnish children and contributed to their spatial socialisation. In this chapter, we examine these processes in the context of the early twentieth-century Owambo, in southwestern Africa, where the FMS began missionary work in 1870. We analyse how the FMS made the geography of southwestern Africa and its inhabitants familiar to Finnish children via its magazines, and also examine how the young readers comprehended these distant spaces. We investigate how ideas of blackness and 'heathenism' were associated with Africa and the cultural practices of African people.

Our approach to the spatial work carried out by the FMS builds on the concepts of 'pedagogy of space,' 'spatial socialisation' and 'geographical imagination,' developed by the geographers Anssi Paasi and Doreen Massey. In emphasising the key roles played by education and media in the ideological reproduction of modern states, Paasi utilises the concept of `pedagogy of space'. He notes the significance of geography textbooks in forging regional knowledge and ideas about `we' and `them' as they depict peoples and their cultures and communicate conceptions and stereotypes of them.[3] We consider this concept useful in examining children's missionary magazines, which can be understood as a form of educational media. In other words, the purpose of the magazines was to involve children in missionary work by familiarising them with Christian values and by educating them about the settings and cultures in which missionary work was undertaken. Paasi refers to the process of 'spatial socialisation'

1. During the nineteenth century, these had included materials directed mainly at adults, such as periodicals, maps, books and illustrations that the FMS utilised to promote the missionary cause in Finland and to harness support for their work. Remes 1993; Skurnik 2021; Väkeväinen 1988.
2. See Vallgårda 2014.
3. Paasi 1998, 218.



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when analysing the roles of institutional practices in the 'production and reproduction of the idea of territories and boundaries.'[4] Moreover, he argues that identity/ideology building often occurs in relation to 'other regional spaces,' whose inhabitants are viewed as different.[5] Although arising from the context of nation-building, we suggest that the concept of spatial socialisation can also be applied to Owambo in the early twentieth century.

We argue that the FMS's circulation of information about Owambo and Aawambo via the print media constituted a form of spatial socialisation. The materials grounded the formation of ideas concerning distant others and helped Finnish children conceptualise regional geographies based on difference. The Christian missionaries' conception of global space rested on rhetoric of darkness and light – the black spaces of un-Christian people needed to be transformed into whiteness.[6] This process was key to the development of the individual and collective geographical imagination of Finnish children concerning Owambo, Africa, and more broadly, the world. Geographical imagination, as defined by Massey, refers to the cognitive maps that people form in their minds about the world and different places in it. Massey appreciates the roles of different materials, such as maps, travel brochures and texts, in this process. She contends that these materials only partially show the space and places in question: 'all perspectives are partial.'[7] Finnish children had very limited means of acquiring perspectives on Owambo and Aawambo that contrasted with the ones published by the FMS. Consequently, it is likely that the missionary representations of Africa strongly impacted those who absorbed them. The missionaries filtered the African landscape and the voices of its inhabitants; they contextualised what the different Aawambo cultural traditions meant in contrast to the Christian worldview.

In Owambo, Finns operated in the colonial world even though they did not have colonies of their own. The FMS established its workstations in this region in 1870 on the advice of the Rhenish Missionary Society, at a time when the area was not yet formally a German colony. This changed in 1884, when the German protectorate of South West Africa was established, although this did not signify the establishment of direct colonial administration in Owambo. After World War I the territory became part of South Africa. Finns enforced the colonial order through their missionary work, even though they did not always favour the actions of the colonial powers.[8] Moreover, Finnish missionaries in the field and at home connected with the epistemological and cultural projects of colonialism and reproduced racialised ideas of human difference and civility. As Karen Vallgårda has noted, using the Danish mission in South India as an example, the edifying work that the Protestant missionaries undertook at home was crucial in terms of justifying Western civilising missions and thereby colonialism in these lands. The publications, expositions and public lectures of the era circulated ideas that helped consolidate 'a notion of obligation towards a supposedly backward and uncivilized world.' Children were educated to view themselves as benefactors who

4. Paasi 1995, 27.
5. Paasi 1995, 804.
6. Skeie 2001.
7. Massey 2008, 84.
8. Kokkonen 1993, 156.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

should pity un-Christian people and help missionary organisations to save indigenous children from their parents.[9]

Finnish missionaries employed similar approaches when they positioned Finnish children as civilised and white in contrast to the uncivilised children with darker skin tones, such as Aawambo. In what follows, we analyse how the Finnish missionaries represented Owambo space and people in *Lasten Lähetyslehti* at the beginning of the twentieth century. We examine the maps and accompanying texts that were offered to Finnish children, as well as the edifying stories and articles designed to inform the young readers of missionary and local life in Owambo. Our analysis focuses on the prevalent themes that surface from the articles, such as ideas about blackness and whiteness and local cultural habits that the missionaries conceptualised as 'heathen.' Moreover, we analyse how the children processed the information about Owambo and Aawambo. Glimpses of these processes can be gleaned from the Q&A section that was published in *Lasten Lähetyslehti* between 1916–1927. In this section, the readers were able to ask about missionary work as well as about the culture of Aawambo and the geography of the region. These questions, and the corresponding answers, enable an analysis of what the children were keen to know more about and how they processed information about foreign and distant cultures and countries.

## *Owambo? – Somewhere in Africa*

The first decades of the publication of *Lasten L*ähetyslehti were marked by the inclusion of numerous types of articles relating to Finnish missionary work in Africa. These articles, which ranged from letters from the missionaries to narratives of African children, including those who had converted to Christianity and those who still adhered to local traditional religions, enabled Finnish children to learn about the children that the Finnish missionaries worked with in the distant African land. The periodicals were part of a wider mediascape about Owambo that was managed by the FMS. In addition to the periodicals, the FMS had published books on Owambo and Aawambo since the 1870s. In 1911, the society displayed artefacts deriving from Africa in its Chinese-African exhibition in Helsinki.[10] In the early twentieth century, the FMS's publications also included booklets directed at children, including the missionary Albin Savola's *Mustien lasten elämästä* (About the lives of black children) and *Hamin majoissa eli Ondonga ja sen kansa* (In the huts of Ham, or Ondonga and its people).[11] However, even though there was a wealth of information about Owambo available to Finnish readers in the first decades of the twentieth century, it is unclear where people imagined it to be located as they had very limited access to maps of the region. Indeed, early twentieth-century FMS publications seldom included maps,

9. Vallgårda 2016, 876. See also Vallgårda 2014.
10. Koivunen 2011.
11. Savola 1916; Savola 1917b.



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and those that had been published during the nineteenth century were no longer in circulation.[12]

The lack of precise spatial knowledge about the location of the Finnish missionary stations or the geographical attributes of the region surfaced in the periodicals in October 1918. At this time the editor of *Lasten Lähetyslehti* Hilja Haahti announced plans to provide readers with a map of Owambo. The printing of the map had been prompted by readers, who expressed in their correspondence with the editor the need to see a map so as to understand what the missionaries were writing about. In referring to these letters, the editors of the periodical captured the sentiments regarding the lack of a sense of space:

> Ondonga, Uukuambi, Uukualonkari, Ongandjera etc. Who of you knows where in Owambo these places are? Where is Oshigambo, that Mrs. Järvinen writes about, and Olukonda, where the letter of missionary sister Rautanen is dated? Aren't they all just names to most of you without clear content? [...] And it is only natural. You do not have a map of these remote regions. No one has ever systematically described to you the places whose names appear in the missionary periodical, or described the inhabitants of each station.[13]

The need to ascertain the location of the missionary stations and to comprehend the missionary field made maps important tools for the Western missionary cause. The FMS, like its counterparts in other countries, utilised different types of maps to spread information about worksites as well as the entire global missionary field. Some organisations also published missionary atlases.[14] The publication of the map of Owambo for the children followed the practice adopted by the FMS with its principal publications, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* and *Missions-Tidning för Finland* (both titles translate as Finland's missionary magazine), which were published in Finnish and in Swedish. These periodicals began to include large-scale maps for readers in the 1860s.[15] A world map of missionary activity, published as a separate sheet map in Finnish and in Swedish, played an important role as it depicted the continents as either white, grey or black based on whether they were classified as Christian, Muslim or 'heathen.' The FMS continued to publish these world maps from 1859 up until the 1890s (see Figure 7.1.).[16] It can be argued that the missionary maps constituted what Sumathi Ramaswamy refers to as a transnational 'visual economy', as they grounded the materialisation of the expanding, transnational and trans-imperial Christian empire.[17] Indeed, it may be noted that the utilisation of such maps was pivotal for the missionary societies to fuel geographical imagination of their audiences, children and adult, concerning distant others and the world as a space for Christian missionary work.

12. These included Pietari Kurvinen's maps of Owambo and Africa, published in 1879 by the FMS, and Ragnar Hult's map of Owambo, which was published in the periodical of the Geografiska Föreningen. See 'Missionskarta' 1879; Hult 1891.
13. 'Lukijoille edellisten kirjeiden johdosta' 1918, 53.
14. Kokkonen 1993, 162; 'Missionskartographie' 2019; Skurnik 2021.
15. 'Selitys kartalle' 1862, 56–57.
16. Skurnik 2021.
17. See Ramaswamy 2014.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

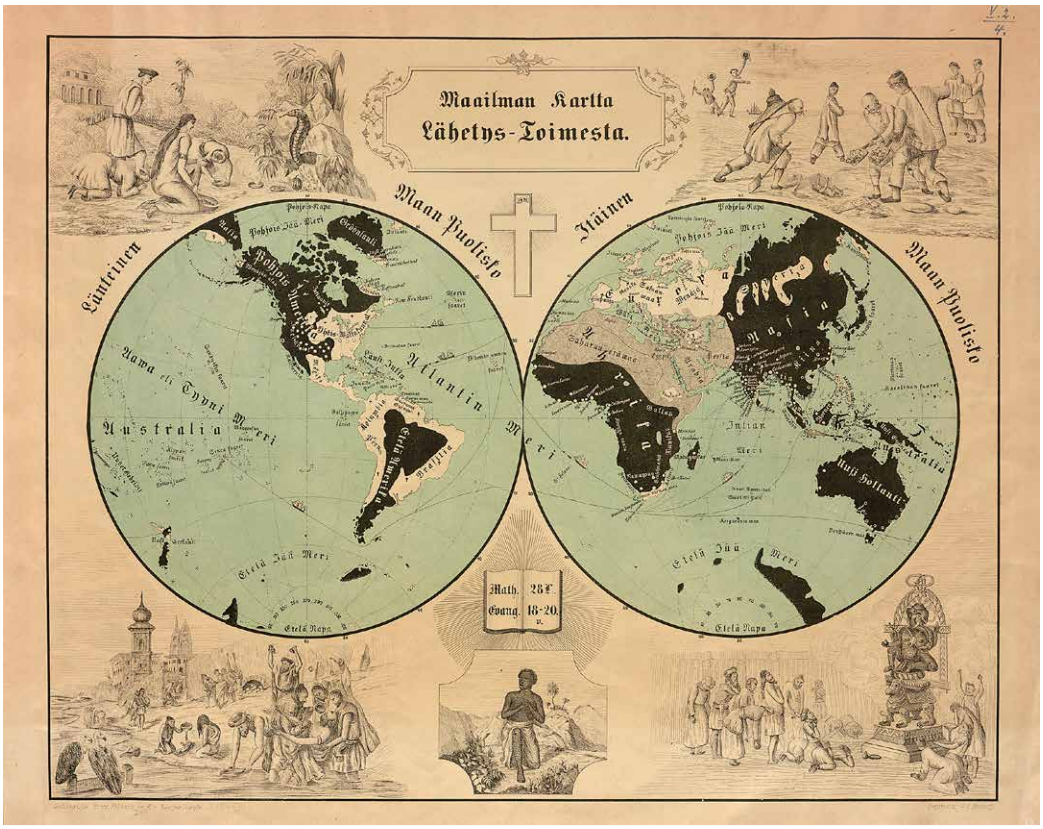


Figure 7.1. The FMS published a missionary map of the world that utilised black, white and grey symbolism to categorise different areas of the world according to religion. *Maailman kartta lähetys-toimesta*, Finnish Missionary Society, circa 1860, Map Collection of the National Library of Finland.

Consequently, once the Christmas edition of *Lasten Lähetyslehti* emerged from the printing press in December 1918, a map (Figure 7.2.) became available to young readers. Those subscribing to the Swedish edition had to wait until the following year for an identical map.[18] The Finnish version occupied a full page and provided a simple view of Owambo by locating the different ethnic groups, villages and missionary stations and by depicting the approximate locations of the roads that connected these stations. In contrast to the world map, the Owambo map did not depict the space as black; rather it shows places of interest as circles on a blank canvas. The map legend explains that the stations marked with a rectangle are main stations and those marked with a dot are no longer in use. The map has no boundaries and contains no means of locating the designated area in Africa; it resembles a mind map that shows how the Finnish missionaries conceptualised their operational space. Thus, the mapmakers assumed that a child was able to locate the area in Africa. This may have been possible, given that some of the maps of Africa that had already been published in school

18. Savola 1919.



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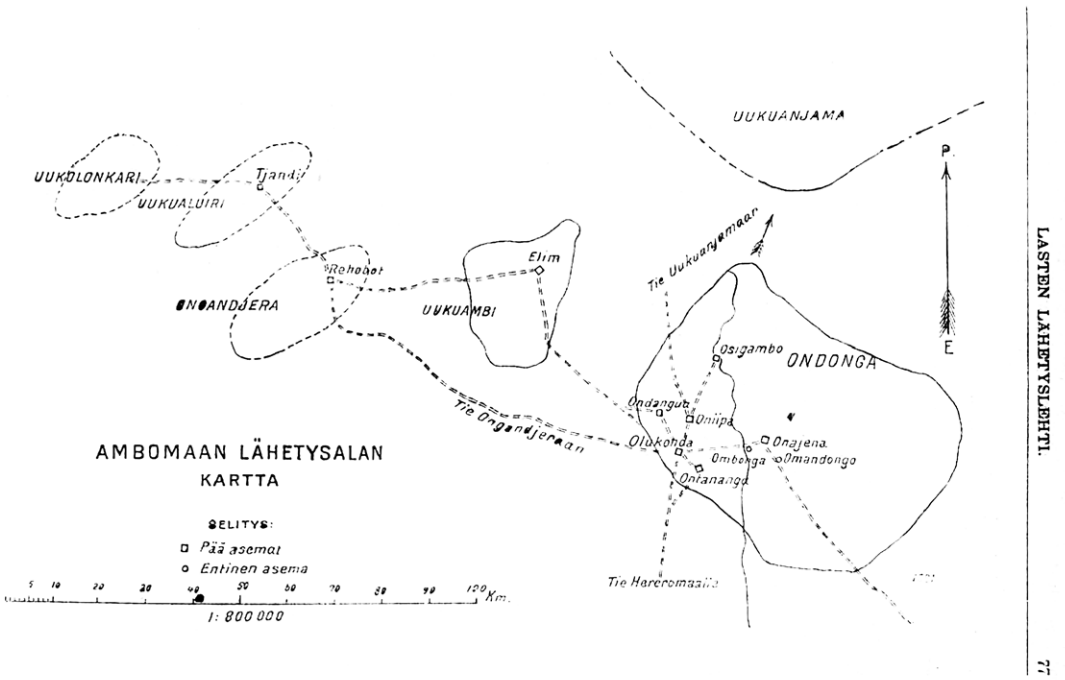


Figure 7.2. A map of the missionary field in Africa was published in *Lasten Lähetyslehti* (depicted here) in 1918 (page 77) and in *Barnens Missionstidning* in 1919.

atlases at the beginning of the twentieth century specify the location of Aawambo and Owambo in Africa. In the 1920s, this was even more commonplace.[19]

The 1918 map of the missionary field in Owambo did not provide the children with much more than the relative locations of different place names and the names of the primary ethnic groups. Indeed, the map lacks topographical detail and anything that would help comprehend the terrain that the missionaries and Aawambo walked and lived on. The accompanying text by the missionary Albin Savola, who had worked in Owambo between 1893–1899 and again between 1901–1905, explained what the different words on the map meant. Those written in capital letters were the ethnic groups that the Finns were working with: the Ondonga, Uukuambi, Onoandjera, Uukualuiri and Uukolonkari. The map thus provides a crude ethnographic cartography of the region and territorialises the spaces of the different groups either with a continuous or dashed line. In so doing the map displayed the wider European tradition of ethnographic mapping of Africa.[20] It is notable that the map does not include any territorial borders. Savola also noted that the Germans had been working with the Uukuanjama.[21] It is noteworthy that the nomenclature that Savola used in

19. See, for example, Gaebler and Blomqvist 1900; Inha 1912, 1923; *Valistuksen koulukartasto. Keskikouluja ja seminaareja varten* 1928. Also see 'Missä on Ambomaa?' 1928, 22.
20. See Noyes 1994.
21. Savola 1918, 76.



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his text differed from those shown on the map: the map shows the names written in Finnish and he referred to them in their German spelling. The Swedish version follows the same writing style as the Finnish map and differs only in its legend.[22] The map may have been drawn by Savola, and it was republished in the updated edition of his book on Owambo, entitled *Ambomaa ja sen kansa* in 1924.[23] The significance of the map that was published in *Lasten Lähetyslehti* in 1920 is indicated by one reader, who asked about the availability of a map of Owambo. The editors answered that the 1918 map was the only good map available.[24]

Sixteen years after the publication of the first map, the FMS circulated another map to its young readers. This map (Figure 7.3.), which was published in 1934, was drawn by hand and illustrates the Finnish missionary field in its broader geographical context in southwestern Africa. Similar to the previous map, it does not employ black and white symbolism. It contains an inset map that is drawn in a very similar manner as the previous version, and on the main map its location is noted by a trapezium marked with 'Ambomaa,' that is, the toponym Finns utilised when referring to Owambo. The publication of the map followed a competition about the geography of the missionary field that the FMS had launched earlier in the same year. After presenting the quiz questions to readers, the editors of the periodical quickly realised that they were far too difficult as 'no proper maps of Ovamboland' were available.[25] Hence, they produced this map in order to illuminate the geography of the mission field to their readers.

The map is hand-drawn, smudgy and difficult to read in places. The brief explanation of the map in the periodical summarises what is depicted in the map. Interestingly, it also begins by stating what the map does not show, namely the Etosha Pan: 'This map lacks the salted plain called Etosa, which is usually shown as a lake on maps. It is a former large inland lake, located where the last letters of the word 'Hereromaa' are found.'[26] The reader was thus guided to read the map by identifying the toponym referring to the area in which the Bantu ethnic group of Herero lived. The inclusion of this information hints at anticipated reactions to readings of the map: confusion about the details included in this edition and those that contradicted information contained in other maps of Africa that readers may have consulted (such as school atlases). Additionally, in contrast to the first map, the 1934 map visualises the presence of European powers and shows territorial boundaries. Its legend indicates that the map communicates diverse information about the spheres of influence of the European powers as well as the sites of different types of missionary work, and the locations of the different ethnic groups.

The two maps provide excellent examples of the spatial views – both partial and positional – that the FMS offered to its readers about Owambo and southwestern Africa. Both maps are stylistically similar to the maps that the FMS published for its adult readers in *Lähetyssanomat* and in books. There is an emphasis on the sites of missionary work and the positioning of ethnic groups.[27] The 1918 map merely shows

22. Savola 1919, 4.
23. The first edition of the book was published in 1916 and entitled *Hamin majoissa eli Ondonga ja sen kansa*. It did not include a map. See Savola 1916; Savola 1924, 224.
24. 'Kirjelaatikko' 1920, 72.
25. 'Ambomaan ja Lounais-Afrikan kartta' 1934, 29.
26. 'Ambomaan ja Lounais-Afrikan kartta' 1934, 29.
27. See analysis of some of these maps in Kokkonen 1993, 160–164.



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the space of the missionary work: what is communicated is the space constructed by Finns in Africa. This does not include local understandings of significant places or indigenous conceptualisations of the space they inhabited. The 1934 map contextualises the space of missionary work by situating it in southwestern Africa and by showing the colonial power relations. Again, the viewpoint of the local people is hidden. What is visible is a Western view of the space, its inhabitants and those aiming to control it. The Finnish children therefore learned to view these spaces via their importance to Europeans, including Finns.


## Ambomaan ja Lounais-Afrikan kartta.

Tässä näette osan Lounais-Afrikaa ja Ambomaan eteläosan, jossa meidän lähetyssaarnaajamme työskentelevät. Tästä kartasta puuttuu Etosa-niminen suolalakeus, mikä on tavallisesti kartoilla merkitty järveksi. Se onkin entinen suuri sisäjärvi, se on sillä paikalla, jossa sanan Hereromaa loppukirjaimet ovat. Amboheimoista siinä näkyvät Ondonga, Uukuanjama, Uukuambi, Ongandjera, Uukualuuri, Ombalantu ja Uukolonkari. Siinä näkyy myöskin Okavangon varrella olevat paikat Kuring-Kuru, Lupala ja Bunja, joita on mainittu Lähetyssanomissa. Tämä kartta olisi pitänyt olla ennenkuin oli helmikuun numerossa ollut kilpatehtävä. Juho-setä ei huomannut, ettei meillä ole kunnollisia karttoja Ambomaasta. Nyt voitte tästä kartasta katsella, missä mikin lähetysasema on. Toivomme ensi nu-

Figure 7.3. The FMS published another map of Owambo showing the missionary field situated in southwestern Africa. Source: *Lasten Lähetyslehti* 4 (1934), 29.



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## *Filling Space: Black and White in Africa/ns*

As noted above, Paasi's concept of the pedagogy of space draws attention to the significant role played by geography textbooks in the social construction of spatial realities and spatial representations.[28] This concept complements that of the process of spatial socialisation and the development of geographical imagination as it includes the idea of agency. In this case, the actor is responsible for composing the materials that form part of the process of constructing spatial realities. Consequently, Paasi's concept is useful when analysing what type of ideas about Africa/ns were communicated to young readers by the FMS magazines. Paasi argues that space is 'a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon, which at the same time also constructs social and cultural reality.' Regions or spatiality do not produce social and cultural classifications and representations, but they form an essential part of the creation of classifications and their content.[29]

In missionary texts, 'heathen spaces' were depicted as black spaces dotted with whiteness and light brought about by Western missionaries. This was a transformative process whereby the expected result was a wholly white and Christian space. Albin Savola captures this dynamic in the FMS magazine when he explains that Olukonda had been the main mission station from its construction and that it can be compared to a great lighthouse in the middle of 'heathenish' darkness: 'it has spread there the heavenly light and guided many Africans towards the heavenly kingdom.'[30] Karina Hestad Skeie has argued that the graphic representation of encounters between light and darkness has been 'the paramount missionary image of the European-African encounter.'[31] This dichotomy was also frequently used by Finnish missionaries.

The symbolism of blackness on missionary maps extends to the blackness of the hearts of those deemed 'heathens' in the Finnish missionary texts. For the missionaries, blackness was not only a physical quality, although this was also referenced frequently, but also a spiritual and inner quality of the heart. For instance, in the first year of the magazine's publication, the mission director Jooseppi Mustakallio wrote about an Aawambo teacher named Tobias, who had been baptised in Omulonga in 1883: 'Before that, Tobias had been a black negro inside and outwardly. But since then, although he was still outwardly black, he was cleansed white from the inside, that is, in the heart, with the baptismal water and sacrificial blood of Christ.'[32] Children were no exception here: a missionary worker noted that the body of an African child, like the body of an African adult, was as black as night, and that it was just as black and dark in their souls if they were not taught about Jesus Christ, who would supposedly bring light and life.[33]

The transformation of a 'heathen' – their becoming 'white from the inside' – was a common narrative trope in missionary periodicals and writings. It was also the focus of the most popular spiritual song, *Musta Saara* ('Black Sarah,' originally

28. Paasi 1998, 218.
29. Paasi 1998, 222–223.
30. Savola 1919, 30.
31. Skeie 2001, 164.
32. Mustakallio 1901, 34.
33. Laimi-täti 1927, 52.



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*Lilla Swarta Sarah* in Swedish), which was printed in Finnish school textbooks in the late nineteenth century. The lyrics tell how a young converted black girl dies and is washed 'wholly white' and 'pure' with the blood of the Lamb of God, thereby offering a description of the transformation that Christian belief could induce.[34] Similar narratives were frequently repeated in the children's magazines, such as when the Damara people were introduced to readers by Uncle Kaarlo, who noted that they differed from other ethnic groups in the region in terms of their dialect and the much darker tone of their skin. However, Uncle Kaarlo assured the readers that Jesus would welcome the Damaras despite their darkness and the gospel would 'enlighten these coal-black people's hearts making them snow-white.'[35]

When discussing the blackness of Africans, the missionaries frequently used the word 'negro' although many of them favoured the word black. Indeed, some actually discussed the connotations the word is likely to evoke in the reader's mind. Anna Pettinen, for instance, wrote the following in 1909: 'Most white-skinned children and even grown-ups when hearing the word "negro" think of and imagine a very dark, repulsive, ugly, savage and evil being, especially if it is connected to the word "heathen".' Even though she was leaning towards articulating a view that stood in contradiction to the preconceived views whites had about Africans, Pettinen nevertheless notes that the word 'heathen' does not inspire confidence and a black person does not live up to the expectation of beauty by 'our' standards.[36] The kinds of derogatory and essentialising descriptions Pettinen refers to were not uncommon, even in geography books of the time,[37] and may therefore have been common ideas in Finland. However, some missionary workers, like Pettinen, were very conscious of the predominance of negative stereotypes of Africans in Europe at the time and worked towards changing this image in the texts they published in the children's magazines. Some missionaries confirmed certain stereotypical European ideas of Africans, such as the belief that all Africans can sing. Replying to a Finnish child's question about the songs of Aawambo, the 'African uncle' assumed that this common assumption lay behind the question. In his reply about the Aawambo songs the uncle confirmed this generalised and essentialist view of Africans.[38]

The prevailing idea the Finns had about Africans was challenged by the people Savola referred to as 'white negroes.' Savola presumed that his readers would describe Africans as black and noted that this was correct as Africans were 'naturally black-skinned people.' He explained that there were exceptions, including albinos, who had the outward features of Africans, including tightly curled hair, but who had white skin and hair.[39] Although blackness in most instances was described as the factor that fundamentally set Africans apart from Finns and other Europeans, the discussion on albinos reveals that even if Africans had white skin, they were perceived to have

34. *Swarta Sarah*, written by the Swede Lina Sandell, was first published in 1865 in the Swedish publication *Missionssånger för barn* ('Mission songs for children'). The song was translated into Finnish in 1882 and published in a number of songbooks in Swedish and Finnish. See Lemmetyinen 2010, 102–107. See also Leila Koivunen's chapter in this volume.
35. Kaarlo Setä 1901a, 26–27.
36. Pettinen 1909, 99–101.
37. Rosberg 1907, 49–56; Rosberg 1909, 201–202.
38. 'Afrikan setä' 1916, 85.
39. Savola 1901, 27. See also Savola's derogatory description of the San, Savola 1917a, 71.



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other physical and mental qualities that made them intrinsically different. The word 'negro' seemed to capture this difference and solve the perceived problem of Africans with white skin colour. In *Mustien lasten elämästä*, Savola continues to discuss two white African boys, Eleasar and Timoteus, under the title '"White" negroes,' with the quotation marks around 'white' indicating that the two African boys are not and cannot be truly white whatever their skin colour. However, Savola notes that the difference between whites and blacks will vanish one day, that is, when those who believe in God gather in front of Jesus as described in the Book of Revelation. Savola explains to his readers that 'black people' will then 'be as pure as lilies and as white as snow.'[40] Savola repeats here the idea expressed in 'Black Sarah' of racial differences only dissolving after death and even then only if the Africans have converted to Christianity.

Curiously, even if white skin did not make an African 'white,' other outward signs, such as Western dress and names, as well as the relinquishment of traditional body decorations and women's hairpieces, were steps in the direction of becoming Christian, 'civilised' and even white from the inside. Furthermore, conversion to Christianity is described as bringing about not only a change in one's religion and outward appearance – from hair and body markings to Western clothing – but also other changes in virtuousness. Christian missionaries believed that familiarity with the Gospel texts helped to stimulate industriousness and an eagerness to work among new converts. To illustrate this belief, *Lasten Lähetyslehti* printed an image of an Aawambo girl operating a loom that had been brought from Finland, accompanied by a text that explained that the girl is now dressed in clothes and no longer naked as she was before her conversion.[41] Early European evangelists in South Africa had viewed nakedness as a sign of 'degeneracy and disorder, the wild and the wanton, dirt and contagion' and the Finnish missionaries appear to have shared this viewpoint.[42] The outward transformation of the Aawambo girl in the image and the industriousness exemplified by the loom had Uncle Kaarlo end his text in the exclamation: 'May God bless our missionary work!'[43]

The magazines provided multiple examples of how the 'heathen' habits of Aawambo contributed to the blackness of Owambo space. Hence, the missionaries were endeavouring to whiten the space. Some of these habits had to do with hygiene, others with outward appearance. The situation here seems to have been not too different from the experience of the Tswana in South Africa in the 1880s, when British missionaries wanted them to change their traditional attire, which the missionaries regarded as dirty, to European jackets or shirts. Comaroff and Comaroff have noted that 'what was clean was European,' in the eyes of European missionaries and that 'aesthetic ethnocentrism masqueraded, here, as moral virtue.'[44] According to Finnish missionary magazines, the implied progress of Aawambo from 'filthy heathens' into Christians was apparent, for instance, in the outward appearance of the women. The long, calf-length weave or headdress worn by grown-up women

40. Savola 1917b, 22.
41. Kaarlo Setä 1901b, 61.
42. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 224.
43. Kaarlo Setä 1901b, 61.
44. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 270.



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was a sign of local, un-Christian traditions, whereas younger women, including Christian mothers, had hair reaching just below their ears.[45] No proper explanation for the heathenness of the long weave is given in *Lasten Lähetyslehti*, but in a 1930 issue of *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, Reverend Järvinen explained that the missionaries would not baptise anyone with the traditional hairstyle because this kind of hair was deemed to contain not only dirt and vermin but was also associated with magic.[46] Anna Rautaheimo reported in 1935 that the women's headdresses were connected with their superstitions and needed to be abandoned before the women could become Christian.[47] Both writers noted the hesitation felt by the women in their rite of passage towards Christianity as they were required to remove their headdress. It seems that the missionaries did not care to examine the meanings and significations of the headdresses, for example as signs of the wearer's social or marital status and therefore did not interpret them as similar to the changes that many European women made to their hairdo when they married. The headdress was simply condemned as dirty and an outward sign of superstition.

Although the headdresses were only worn by grown-up women, the supposed 'vanity' and need for decorations among Aawambo girls was also discussed in a critical manner in several articles in *Lasten Lähetyslehti*. Some stories were about girls who had converted, while others were about those who had not embraced Christianity. An example of the second kind of story involved a nine-year-old girl named Nashipolo and an eleven-year-old girl named Namtenja, who had pierced their ears with an acacia thorn because they had wanted to wear similar decorations as older girls. When Nashipolo's ears became infected, one of the missionaries explained to her how the Tempter makes people try to tamper with God's work by decorating their bodies, for instance through ear piercing, the extraction of frontal teeth and burn marks on the skin that were visible even after one converted to Christianity.[48] However, the missionaries reported that even converts were susceptible to such temptations under trying circumstances. Lyyli Levänen wrote about two baptised teenage Aawambo girls, Katriina and Fanny, who were from a Christian home and therefore had intact front teeth. During famines, the girls had to work in exchange for food at a digging site, where they were bullied and called ugly because of their teeth. In her narrative, Levänen remarked how preposterous it was to perceive anything that God had created as ugly. She explained that the girls had succumbed to the whispers of the Tempter and asked a witch to knock out their front teeth – an act which was portrayed as the girls' un-Christian vanity. Both girls subsequently became gravely ill because of a mouth infection they contracted. As a result, Fanny passed away and Katriina was taken to the mission hospital in the hope that she might still be saved. A missionary explained to the families of the girls that the death of Fanny was God's way of communicating with them and demonstrating that he does not tolerate sin. Levänen concluded by hoping that this would be a lesson to the Aawambo to not modify their teeth, and she asked her Finnish readers to pray for black Christian children so that they would

45. Juho weikko 1905, 6; Tuominen 1923, 42.
46. Järvinen and Järvinen 1930, 33.
47. Rautaheimo 1935, 39.
48. Järvinen 1920, 36–37.



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defeat the Tempter.[49] The story implicitly condemned any signs of Aawambo culture on girls' bodies as sinful and soul-threatening, sometimes also life-threatening. Finnish children are in effect invited to pray for Aawambo not only to resist sin but also their own cultural traditions. The Finnish readers were thus instructed to regard European cultural habits, dress and the absence of bodily decorations as pure and Christian, not as denoting ethnic or cultural differences.

While the children's magazines contain stark examples, as seen above, they also include softer approaches and many shades of grey. Skeie has noted that although Norwegian missionaries in Madagascar frequently used the common image of encounter between light and darkness, they did not employ it exclusively. The Norwegian missionaries also employed more complicated images of the people they worked with and thus contradicted the 'black and white stereotype.' The more complex images indicate the missionaries' attempts to understand local cultures and beliefs.[50] Similarly, Finnish missionaries, while recurrently using the metaphor of light and darkness, often also went beyond stereotypical images in their texts for children. Anna Pettinen, for instance, did not leave her discussion of Africans to the demeaning characterisation described above. Instead, she encouraged her young Finnish readers to overcome their prejudices. She explained that white people become acquainted with the appearance of black people when they spend time together and quickly cease to think about the differences. She went as far as suggesting that it was like being among one's own compatriots. In Pettinen's view, Aawambo children were particularly pretty and pleasant and one could not help but like them. Furthermore, respect for elders and dignitaries was deeply ingrained among the Aawambo, in addition to which Aawambo children did not argue and fight like Finnish children. Hence, according to Pettinen, Aawambo children were in fact suitable role models for Finnish children, who had often grown up in more favourable conditions.[51] The young readers of the magazines were thus encouraged to hold some aspects of Aawambo culture in high regard and to form positive affective ties with African children.

## *Finnish Children and Perceptions of Owambo*

How did Finnish children imagine Owambo? The questions that the children submitted to the editors of *Lasten Lähetyslehti* provide us with clues about how they aimed to comprehend the Finnish-African space depicted on the maps. The children were first encouraged to submit questions about the missionary field in 1916. Children's questions continued to be published until 1927 in *Lasten Lähetyslehti* but not in *Barnens Missionstidning*. However, some of the answers were also printed in the Swedish issue. The editors explained that the purpose of the column was to enable questions about the missionary field. The editors stressed that they did not mean to answer and publish every letter that arrived on to their desks. Indeed, they would only

49. Levänen 1930, 52–54.
50. Skeie 2001, 164.
51. Pettinen 1909, 99–101.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

publish the letters that they deemed to be of interest, and which addressed themes that had not already been discussed in prior articles.[52]

The questions submitted mostly related to the work sites of the Finnish missionaries, including Owambo, but also included more general questions about missions, 'heathens,' and the contributions that children could make to missionary work. One of the first questions printed in 1916 was from a child called Ilmo, who wanted to know how the Aawambo ate.[53] The answer to Ilmo's question appeared in the next issue.[54] Ilmo´s question is indicative of the questions Finnish children raised about Owambo and Aawambo in the following years. Many focused on everyday life and the habits of distant peoples. A recurring way of framing the questions related to linking them to the children's own spheres of life. In 1917, for example, several questions related to African berries and flowers ('do similar berries grow in Africa as in Finland?;' 'do the same flowers grow in Ovamboland as here?'), or about parental love ('do the heathens love their children in a similar manner as our parents love us?') and different ethnic groups ('Are there gypsies in Africa and do they travel around like they do here?').[55] Similar questions were also made in later years when the young Finnish readers wanted to know whether one could see the aurora borealis in China or Africa, or if Africans had similar pets as Finns.[56] These questions show that the children sought to comprehend the foreign space and its inhabitants through what they knew best: their own environment and family relations. Their geographical imagination about Africa and Africans developed in comparison to Finland and based on information provided by the missionary magazine.

A sense of the similarities and difficulties faced by Finnish children in attempting to grasp African space is visible in a drawing competition organised by *Lasten Lähetyslehti* in 1923. The topic of the competition was to illustrate a story called 'Namupala and the white girl' that described the friendship between Namupala, an African boy, and Sirkku, a Finnish missionary's child. In the story, the two children were approached by a venomous snake while studying a book. Namupala saved Sirkku by killing the snake with a bow and arrow that he had just made for himself.[57] The way that the editor of the magazine described the drawings submitted by the children for the competition provides an interesting glimpse into how some Finnish children, based on reading the missionary periodical and possibly other material on Africa, imagined Africa, its inhabitants and its environment. Indeed, the editor highlighted the errors that many had made when depicting the African environment: 'It was amusing to see from the drawings, how differently African nature and conditions are imagined. Thus, in some drawings there were birches and spruces, hepaticas and amanitas, which one absolutely cannot encounter in Africa.'[58]

None of these drawings were published in the magazine. Different drawings were published, however, but these depicted palm trees and African houses to demonstrate

52. 'Kirjelaatikko' 1916, 56; 'Kirjelaatikko' 1918, 24.
53. 'Kysymyksiä' 1916, 56.
54. R. R. 1916, 59–61.
55. 'Kysymyksiä' 1917a, 23–24; 'Kysymyksiä' 1917b, 55.
56. 'Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia' 1921, 15; 'Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia' 1922, 38.
57. 'Piirustuskilpailu' 1923a, 14–15.
58. 'Piirustuskilpailu' 4/1923b, 32.



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that the story was set in Africa. The placement of birches in an African setting shows that for some it was difficult to imagine what Africa was like and how it differed from Finland. This is not surprising because the communication of information about the African environment was not the main concern of the FMS. Indeed, as has been discussed above, the focus of the articles and stories was almost always either on African children, especially their bodies and their habits, and the supposed darkness of non-Christian Africa or on the lives of the Finnish missionaries' children who lived in Owambo. However, some articles published between 1919–1923 did include images of the local plants and contained photographs of the missionary stations, which communicated ideas about the landscape.[59]

The questions also reveal how contemporary events in Africa affected the children's thinking. An illustrative example concerns questions published in 1922 by someone using the pen name 'Unityttö' (sleepy girl), who inquired whether the troubled events in South Africa had affected Owambo and enquired about the status of this region: 'Do the Aawambo have an independent state, or are they a colony of European powers, whose? Are there European civil servants? What types of school do European children go to?'[60] The reference to events in South Africa is likely related to a strike by miners at the end of 1921, which developed into the Rand Rebellion against the state. Interest in the independent status of Owambo may also reflect the relatively recent independence of Finland.

At times, the answers of the magazine editors were plain and simple, on other occasions they wrote wordy replies that described the people's habits in detail, communicating distinctive ideas about the transformation that the missionaries were trying to make. They often made comparisons to Finnish habits. Photographs and illustrations sometimes accompanied the answers. When a Finnish child asked if there were any saunas in Owambo and how the Aawambo washed themselves,[61] Savola replied that the Aawambo do not often wash but use grease on their skin instead. He pointed out the difference to the Christian Aawambo, who 'often wash their faces and also use soap. Christianity brings inward and outward cleanliness with it.'[62] A similar 'civilising' effect of Christianity was pointed out in a discussion of the eating habits of the Aawambo. These were first described in response to Ilmo's above-mentioned question about how the Aawambo eat. The missionary Reinhold Rautanen stated that a stranger would find the habits of eating with fingers and making excessive noises unrefined and unhygienic, especially since the dishes were not washed afterwards. He observed that 'the Christian homes in Owambo are already somewhat cleaner than those of the so-called "greasy heathens" as the former wash their dishes, even carefully, if they expect teachers to visit.'[63] The trope of 'the greasy native,' was associated with dirtiness and ugliness. The stereotypical depiction of an oiled and unwashed body had originated in late eighteenth-century Dutch depictions of the Khoisan people and

59. 'Olukondan asema' 1919, 29; 'Ondongalainen talo' 1919, 38; 'Omahangutähkä' 1919, 48; 'Osiljatähkä' 1919, 49; 'Kaivo' 1921, 14; 'Afrikan lastenkoti' 1921, 67; 'Tshandin lähetysasema Ambomaalla' 1923, 15.
60. 'Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia' 1922, 38.
61. 'Kysymyksiä' 1919, 62.
62. Savola 1919c, 69.
63. R. R. 1916, 61.



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other European accounts of Southern African people. By the mid-nineteenth century this image had become common in popular literature.[64] Rautanen had changed the word 'native' to 'heathen,' thus associating dirtiness with heathenness rather than with nativeness.

The topic was revisited again eight years later by Erkki Lehto, who differentiated 'us,' who are used to 'the habits of a civilised country,' from the Aawambo, who eat with their fingers without using cutlery.[65] Western ideas of cultural superiority have relied on the comparison of domestic norms, as theories of colonialism have often pointed out.[66] As Anne McClintock argues, 'sub-Saharan women were to be "civilized" by being dressed (in clean, white, British cotton)' and washed with soap.[67] A Sunday School story about non-Christian eating habits, for example, could serve as a reminder to children that 'civilisation rests upon that childhood nemesis, good table manners' in nineteenth-century America.[68] Table manners and the use of cutlery, as well as soap and cleanliness, also denoted civilisation in *Lasten Lähetyslehti*. More generally, ideas related to savageness and a lack of civilisation in domestic settings were depicted in many Western nineteenth-century colonial and missionary accounts. Nonetheless, they were not a significant theme in the Finnish children's mission magazine. In fact, a reply to a child's question about parental love among non-Christians contained the following description: The Aawambo 'love their children greatly. Mother's love is one of the greatest qualities of people there. A mother will never abandon her child.'[69] In general, the missionaries gave credit where it was due in their opinion. These examples show that at times the Finnish missionaries' narratives of Owambo and Aawambo went 'beyond black and white' as they displayed an understanding of the people's habits and cultural practices.

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter we have utilised *Lasten Lähetyslehti* as a focused lens to investigate the type of ideas and spatial conceptualisations concerning Owambo that Finnish children were acquainted with. We have explored the spatial knowledge that the FMS imparted to its young audience via maps of Owambo and analysed how the articles discussing the 'heathens' fuelled ideas and geographical imagination about these spaces as dark; only the missionary stations that were marked with tiny white dots marked the possibility of transformation. In combination the maps and the texts displayed a Finnish conceptualisation of Owambo space that was underpinned by racial and colonial discourses. On one level, the FMS was interested in providing more accurate information about the Aawambo and the Owambo region. On another level, they relied on dark descriptions of space and toyed with the much-used metaphor of the blackness of Africa and stressed its physical distance to Finnish children.

64. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 224.
65. Lehto 1924, 20.
66. Sánchez-Eppler 1996, 412. See also McClintock 1995.
67. McClintock 1995, 31.
68. Sánchez-Eppler 1996, 413.
69. 'Vastauksia kysymyksiin' 1917, 31.



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This dynamic of distance was physical, mental and racial, and it was crucial in the process of spatial socialisation and consequently developing individual and collective geographical imagination concerning Africa. However, the questions posed by the children reveal what may be called 'colonial innocence' that contrasts with what the missionaries mostly narrated. Finnish children were interested in finding connections between the two distant sites as they contemplated whether the children in Owambo could engage in similar activities as them or if their parents loved them too. The analysis presented in this chapter shows that the children's missionary magazines deserve to be studied in full to understand how they contributed to the practices through which Finnish children became acculturated into accepting colonial and Eurocentric beliefs about Africa and its inhabitants.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# III

# Cultural Change and Resistance in Owambo

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Traditional Aawambo Healing Practices that have Survived the Influence of Finnish Missionaries in Northern Namibia

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*Abstract*

The fundamental contention of this chapter is that some cultural norms and practices survived despite the extreme corruption of the traditional values brought about by the arrival of Finnish missionaries and the subsequent conversion of the Aawambo people to Christianity. This chapter examines the factors that led to the survival of some of the Aawambo healing traditions and practices. Oral interviews with community elders, who are regarded as the guardians of indigenous knowledge, were used to collect data. In particular, the normative and epistemological frameworks around the idea that Finnish missionaries influenced Aawambo culture are examined. This chapter demonstrates that despite all attempts by Finnish missionaries to eradicate Aawambo traditional cultural and social norms, many persisted and were assimilated into what is seen today as traditional healing practices and part of the new social order. This chapter argues that this hardiness was made possible because of the agency that Aawambo employed in preventing the complete erosion of their cultural practices. It further argues that the open and adaptive nature of African healing and its ability to absorb and transform other healing traditions should be recognised. This chapter recommends that Aawambo are allowed to entertain their traditional healing practices, while also attending to their Christian duties.



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Christianisation and cultural change are not new topics in Namibian historiography. Although several researchers have comprehensively written about the Aawambo since the 1870s, far too little attention has been paid to whether their culture and social status were completely transformed by Finnish missionaries. Moreover, little scholarly attention has been paid to the factors that made possible any remnants of the agency of the Aawambo in preventing the complete corrosion of their cultural practices.[1] The arrival of missionaries and the consequent conversion to Christianity of Aawambo not only threatened their indigenous forms of religiosity and cultural practices, but also the imagination and consciousness underlying them. Those who converted to Christianity were forbidden to engage in certain cultural practices that missionaries considered pagan. These practices were referred to locally as *uupagani*. The converts that transgressed were excommunicated from the church and were only accepted back after undertaking a process of repentence.[2] This chapter, however, challenges the Owambo Native Commissioner's notion that the Finnish Mission succeeded in completely breaking down the 'tribal' system and the customs of the Aawambo.[3] The same argument was presented by the anthropologist Maija Hiltunen in her study of Finnish missionary writings on witchcraft (*uulodhi*) in Owambo during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She confidently argued that the converts no longer regarded themselves as belonging to the old system.[4] What one needs to note here is that the new religion offered Aawambo challenges and opportunities, which they were quick to seize and turn to their own advantage. In examining indigenous responses to conversion to Christianity, Porter claims that local people have never been merely silent or inactive converts of European Christian belief,[5] and we argue that this was the same for the Aawambo. This chapter shows that the existing observable remnants are an indication that Aawambo did not completely abandon their culture. Certain social contexts uphold both indigenous and Christian practices, which clearly do not preclude one another, and blur the boundaries between the two realms.

This chapter deploys the concept of traditional healing, and it begins with a critique of earlier work focusing on indigenous knowledge, medical culture, historical healing and traditional medicine. According to Maylin Meincke, international and regional public health policy has been promoting the integration and regulation of traditional medicine and their practitioners since the late 1970s. The aim has been to ensure the safety of the traditional healers' patients and to improve healthcare services in rural areas by utilising traditional healers as auxiliary healthcare personnel.[6] Although Namibia has still not officially recognised traditional medicine and its practitioners as a complementary healthcare system, the fact remains that traditional healers continue to provide health services to Namibians.[7]

In their book *Indigenous Knowledge of Namibia*, Chinsembu et al. examine the indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants for treating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other

1. McKittrick 2002; Fairweather 2004, 16–32; Miettinen 2005; Nampala and Shigwedha 2006.
2. This process is referred to locally as *oku kondwa megongalo,* which literally means to be 'cut off from the church/congregation services.' Nambala 2022.
3. Finnish Mission Sites 1933–1940, NAO, 011, volume 1, File 6/2/5, NAN.
4. Hiltunen 1986, 4.
5. Porter 1997, 386.
6. Meincke 2018, 23.
7. Meincke 2018, 23.



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microbial infections that can be contracted by humans and livestock, as well as cancer. They also examine indigenous foods and the coping and response strategies that local people have relied on in dealing with human-wildlife conflicts, floods, gender, climate change and the management of natural resources.[8] In the introductory chapter, Chinsembu argues that indigenous knowledge of plants might be used to manage HIV/AIDS. He further states that there is a reason to evaluate elements of traditional medicine, particularly medicinal plants and other natural products, that can yield effective and affordable therapeutic agents for conditions related to HIV/AIDS.[9] Shirungu and Cheikhyoussef argue that it is imperative to seriously consider the indigenous healing in mental health in terms of collaboration between biomedical and traditional health practitioners for the benefit of all.[10] Meincke claims that the collaboration between biomedicine and traditional healing in Namibia is still in its infancy and that little effort has been undertaken by the government to guide it.[11] Traditional healing and traditional medicine have been the focus of many ethnographic and sociological studies and have been shown to be very diverse and innovative within Western-informed health services.[12] This chapter critically examines elements of Aawambo traditional healing practices that survived the missionaries' efforts to disregard them as insignificant and harmful to the civilising project. This chapter further investigates factors that contributed to the survival of these healing practices and studies how the Aawambo navigate traditional medicine in the context of their beliefs, communities and healing.

## *Methodology and Conceptualisation*

This chapter relies heavily on oral historical dialogues (semi-structured interviews) conducted with selected members of the Aawambo community, who were asked to share their knowledge and experiences regarding the topic in question. We were unable to conduct all the interviews ourselves. Limited time and a lack of funding played into our decision to ask Junias Vaino Kambungu, a theology student at UNAM's northern campus (Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus), who regularly attends meetings with the majority of the clergymen who were interviewed, to conduct some interviews. Lovisa Tegelela Nampala was able to interview Josaphat Shanghala, a former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), and three herbalists/traditional healers residing in Ohangwena, known for their expertise in healing illnesses that are regarded as incurable by Western and/or modern medicine.

We familiarised ourselves with the topic and planned the interviews, formulating several questions: What are some of the cultural aspects of life that have remained unchanged despite the influence of Finnish missionaries and the later influence of Christianity in the region? To whom might we try to talk to about the appreciation of culture and indigenous knowledge? We decided to interview clergymen who

8. Chinsembu et al. 2015.
9. Chinsembu 2015, 2.
10. Shirungu and Cheikhyoussef 2018, 134.
11. Meincke 2018, 24.
12. Meincke 2018, 24.



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openly engaged with and criticised the harmful impact of Christianity on Aawambo customs, viewed as pagan and evil, and who wanted to revive some of them.[13] Many of the interviewees were selected based on their social standing and their divergent positions on the issue of cultural practices. Some opposed and others supported the retention of traditional cultural practices, while all were avowed Christians. To avoid neglecting and/or silencing other voices on the topic, we decided to include three herbalists/traditional healers considered to be custodians of indigenous knowledge, in particular to study the normative and epistemological parameters of Finnish influence on Aawambo culture. This was necessary because many people still support Aawambo traditional healing practices regardless of being Christian.[14] Although many conversions did take place, it is evident that Aawambo never completely abandoned their traditional practices. This statement is supported by the account of Ndadi, who says that although his parents (who according to him were Christians) did not believe in witchcraft, there were still certain things they used to do in traditional ways.[15]

Once the interviews were complete we reserved a few days to discuss them with Kambungu and to review transcripts, built narratives and develop critiques. We are aware that the methodology has its limitations, as it relies on our own judgment in selecting the participants with whom to engage in oral dialogue. However, we wanted to access a particular sample of participants who straddled between Christianity and cultural heritage. Even though the number of participants does not statistically represent the population at large,[16] the interviewees provide an important perspective on the history of Christianity in Owambo and regarding the silence about the customs and practices that survived the influence of Finnish missionaries. Although the narrative of these community elders may not allow for wider comparison, they are important in providing a perspective on what many Aawambo consider Christian practices, but that have also been considered as 'pagan.' The limitations are counteracted by both authors (including Kambungu) having prior knowledge of the research area and topic and therefore being able to select and target appropriate participants.[17]

When using oral sources, it is important to be aware of their positionality. Different people provide different narratives and strive to express different viewpoints on the past.[18] Thus, the construction of individual memories always employs different types of understanding of the past, each with different claims to truth and authenticity. In this chapter, oral interviews are used to gather the experiences of elders, who are viewed as knowledge-bearers. In such an endeavour there are likely to only be partial

13. This is based on an interview conducted by Vilho Shigwedha for his MA thesis with Mathew Kapolo on 25 February 2002. The latter now prefers to us his indigenous name of Tshapaka Kapolo, instead of his Christian name in which he finds no meaning. See Shigwedha 2004, 141.
14. Ndadi 1974, 32.
15. Ndadi 1974, 32.
16. We concentrated on the depth of the information rather than the representativeness of the population.
17. As indicated earlier, the researchers were not able to conduct some of the interviews themselves, thus Junias Vaino Kambungu, who has connections with the clergymen, was tasked to conduct some of the interviews.
18. Thompson 2000 and Alessandro 1998.



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and multiple truths, and one should use complex interpretations and take a reflective approach.

## *Aawambo Traditional Healing Customs and Practices*

There were many traditional healing practices before the Finnish missionaries came to Owambo. Traditional healers were often consulted for diseases, such as headaches, coughs, diarrhoea, skin diseases, as well as for wounds. Many were treated with general health tonics made from entire plants and plant parts like roots, leaves, bark, tubers, seeds, fruit, pods and stems.[19] These were also used to treat weakness and unspecified ailments. Interestingly, some healing practices concentrated more on traditional beliefs, witchcraft and human behaviour. One such healing practice for a migraine was, and still is, referred to as *okukwika*. A traditional healer used a razor blade (*oshimbi*), fire and a young calf's horn called *uuguga*. The healer made two cuts on both sides of the patient's head, put fire inside the horn, placed it on the cut and twisted the horn hard enough to remove the blood that was believed to cause the headache. This process is called *okukwika*.[20]

Another traditional healing practice was for mental illness. Many Aawambo believed that mental illness was caused by an ancestor (*omukwamhungu*) who had possessed a relative or family member because he/she craved a certain type of food or an organ from an animal, or because this ancestor used to practise healing when alive. Mental illness was attended to by a healer who would consult the spiritual realm, where they received guidance in identifying the ancestor and determining how the latter's demands could be met. The healer conducted the healing with the assistance of drummers summoned to perform a piece of music using a drum called an *ongoma.* The community was also invited to witness and participate in the dancing.[21] If successful, the patient was healed from being possessed by ancestors, if not, a psychological and/or mental breakdown was likely.

Missionaries insisted that their Owambo converts abstain from all traditional practices that were seen to be against Christian teachings.[22] They argued that forbidden customs, such as the 'inhuman' healing practices, represented 'savagery, ignorance and heathen superstition.'[23] Clearly, ignorance and ethnocentrism contributed to many of the negative and discriminatory beliefs that Finnish missionaries had about Aawambo healing practices. Finnish missionaries viewed Owambo traditional healing practices as being closely connected to local indigenous religions. Traditional healing was, and still is, a very complex issue involving ritual and spiritual aspects. It encompasses far more than simply the use of plants.[24] Traditional healers worked on the body and mind together to help cure an illness. Thus, as indicated above, prior to the arrival

19. Cheikhyoussef et al. 2011, 5.
20. Mandume 2023. Padelia Mandume informs us that Aawambo instituted a proverb – *ta mu kwike Kakulu, ye ou ta vele omutwe oTena* – from such healing.
21. Mans 1997, 108, 217, 236; Nampala 2006, 21–25. Johannes 2023; Hamutenya 2023; Mukoya 2023.
22. Nampala 2006, 73.
23. Walde Kivinen, as cited in Miettinen 2005, 120.
24. LeBeau 2003.



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of missionaries, Aawambo sought treatment and healing from traditional healers. Gwyneth Davies claims that Aawambo still view ill health as an imbalance of the body, soul and spirit, rather than as simply a physiological disorder.[25] Maija Hiltunen's study on witchcraft and sorcery among the Aawambo at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also discusses the Aawambo conception of disease.[26] She describes some interesting cases of sorcery documented in the Liljeblad Collection. These involved cases in which the Aawambo were faced with sickness and questioned *who* caused this sickness rather than *what* caused it. For them, sickness, accidents and any other misfortunes had human origins, and diagnosis involved the identification of the person who caused the sickness. Hence sicknesses were dealt with as they occurred rather than prevented in advance.[27] Missionaries and churches defined traditional healing and medicine in ways that suggested 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery' and thus contradicted missionary categories of thought and belief.

Hiltunen further argues that Finnish missionaries imported their Western ideas and ways of thought, which influenced the way of life of the Owambo. This was especially the case with medical work and various practical crafts and had a profound effect on traditional society in northern Namibia.[28] Traditional healing practices in particular were regarded as 'pagan' and therefore unacceptable to the missionaries. Davies argues that missionary doctors rejected and strongly discouraged 'the Ovambo aetiologies as well as the beliefs in ancestral spirits, witches and sorcerers.' Furthermore, she posits that 'treatment based on herbal medicines aetiologies received a very negative response at the mission clinics – a situation which was not helped by the fact that many Ovambo only visited clinics as a last resort, when herbal medicines were seen to have failed and in case if there was an emergency (e.g. over-dosing).'[29] Davies also refers to the missionaries in Angola, especially those usually based in remoter areas of the colony. The Portuguese officials in Angola were not obvious candidates for the task of converting the indigenous people from 'traditional' healing methods to European medical practice.[30]

Missionaries had to discourage 'traditional' practice, yet at the same time glean information about herbal medicines. The European medical staff designed to replace indigenous healers also needed information about traditional healing to inspire the people's confidence and thus ease the transition.[31] They might also resort to traditional healing because of a scarcity of Western medication. An example of such an instance is provided by Dr. Selma Rainio. When she started treating patients at Oniipa Mission Station she had no clinic and practically no medication. According to oral history, it was hard for Rainio to obtain medical supplies, so she often consulted with the local traditional healers about the medicinal uses of local plants.[32]

25. Davies 1994, 4.
26. Hiltunen 1986.
27. Hiltunen 1986, 35–36.
28. Hiltunen 1986, 15.
29. Davies 1994, 16.
30. Davies 1994, 25.
31. Davies 1994, 25.
32. Mtuleni and Shiweda 2011.



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## *Elements of Traditional Healing Practices that Survived*

Regardless of the discouragement of traditional healing practices, some 'original' Owambo religious and healing practices have survived – albeit in considerably developed forms. As Landau argues, 'Christians continue to engage in practices labelled non-Christian and religious by missionaries, without necessarily seeing them as representing a competing discourse.'[33] Today, the practice of traditional healing is not integrated into national healthcare systems, but is performed in secret, as many Christians fear being ostracised by the church for engaging in such forms of medicine. Some also believe that traditional healers are tricksters and fake their diagnoses and treatments for money. As Meincke asserts: 'traditional healers are often denounced as "frauds" especially since the many incidences in the 1990s and early 2000s of healers claiming to have found cures for incurable diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS.'[34] Public health policies uphold the dichotomy between supernatural and rational and the shaman-like traditional healer (the spiritual healer, the witch-doctor) and the herbalist. The latter is allowed to practise, as the efficaciousness of medicinal plants can be scientifically assessed and their application standardised.[35]

Interestingly, techniques of assessment and standardisation were effectively used by Aawambo even before they came into contact with Western medicine. In a previous study, Lovisa Nampala argued that Aawambo experts tested traditional healing techniques before allowing them to be widely practised by the entire community.[36] One of the interviewees, Tshapaka Kapolo, contends that the system cannot function without experts. He adds that the Aawambo health and medical system had a large number of professionals, both men and women.[37] This is confirmed by Richard Moorsom, who notes that there were few trained doctors in the Aawambo health system.[38] These doctors relied on traditional healers and/or practitioners and specialised in using *iimeno* plant components and/or *iihemba* herbs that they turned into medicines that treated a variety of illnesses.[39] The two herbalists/traditional healers interviewed stated that they could attend to illnesses related to their areas of specialisation, and they admitted to sometimes not knowing the cause of an illness. They stressed they never combined magic with herbs during healing.[40]

It is believed that the God of the Aawambo, widely known as *Kalunga kaNangombe*, transmitted his healing talents to the earliest herbalists (*oonganga*).[41] Kapolo explains that this term derives from the expression *mu pa ngaa*, *ngaa*, which are the words healers utter when they tell patients how to take their medicine. To become a healer, a person had to be naturally talented and learn healing practices by assisting an experienced healer in attending to patients.[42] Nambala attests that

33. Landau 1999, 11.
34. Meincke 2018, 24.
35. Meincke 2018, 24.
36. Nampala 2006, 5.
37. Tshapaka Kapolo 2022.
38. Clarence-Smith and Moorsom 1975, 365–381; Moorsom 1997, 4.
39. Joshaphat Shanghala 2022.
40. Haimbodi 2022; Haufiku 2022.
41. Nampala 2006, 17–25; Miettinen 2005, 32.
42. Kapolo 2022; Nambala 2022; Mwashakele 2022.



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certain clans (*omazimo*) believed that knowledge on healing sicknesses, such as *endjandja*, headaches and *okukwika*, could be passed on in an informal manner.[43] Ndeshihafela Haufiku and Helena Haimbodi both acknowledge acquiring healing skills through *okulya olusha*.[44] In the past, they explain, an individual interested in becoming a traditional healer had to suffer from the same illness they wanted to learn to cure. Moreover, they had to join *onganga,* where they swallowed two morsels of thick porridge (*omahangu*),[45] which contained their own blood, taken from a cut on one of their wrists, and dry skin that had peeled off from the healing wounds of the patient.[46] Those who vomited after swallowing the porridge were regarded as having failed the examination and hence were not qualified to become healers. The ritual was usually conducted when a recovering patient made the final call to the clinic. Thus, a requirement to become a traditional healer was that the candidate suffered from the same illness as he or she was seeking to treat.[47]

It was also possible to acquire healing skills through dreams and by communicating with ancestors. Haimbodi, for example, recounts that the skill she acquired to provide antenatal care to expectant mothers was passed down to her in a dream.[48] According to Mwashekele, dreams are the means by which the dead speak to the living.[49] Some Aawambo visit the graves of their deceased relatives to talk to them and ask for guidance. But these are expressions of respect for the deceased, not pagan or 'magical' practices.[50] Communicating with ancestors is a practice that survived missionary influence. Although biblical teaching discouraged the Aawambo from seeking a relationship with their dead relatives, the interviewees noted that Aawambo visit family graves on anniversaries, to seek encouragement when they are feeling down, or before an upcoming trip or to introduce a new family member.[51]

Oral historians acknowledge that there are ailments for which Aawambo often seek the help of traditional healers. These include distubances of the reproductive system (*endjandja*) brought about by a lack of sexual activity and the need to 'cleanse' a mother who has given birth to twins. Herbalists also care for women who give birth to babies that come out feet first (*oupili*).[52] The Aawambo Christian community believes that some ailments, such as *ondundudi* and *odiya,* cannot be cured by Western medicine.[53] Instead, they stress the need to see a herbalist, even if this is sternly opposed by missionaries and the church. Missionaries viewed *oonganga* as essential bearers of heathen culture and those who sought their services as having committed a grave offence against the Christian faith that needed to be punished

43. Nambala 2022.
44. Haufiku 2022. Ndeshihafela Haufiku is a herbalist who attends to patients that suffer from abscesses (*ondududi*). Haimbodi 2022. Helena Haimbodi specialises in illnesses that are referred to as *Herpes Zoster*, or *odiya*.
45. Haimbodi 2022; Haufiku 2022.
46. Haimbodi 2022; Haufiku 2022.
47. Haimbodi 2022; Haufiku 2022.
48. Haimbodi 2022.
49. Nampala 2006, 22. Mwashekele 2022; Haimbodi 2022; Haufiku 2022.
50. Hiltunen 1986.
51. Shanghala 2022.
52. Miettinen 2005, 80.
53. Kapolo 2022; Nambala 2022; Mwashekele 2022.



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accordingly.[54] Those who used herbal medicines or consulted herbalists were branded as idolatrous.[55] However, these restrictions have not stopped people from approaching herbalists for services, as evidenced by the debate discussed above. Mwashekele asserts that it is important to embrace this form of indigenous knowledge since it allows for the traditional treatment of many illnesses that the Western medical system finds challenging to treat.[56] In many instances, Western medicine opts to amputate the affected part, while the traditional healers effectively treat that illness.

Childbirth is another aspect of the Aawambo health system, and specialists in this field are called *ovadalifi*. They have acquired medical skills from older midwives. Mwashekele praises traditional midwives as they used no modern methods or medicines, only herbs.[57] Similarly, Kautondokwa and Silvester describe how *ovadalifi* passed on indigenous knowledge to younger girls by letting them observe the entire birthing process with the intention that one day they would take over from them.[58] Like all other healthcare facilities, however, the Aawambo medical system has had its problems and challenges.[59]

## *Conclusion*

This chapter demonstrated the survival of some of Aawambo's traditional healing practices despite the influence of missionaries and their attempts to eradicate these practices. Traditional healing and traditional medicine have been the focus of many ethnographic and sociological studies that have encouraged the utilisation of indigenous knowledge of plants and other natural products that can yield effective and affordable therapeutic agents that can be used to manage different illnesses. This is despite earlier missionary beliefs that defined traditional healing and medicine in ways that suggested 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery,' which went against the imposition of missionary categories of thought and belief. The Aawambo traditional healing practices that were regarded as distinctly 'pagan' were therefore unacceptable to the missionaries. This chapter has focused on lesser-known aspects of the interaction between Western and Aawambo medical practices, pointing out that while missionaries discouraged traditional practices they also gleaned information about herbal medicines. Missionaries who were meant to replace the indigenous healers required such information to inspire the people's confidence and thus to ease the transition. The other reason was that missionaries had trouble obtaining Western medicinal supplies from Finland or elsewhere. Thus, they often consulted local traditional healers about the medicinal uses of local plants to heal patients. This implies that herbs and traditional medicine were only a 'bad thing' when used by Aawambo healers, but acceptable when European doctors, such as Rainio and other missionaries, used them.

54. Miettinen 2005, 124.
55. Miettinen 2005, 124.
56. Mwashekele 2022.
57. Mwashekele 2022.
58. Kautondokwa 2019, 51.
59. Kapolo 2022. Also see Miettinen 2005, 82.



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Taking the lead from recent literature that emphasises the integration and regulation of traditional medicine and healers to provide health services to Namibians, this chapter argues that the open and adaptive nature of African healing and its ability to absorb and transform other healing traditions should be recognised. Considering the overlap with biomedicine, Namibian scholars of medical anthropology have indicated that it is imperative to seriously consider collaboration between the two traditions. This collaboration is still in its initial stages in Namibia, and the government has done little to promote it. Although Finnish missionaries 'borrowed' and 'gleaned' herbal medical knowledge from traditional healers, they neglected and misperceived other healing practices that were central to the Aawambo understanding of the body and health. It is thus time to incorporate elements of indigenous healing knowledge and practices and to prioritise interactions between different forms of traditional healing. Finally, this chapter recommends that Aawambo are allowed to entertain their traditional healing practices, while also attending to their Christian duties.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Cultural Identity Formation: Exploring the *Yihiho* Traditional Headdress of Vakwangali Women through Textile Designs

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*Abstract*

The Vakwangali people of Kavango West Region in Namibia have lost much of their cultural identity through encounters with traders, missionaries and colonial rulers. This chapter focuses on the traditional *yihiho* headdress of Vakwangali women, which is a unique headdress embedded with cultural values that was jettisoned upon conversion to Christianity through the process of 'cultural colonialism.' The creative work presented in this chapter was partly generated by prior research on Vakwangali traditional clothing. A practice-based research methodology was employed to extract in-depth knowledge regarding the *yihiho* traditional headdress from narratives and how to design this form of textile. The textile prints were presented to the Vakwangali community at the Ukwangali Cultural Festival, and the responses of the community are also discussed in the chapter. In post-colonial Namibia, state-sponsored cultural festivals have been a central way to promote national cultural pride and to restore cultural identities. This chapter is not an anthropological study of cultural festivals; rather it presents a creative methodology that links Vakwangali cultural identity in practice to Vakwangali Cultural Festival. The objective was to create textiles designs inspired by the *yihiho* traditional headdress with an attempt to revive its value and meaning. A creative methodology was adopted to reflect on colonial history and influence by acknowledging trauma and loss suffered through the forceful removal of the *yihiho* headdress.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Culture is a continuous process of adoption and change. However, the stereotypical idea of culture may lean towards a dead past of a static nature. The cultural identities of ethnic groups collectively adapt and change over time as they encounter agents of change. This chapter examines the loss of cultural identities among Vakwangali women on to whom missionaries imposed a 'Eurocentric image'. A particular focus is placed on the wearing of the *yihiho* traditional headdress through change, resistance and abandonment. A historical background is necessary to understand the phenomenon of cultural identity loss among Vakwangali women and to illustrate that missionaries were instrumental in constructing hostile attitudes towards *yihiho* headdress, which led to its abandonment.

The loss of culture among ethnic groups is a complex phenomenon brought on by multiple agents. The notion of Christianity as the sole agent causing loss of culture among many Namibian ethnic groups has been opposed by some researchers, who highlight that other agents contributed to the change.[1] For instance, early trade activities enabled the Namibian royals and elites to acquire European goods and to incorporate them into traditional clothing.[2] This is conceptualised in the adage according to which Europeans came to the former 'Ovamboland' armed with 'the Bottle, the Bible then the Bullet.'[3] Finnish missionaries were granted permission by the Aawambo kings to start mission work in his realm in the 1860s, and Finnish missions were established in Ondonga, Uukwanyama, Uukwambi and Ongandjera communities starting from 1870.[4] However, Finnish work expanded to Kavango area only in 1926, when the first Lutheran mission was established in Nkurenkuru.[5]

Christianity entailed a change from traditional to European ways of living and dressing. As shown in Iizyenda's chapter in the present volume, Finnish missionaries encouraged Aawambo converts to uphold a 'Eurocentric image', and the same goes for the Vakwangali people. For context, Ukwangali is the land, where Vakwangali (plural) people or Mukwangali (singular) lives who speak Rukwangali language. The expansion of Finnish mission work to Nkurenkuru in the 1920s was carried out in a strict manner to maintain Christianity and to prevent hybrid lifestyles among the converts. This entailed the destruction, removal or prohibition of cultural practices that were deemed incompatible with Christianity. It has indeed been claimed that early mission work was more concerned about the outward appearance of people than their spirituality.[6] The abandonment of traditional clothing led to loss of cultural identity embedded in traditional clothing.

Vakwangali women who became Christian had to abandon their traditional clothing, including headdresses, and lost their cultural identity in the process. This chapter particularly looks at the symbolism of the *yihiho* (plural) headdress, also known as *vihiho,* and asks what contributed to their abandonment? Whereas existing literature on traditional clothing is descriptive and mainly highlights the backwardness

1. See Muurman 2017, 65; Shigwedha 2004, 189; Likuwa 2017, 27.
2. Muurman 2017, 22, 60.
3. Miettinen 2005, 87.
4. Miettinen 2005, 88–89.
5. Muurman 2017, 22.
6. See notes on the views of missionaries regarding the traditional headdress as a pagan artefact and as not being fit for Christianity, Muurman 2017, 60.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

of traditional clothing, this chapter seeks an alternative approach. By drawing on a combination of literature and interviews, it charts the key changes and illustrates how some cultural values can be revived through fashion design. The conclusion highlights that cultural identities are non-static, constantly changing and are recreated over time.

## *Symbolism of the Yihiho*

The colonial intrusion by Finnish missionaries led to a loss of cultural identity and value embedded in the *yihiho*. Before the arrival of Finnish missionaries in Kavango region in 1924, the Vakwangali mainly wore traditional clothing that contained symbolic codes that directed social interaction in the traditional society. As Iizyenda explains in her chapter, the metal beads of the *uuputu* ornaments represented wealth, identity and clan and were also used for healing and as a means of trading among Aawambo ethnic groups. Written accounts of the traditional headdress of Kavango women tend to be descriptive. For instance, a book about hairstyles, headdresses and ornaments by Scherz et al. contains a brief description of the decorations that adorned the headdresses of Kavango women and what they represented in terms of social standing.[7]

To supplement the existing literature and to provide a different perspective on traditional clothing, I interviewed key members of the royal clan. Theresia Kamunoko, Serverinus Siteketa and Nepemba Johanna belong to the royal clan, grew up in the regal homestead and possess in-depth knowledge of traditional clothing. They also know a great deal about how change came about in traditional Vakwangali society. The interviewees explained that traditional clothing was not mainly a means of protecting and covering the body. It also communicated something about the wearer's gender, social status and ethnical identity, allowing him or her to be addressed accordingly.[8] This was not unique to Africans. Clothing delivered similar messages in European societies. The traditional costume of the indigenous Sámi people in Finland, for example, changed when machine-woven textiles were introduced in the 1920s. Sámi women were nevertheless able to maintain the use of their traditional cap, which could be shaped and adorned in a variety of ways depending on the woman's status. Unmarried women, for instance, wore a crown that revealed the top of the head, whilst married women wore a heavily adorned cap. Furthermore, widows wore a simplified version without any adornments.[9] Clothing has been used for many centuries as a guide for social interaction in different societies. Vakwangali traditional society was no different. The values and meanings that were embedded in traditional clothing were symbolic and contributed to cultural identity and social interactions. Hairstyles and clothing were not mere styles but were also embedded with symbolism.[10]

7. Scherz et al. 1999, 21.
8. Interviews: Theresia Kamunoko, Severinus Siteketa and Nepemba Johanna were descendants of royalty who had experience of early missionary work in Ukwangali. They were the first children in the royal clan to attend mission schools. Some elders supported their attendance at school, but some were conflicted as they felt that mission schools interfered with their traditions.
9. Svensson 1992, 65.
10. For a description of a *yihiho*, see Caley 2020, 60.



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Kamunoko, who is affiliated with a traditional dancing group, uses her experience and background to make sense of the changes. She notes that changes in traditional clothing came about through royal influence. In a traditional society, all subjects imitated royal trendsetters. Clothing, including the headdresses of the royals, was made of the finest materials and decorated with rare ornaments. Commoners would improvise their styles and trends with available materials. In pre-colonial times, the *yihiho* headdresses of the royals were outstanding. If a royal male married a commoner, the newlywed bride would arrive at the royal homestead in a simple headdress. Those in charge of preparing the bride would remove her simple headdress and braids and affix a *yihiho* fit for her new royal status.[11]

There was little variation in the style and materials of the *yihiho*. Distinctions derived from the ornaments used for decoration and the quality of the braids. A *yihiho* headdress was made from thin, twisted braids and from beaten-down roots of *mugoro* (*terminalia sericca*) and mixed with natural fat for preservation.[12] To highlight the symbolism of a *sihiho*, one needs to look at the different parts that composed the headdress and their meanings. The different parts of the headdress had names and meanings, such as *sikoka*, *sinduku so sikoka*, *simbarara*, *ereke*, *mamporora*

Figure 9.1. 'Mukadi.' Portrait of a woman wearing a *sihiho*, which was later adopted into a silkscreen design for textile printing. Image: Maria Caley (2003).

11. Kamunoko 2018.
12. Scherz et al. 1999, 22.



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and *yikoka*.[13] A notable part of a *yihiho* headdress is the forehead section, named *simbarara* ('crown'). Women adorned their *yihiho* with materials at their disposal. The more beaded the headdress, the more wealth it represented, as beads and cowrie shells were rare and acquired through trading.[14] Women who could not acquire beads decorated their headdress with seeds or other ornaments they could produce with their hands. The *yihiho* headdress were preserved in fat mixed with *rukura* powder for aesthetic purposes. Again, only women who had the means to acquire such expensive items could afford to regularly renew their headdress. Thus, well-moisturised skin and hair represented status.[15] The headdresses of commoners often looked unkempt and ashy, as they were not able to acquire fat and oils to preserve them. The social status, ethnicity and character of a woman could be revealed by her *sihiho*. Hence, women often took pride in their *yihiho* and sought to keep them in good condition, as they understood that their character and reputation was at stake.

When a girl reached puberty, a distinctive and intricate *yihiho* headdress was prepared for her by her elders. A *sihiho* was only for girls who had come of age. A girl's hair would be braided into the iconic headdress while she prepared for initiation rites, such as the *etembu* for commoners or the *rufuko* for royal Vakwangali girls and the *olufuko* for the Aawambo people .[16] When a *Mukwangali* (singular) girl experienced her first menstruation, she was taken to an isolated hut away from the homestead, where she was prepared for the *etembu*, or, for the royal girls, the *rufuko* initiation rite.[17] In *etembu* and *rufuko* rites, the girls would be dressed in the clothing of mature women and their hair would also be braided in the style of a grown woman. These preparations, which took place in an isolated place, formed part of the practice of removing girls from their homestead. They were only welcomed back once they had gone through the rite of passage into adulthood and dressed in traditional clothing befitting a woman.[18] The initiation ceremonies that were conducted away from the community were performed to highlight that the children were now entering adulthood, which entailed bodily changes and increased expectations from the community. After staying away for some time, the girls would be welcomed back by their community with a celebration.

A *yihiho* was symbolic and important for Vakwangali women, as it marked their role in the traditional society with honour and respect. Hairstyles were used as a guide on how to interact appropriately with the wearer. To unpack the meaning of the decorations on the *simbarara* headdress it helps to know that it means a crown. Crowns and tiaras, whether in European or African societies, help to determine social hierarchy and are symbols of power. When *simbarara* was adorned on the head of a woman it was done in a secluded private area at an *etembu*. The girls were reintroduced to the community with a complete headdress at a feast. They would then wear the crown for the rest of their lives. Whenever a Mukwangali woman needed to repair her *yihiho*, this was again done in private. This contextual background helps

13. Scherz et al. 1999, 22.
14. Scherz et al. 1999, 22.
15. Shigwedha 2004, 28, 68.
16. MuAshekele et al. 2018, 62.
17. MuAshekele et al. 2018, 51–52.
18. Kamunoko 2018.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

to explain why the removal of a *yihiho*, particularly in public, was met with so much resistance from Vakwangali women. It was deemed humiliating.

## *Agents of Change*

The 'civilising' of the Kavango entailed the introduction of a European style of dress, which was encouraged and enforced over traditional clothing. European explorers, traders, missionaries and colonial rulers collectively popularised European dress styles among the Vakwangali. Traditional clothing was shunned as only being suitable for pagans and uncivilised people.[19] The acquisition of European goods, whether from traders, missionaries or colonisers, was prized among the Vakwangali, as it enabled them to accentuate their links with European civilisation. Ultimately, it did not matter who among the Europeans was driving the agenda for civilisation, as it came at the expense of the abandonment of indigenous culture and traditional clothing.

Mission work in Namibia was carried out to gain dominance and influence, whether spiritual or concrete. In 1926, Finnish missionaries embarked on their first trip to Ukwangali, located west of 'Ovamboland.' They initially believed that the Vakwangali people also spoke Ndonga, but soon realised that they spoke a different language.[20] As soon as mission stations were established, missionaries began to enforce what was acceptable to their Christian outlook among the surrounding community. Muurman, in her study on Christianity and traditional religion in Kavango, argues that more emphasis was put on the dress than on the spirituality of the converts.[21] Other studies show that when missionaries settled in Namibia, they soon realised that the local communities had already had contact with Europeans and acquired European goods via trade links.[22]

Oppression, whether by means of trade, Christianity or colonial rule, is not widely discussed by the local communities. The overriding perception was that missionary work was being carried out to bestow the fruits of European civilisation upon them. In contrast, Miettinen outlines how early mission work was not undertaken to improve the lives of Africans, but was devoted to the spread of Christianity.[23] Mission schools needed financial support from the South West African administration and therefore had to make modifications to their curriculum. They were required to introduce lessons, for example, in Afrikaans at the expense of English.[24] Younger missionaries were in favour of the change because they thought it would equip the Aawambo to serve in the contract labour system.[25] The migrant labour system allowed colonial rulers to hire cheap labour on short-term contracts in the 'Police Zone' for farm

19. Muurman 2017, 62.
20. Muurman 2017, 30.
21. Muurman 2017, 60.
22. Shigwedha 2004, 189–191.
23. Miettinen 2005, 135.
24. Miettinen 2005, 135.
25. Miettinen 2005, 134.



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work,[26] construction, factory work and mining.[27] Older Finnish missionaries were opposed to the curriculum change, feeling it would compromise the dissemination of the Gospel.[28] Irrespective of the ultimate motive, the Vakwangali embraced the change as it brought other services to the community. *Hompa* Kanuni, a traditional leader who allowed missionary work in her area, did so because she felt the work would advance her community.[29] But she was also mindful that not all European ideologies were good for her community and did not support her subjects undertaking contract labour.[30]

The agents of change were constantly at play, and change was inevitable even among the Vakwangali. The desire to acquire European goods from traders was sometimes supported by missionaries in terms of 'goods for payment.'[31] At other times, the missionaries spoke out against such desires and encouraged humbleness as a suitable characteristic for a good Christian.[32] The way in which missionaries coerced the Vakwangali to remove their traditional clothing differed from one Christian denomination to another. Some interviewees remarked that Lutherans were stricter than Catholics.[33] To point out, there were frictions between the Lutherans, Catholics and Anglicans. This was used to perpetuate a particular distinction to other missionaries and to further drive propaganda issues 'back home', as to who was doing a better job at 'delivering the gospel' and disciplining the new converts 'effectively'.[34] Since all missionaries were striving to convert more people to their form of Christianity, they often portrayed other missionaries in an unfavourable light, suggesting that they were not doing their work diligently or were too relaxed in terms of maintaining order among converts.[35]

Mission schools played a central role in promoting behavioural change among new converts. As the Vakwangali people embraced Christianity as Catholics, Lutherans and Anglicans, they were instructed to remove their traditional clothing and to adopt European styles. In the early years of missionary work, school children had to dress in a European style, which they called *yokombongi.* However, when they went home, they would change into their traditional loin cloths.[36] From the early 1920s until the mid-1950s, some royals encouraged their children to convert to Christianity and attend mission school. Other royals were less positive about Christianisation.[37] Siteketa and Johanna completed their primary school education at Tondoro Catholic Mission. Royal elders denied Johanna the opportunity to continue her education,

26. The area in which colonial rules operated from and imposed restricted entry into for natives with permits for contract labour. The area was in the central, southern and coastal regions of Namibia.
27. Likuwa 2012, 117–119.
28. Likuwa 2012, 136.
29. Shiremo n.d.
30. Shiremo n.d.
31. Jantunen 1963, 4.
32. Miettinen 2005, 133.
33. Siteketa and Johanna 2018.
34. Miettinen 2005, 126.
35. See notes on how Lutherans often accused Catholics of being too relaxed by being tolerant of African customs. Miettinen 2005, 125.
36. Siteketa and Johanna 2018.
37. Muurman 2017, 42.



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while her brother, Siteketa, was allowed to attend the Döbra Catholic Mission School for teachers training.[38] The traditionalists in Vakwangali society, who looked up to the royal family, began to send children to mission schools. This was accompanied by the abandonment of traditional clothing and the spread of 'cultural colonialism.'[39] Similar practice was applied by Finnish missionaries to rid of traditional practice and clothing among Vakwangali and separating children from families making them attending boarding schools. In addition to the strictness of Finnish missionaries highlighted earlier in disciplining the newly converts, Kamunoko shares the same sentiments.[40]

## *Resistance to the Removal of the Yihiho*

Kavango women resisted demands to remove their traditional clothing. Although some traditional rulers supported the colonial rulers and missionary work, some were unhappy about the demand to abandon traditional clothing. The communities also criticised women who cut off their *yihiho* and mocked them as 'hornless cows.'[41] Traditional rulers also upheld punishments for those who removed their *yihiho*. In Hambukushu, *Fumu* Mayavero resisted the practice of abandoning traditional clothing by fining women who cut off their *yihiho* (*thihukeka*).[42] Missionaries and colonial rulers regarded the traditional hairstyle and clothing as impractical, as the *rukura* would soil what they were working with.[43] They also viewed the traditional hairstyle as a health risk in assuming that the yihiho headdress was infested with vermin.[44] When their arguments about the impracticability and unhealthiness of the *yihiho* failed to convince the women, missionaries and colonial rulers reasoned that the removal of headdress was of spiritual importance.[45] Missionaries changed tactics and focused their efforts on new converts, hoping they would influence the rest of the community. The removal of traditional clothing, particularly the *yihiho*, was presented as a spiritual rite of passage and only shaved women were baptised.[46]

The forceful removal of traditional clothing was not unique to the Vakwangali. Similar experiences can be seen in the case of the Ovaherero people. A young Herero girl, Yahohora, was brought to work on a farm owned by a German couple after surviving the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples. Yahohora valued her traditional headdress highly, as it had been given to her by her parents in a ceremony and was perhaps the last remaining vestige of her cultural values.[47] Being told to take off all her traditional clothing and headdress and wash herself in the open was traumatic. Traditionally, a headdress was removed in a ceremony conducted by the

38. Siteketa and Johanna 2018.
39. Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä 2021, 8.
40. Finnish missionaries summoned women and shaved off their yihiho in public, Kamunoko 2018.
41. Fisch 2022, 272.
42. Fisch 2022, 272.
43. Shiremo 2020, 107.
44. See an example of a missionary Hugo Hahn shave off a traditional hearddress of a Omuhimba man. Hahn, Vedder and Fourie 1966, 182;
45. Muurman 2017, 111; Fisch 2022, 272.
46. Fisch 2022, 272.
47. Katjivena 2020, 31.



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girl's parents or an appointed relative.[48] Facing more pain and humiliation, Yahohora was ordered to stand in the sun until she dried off and was then given a European long dress to put on.[49] It can be concluded that traditional clothing and headdress held sentimental value for Yahohora. They were her last connection to her assassinated parents. The unceremonious removal of Yahohora's traditional clothing was a traumatic and humiliating experience. Such an experience is relatable to Vakwangali women.

Vakwangali women were often forcefully and unceremoniously compelled to remove traditional clothing, including their symbolic *yihiho* headdress. Royal women who converted to Christianity shaved their *yihiho* off and were rewarded with scarves. This encouraged the other women in the community to shave off their *yihiho* headdresses to get scarves.[50] Vakwangali women did not like the fact that they had to unceremoniously shave off their *yihihos* in public and in most cases by force. Theresia Kamunoko detailed that the Finnish missionaries were not so gentle when it came to enforcing their branch of Christianity. They were known to summon women and shave off their *yihihos* in public.[51] Missionaries insisted on cutting off traditional headdress as a symbolic transition to Christianity and as a condition for attending school.[52] Missionaries, like colonisers, were out to conquer and dominate. The Finnish missionaries who arrived in the Ukwangali area had little interest in learning about the Vakwangali culture including language. Indeed, they assumed that the Vakwangali and the Aawambo were one and the same. Over time more women followed the trends set by the newly Christian converts to cut off their *yihiho*. Nonetheless, despite the relative reputation, the unceremonious shaving of the *yihiho* in public left Vakwangali women humiliated and traumatised. Ultimately Vakwangali women abandoned wearing of yihiho through influence from both the royal who were affiliated with missionaries and through conversion to Christianity.

From the narratives it can be understood that Vakwangali women suffered trauma because of the humiliation of being forced to unceremoniously remove their *yihiho*. This traumatic loss of cultural identity can be linked to the ruthless attitude of missionaries. The Finnish Lutherans spiritualised indigenous traditions and culture and therefore demanded the removal of traditional clothing to demonstrate total acceptance of the new faith.[53] Shiremo argues that the removal of the *yihiho* among Kavango women was strongly resisted as some continued to refuse to shave off their symbolic headdress in the name of Christianity and education.[54] The resistance and refusal of some Kavango women to jettison their *yihiho* in order to attend school also delayed their professional advancement in comparison to Kavango men. The first doctoral degree granted to a Kavango woman was conferred upon Theresia Shitoka Shivera in 2006 for her studies in medicine.[55] Kavango women did eventually convert to Christianity, but the process entailed a struggle, as they felt that they were

48. Katjivena 2020, 33.
49. Katjivena 2020, 33–34.
50. Likuwa 2012, 104.
51. Kamunoko 2018; Muurman 2017, 144; Shiremo 2020, 107; Fisch 2022, 72.
52. Shiremo 2020, 111.
53. Muurman 2017, 60, 96.
54. Shiremo 2020, 108–111.
55. Shiremo 2020, 113.



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abandoning their cultural identity.[56] It can be gleaned from the interviews that the missionaries were determined to eradicate all local cultural values and pride. This did not happen without resistance, although women who refused could be fined or ridiculed, but ultimately the Vakavango accepted the modern 'hornless' style for women.

Unlike some other ethnic groups in Namibia, such as the Himba,[57] who still wear their traditional clothing and who managed to preserve their cultural identity, the Vakwangali women did lose their cultural identity. It is hard to recognise Vakwangali women in present-day Namibia solely by their clothes, unless they are wearing a traditional dancing costume. As Christianity became firmly grounded in Namibia, the Vakwangali abandoned their traditional clothing. The only spheres in which one can notice traces of traditional clothing are within activities that promote their culture, such as festivals and museums. Akuupa argues that although these state-sponsored festivals pit different ethnic groups against each other in competition, they also promote a national sense of pride that is 'different, but united'.[58] This echoes the views of cultural dancers, who emphasise that although the traditional clothing is far from what was worn in the past, it is a way to demonstrate and express cultural identity and pride. They view the competition as an opportunity to represent and preserve their culture.

## *The Yihiho as a Textile Design*

Unlike other ethnic groups in Namibia As stated earlier, the Vakwangali have abandoned their traditional clothing. The clothing that Vakwangali women wear today is European and has no cultural identity. The trade cloth that was adopted by the Vakwangali does not represent their cultural identity. Some Kavango women feel a sense of grief at the loss of their cultural identity, as they are unable to wear their traditional clothing, particularly the *yihiho*, in a modern setting. Part of the underlying goal of the research outlined in this chapter was to create textile designs that reflect Vakwangali culture in the hope of fostering a cultural identity in modern fashion. A practice-led approach in contemporary design allows designers to apply in-depth knowledge to address an issue or resolve a problem through design, whereby the community verifies the artifacts and brings in new knowledge.[59] The design process can be characterised as 'making sense of things.'[60]

One problem that the design process had to solve was that the *yihiho* is regarded as unsuitable for contemporary everyday wear. *Yihiho* headdresses are usually only worn by traditional dance performers and perceived as costumes of such performances. Other exceptions are traditional weddings, where the bride sometimes wears the *yihiho* and in photoshoots. This research process applied a textile design of the yihiho

56. Shiremo 2020, 131.
57. Himba traditional clothing has transformed through time, with most of the clothing items now being made from conventional and synthetic material.
58. Akuupa 2010, 112–113.
59. Glade-Wright, 2017, 90.
60. Krippendorff 1989, 9.



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headdress to fashion garments that are both practical and wearable as an attempt to create cultural identity in modern fashion. The design of the silkscreen textile print features the portrait of a woman in a *yihiho* (Fig. 9.1.). The design is versatile and can be printed on different fabrics and surfaces. From my explorations, the most successful print was white on a dark blue textile (Fig. 9.2.). The idea behind the design was to present a woman wearing a *yihiho* headdress to Vakwangali women. There was a need to bring the designs back to Vakwangali communities to get direct feedback from Vakwangali women about the design. This was done at the Vakwangali Cultural Festival in Mayara royal village in Ukwangali kingdom on 9 September 2018, where my designs were presented. The location in Ukwangali did not have a stage to present the fashion collection, and hence the presentation of the design made use of an open area in the field where the festival was taking place. Although the Ukwangali Cultural Festival was a launching event, it presented an opportunity to directly engage Vakwangali women. Most importantly, cultural experts and enthusiasts were able to obtain much needed context and feedback on the designs. The audience was intrigued and wanted to know who this woman in the design was.

Some women proceeded to name the print after *Hompa* Kanuni zaHaruwodi (1890–1972). For context, *Hompa* Kanuni was a powerful chief that ruled the Ukwangali Kingdoms. She was admired and hailed for her outstanding leadership qualities, wisdom and fair rule, and known for her bravery and strength, which she demonstrated in a royal stick fight with her brother Sivute.[61] A stick fight is a traditional form of combat with short sticks that is still performed by the Ovahimba people. *Hompa* Kanuni took the chieftaincy after the untimely death of her uncle and was already accustomed to her royal duties as she had assisted her uncle before his passing. She was diligent and looked out for her people and her community. As stated earlier, during her reign she permitted Finnish missionaries to set up a mission school at Tondoro in 1926. Though she looked out for her community in terms of facilitating cooperation with Europeans, she was also very adamant in her opposition to the operations of the Contract Labour System. Her brother, Sivute, used her resistance against the Contract Labour System to connive with the Native Commissioner Eedes to depose her.[62] *Hompa* Kanuni was accused of not supporting the Contract Labour System and not encouraging her community members to sign contracts.[63] After the death of Sivute in 1958, the Vakwangali community met to deliberate on who was to take on the role of chieftain. Kanuni confidently asserted that she had sufficient votes to take over the chieftaincy. Even in old age her mental state was unimpaired and the Vakwangali people still had confidence in the fairness of her ruling.[64]

The rationale in naming this print after *Hompa* Kanuni was based on the aesthetic of the *sihiho* and the admiration of *Hompa* Kanuni. The woman in the design ought to be a royal: she looks neat and is heavily adorned with beads, which indicates high status. There are portraits of *Hompa* Kanuni in the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) and one portrait relief in the National Museum of Namibia in Windhoek. The two portraits of *Hompa* Kanuni are similar, and it is probable that the portrait relief in

61. Kampungu 1965, 371–372.
62. Shiremo 2020, 85.
63. Shiremo 1998.
64. 'Native Commissioner Report,' 1958, NAN.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Figure 9.2. Gallery exhibition dress printed with *Sihiho* silkscreen design, designed by Maria Caley. Photograph: Vilho Nuumbala.

the museum was based on the photograph from NAN. However, these portraits were not used as an inspiration for the textile design. Nonetheless, a group of women at the Ukwangali festival concluded that the textile print is a portrait of *Hompa* Kanuni. This may be taken as a sign of acceptance, given the status of *Hompa* Kanuni as an admired heroine and part of Vakwangali history.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has argued that Vakwangali cultural identity may have been largely lost and now only survives through costumes for performances in cultural festivals. The need to revive symbolic traditional clothing stems from Kavango women, who feel that modern everyday dress does not do justice to their cultural identity. A review of archival material and supplementary literature with knowledge gleaned from the



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interviews, has allowed a more in-depth presentation of another narrative on the transformation of the *yihiho* traditional headdress. The iconic *yihiho* traditional headdress was ridiculed and labelled 'pagan' by missionaries to stop Kavango women from wearing it. Despite initial resistance, Kavango women did stop wearing the *yihiho*. Finnish mission work, perpetuated control over Vakwangali people through preference for the 'Eurocentric image' that resulted in *yokombongi* clothing. This chapter concluded with an example of an alternative way of wearing and reviving the *yihiho* in modern fashion. With the use of practice-led methodology, the chapter showed how a creative process can be used to address the loss of cultural identity among Vakwangali women. The quest for cultural identity formations was addressed creatively by recreating the *sihiho* using modern textiles. Vakwangli women accepted the design, as they provided positive feedback, as well as buying and wearing it and naming it after *Hompa* Kanuni zaHaruwodi. By embracing the *sihiho* textile design, the Vakwangali showed that they are still proud of their cultural identity and have a strong admiration for and affinity with the royals. This chapter therefore concludes that cultural identity formations are possible among any society, with practical activities directly involving designers who can purposefully design for a community's desires.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Narratives of *Uuputu* Artefacts: An Intrusion of Finnish Missionaries on the Cultural and Technological Development of the Aawambo People

LOINI IIZYENDA

*Abstract*

Preserving knowledge about metal beads (*uuputu*) is crucial for challenging the dominant European and Western canon, which undermines the valuable, yet shunned, 'traditional' ornaments produced by 'non-Western and lesser' locals. *Uuputu* artefacts demonstrate how technologically and culturally advanced the Aawambo people were prior to their encounters with Finnish missionaries. This chapter is a narrative and qualitative study that focuses on documenting different insights and experiences regarding the cultural usage of *uuputu*, as well as their production and the misconceptions of Finnish missionaries regarding traditional ornaments. Temporally, the study covers the period from the late nineteenth century, prior to the adoption of the teachings of missionaries, up until the contemporary practices of the twenty-first century. Iron beads (*uuputu wiiyela*) and copper beads (*uuputu wongopola)* formed part of the traditional costume of the Aawambo as a visual expression of the status of the wearer. The beads symbolise clan identity, participation in initiation rites, protection and healing and constitute economic value as exchange goods. Finnish missionary activities were established in Owambo in 1870 and are esteemed by the Aawambo people. Indeed, Aawambo literature records how they brought socio-cultural development to the community. A contradictory view argues that the Aawambo were fairly self-sufficient prior to their encounters with the Finnish missionaries. Any person interested in becoming a Christian in Owambo was instructed to abandon their traditional attire, including the therapeutic *uuputu* ornaments. Within the transition of appropriating Eurocentric ideologies and lifestyle, the Aawambo socio-cultural values and symbolic cultural objects including *uuputu* beads were disrupted and weakened.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

This chapter focuses on narratives that indicate the self-reliant and industrious characteristics of the Aawambo people, who crafted sustainable ornaments, such as metal beads (*uuputu)*, to serve their socio-cultural activities. This study conveys information from the late nineteenth century, prior to the adoption of teaching by Finnish missionaries, until the twenty-first century. Documenting the narratives and experiences regarding the beads is important for cultural conservation.

The Aawambo people are found in the Owambo region in north-central Namibia. They comprise of the Ndonga, Kwanyama, Kwambi, Ngandjera, Mbalantu, Mbadja, Kolonkadhi, Kwaluudhi and Aaunda groups.[1] The Aawambo people were skilled in crafts, such as metalworking, pottery, basketry and woodcarving, that were conducive for their economic and social welfare.[2] Kari Miettinen states that 'the most specialized of all crafts in Ovamboland was metal smelting, and the smiths were the only group of craftsmen for whom their craft sometimes was their only business.'[3] Encounters with European missionaries, colonial administrators and academics documented existing knowledge about indigenous mining production and trade.[4] Colonial narratives often portrayed cultural production activities and objects as uncivilised or pre-technological. Finnish missionary activity, which began in Owambo in 1870, was instrumental in overseeing the alteration or abandonment of valuable and symbolic traditional metal artefacts.[5]

Recording metal artefacts, which include copper and iron, as media among the Aawambo community, is significant not only in emphasising the economic and technological aspects of Aawambo cultural life but also for highlighting the cultural and artistic dimensions of the copper ornaments. This chapter also revisits and reaffirms the prevailing cultural knowledge and practices based on narratives obtained from a collaborative research project entitled 'Mapping the Media of Copper among the Ovambo Cultures.' The project consisted of a team of researchers from the University of Namibia, the Institute of Media and Arts at the University of Potsdam and an independent historian. Interviewees were specifically selected based on their knowledge of metalwork or their expertise in producing traditional attire and ornaments and their familiarity with the related socio-cultural connotations. The participants were expected to respond to questions focusing on their personal background, as well as the symbolism that was attached to the production methods and traditions concerning metal beads.

For this chapter, information from three participants was chosen, mainly due to their responses, which supported the objectives of this research. One of the selected interviewees is Fillemon Gerhard Hamunyela, a Kwanyama elder from Okongo in Ohangwena region of Namibia. He was born in 1932 and learned his trade as a blacksmith from an uncle, who produced articles, such as hoes, spears and arrows. The second interviewee, Paulus Josef, was consulted in Ombalantu, Omusati region. He was born in 1970. Josef was raised in a family of blacksmiths, who specialised

1. Kautondokwa 2014, 1.
2. Shigwedha 2004, 22.
3. Miettinen 2005, 44.
4. Mathoho et al. 2016, 3.
5. Kim Groop argues that the motives of their evangelical mission was steered more by Pietistic ideology, with specific Christian expectations. See Groop 2014, 2.



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in metal pot production. Over the years he ventured into crafting metal beads due to their demand as cultural adornments. The third interviewee, Laina Ndapandula yaNaftal Simon Mwetupunga, was born in 1971 and is from Okalongo, Omusati region. She is a crafter of traditional Aawambo ornaments and clothing. Mwetupunga is a descendant of a royal family and inherited various ornaments, as well as gaining knowledge of the cultural representation of ornaments from her grandmother.

The *uuputu* artefacts discussed in this chapter were the creation of craftsmen and craftswomen with metalworking skills and were popular commodities among the different Aawambo sub-groups. The artefacts can be defined as small, rounded metal objects made from copper and iron with small holes for threading on a string. Among Aawambo communities, the type of the metal chosen, the colour, size and the placement of beads on the body formed part of their communicative aspects.

Smithies are documented as being particularly common in Ondonga and Uukwanyama, due to their accessibility to copper and iron deposits.[6] However, through trading interactions and the migration of different groups, the skills were also acquired by other groups, such as the Ngandjera. Siiskonen discusses how 'metal products, both tools and jewelry, produced by the smiths were important for all the Ovambo communities.'[7] The metal beads are called either *uuputu* or *iiyela*, depending on Aawambo dialects. Additional Aawambo metal artefacts that were produced include iron hoes (*etemo*) that were used for agricultural purposes, and *lobola*, which is a form of dowry payment for brides. In addition, spears (*egonga*) and arrows (*iikuti*) were also made, as were knives (*omwele*) and ornamental bracelets *(oongondo).* This chapter will particularly focus on *uuputu* artefacts due to their various cultural and household functions.[8]

The Aawambo groups were exposed to Christian ideology at different time intervals, which influences the current value placed on socio-cultural activities. The Ondonga subgroup was one of the first to embrace the Finnish missionaries and their ideology and hence observes traditional customs less. Mission work among other groups, such as Kwambi, Ngandjera and Kwaluudhi, only progressed from 1903.[9] Traditional customs are currently practiced more dutifully among the Mbandja group.

Missionaries disregarded Aawambo socio-cultural norms and events, which were often expressed through ornamental attire. The missionaries employed strategies to weaken Aawambo customs, and the response of the affected communities is discussed below. Furthermore, this chapter will also examine how many metallic, ethnographical ornaments were collected and presented to a Finnish audience in order to endorse the evangelical work of missionaries.

6. Siiskonen 1990, 62.
7. Siiskonen 1990, 63.
8. 'Oombale Dhi Ihaka' 2019, 35, 43, 58–59, 66, 67.
9. Eirola et al. 1983, 5.



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## *Uuputu Artefacts and their Cultural Usage*

*Uuputu* are presumed to have been the oldest jewelry item produced by the Aawambo.[10] *Uuputu* are worn around the neck, arms and legs by both women and men, with representational meanings attached to them. The beads symbolised the wearer's transition into adulthood, clan association and wealth, and also offered protection from misfortune. Apart from their ornamental function, the beads also served as a medium for bartering and as objects for healing people with bone deficiencies.

According to Aawambo tradition, the first collection of beads given to a baby is from the father's clan. The ritual ceremony is called *ezaleko lyondiwi,* and the associated ornaments differ from clan to clan, which includes using metal beads for some groups.[11] Paulus Josef, a blacksmith specialising in *uuputu* bead making, described how the different dark iron beads are added to a beaded shell necklace, called an *oonyoka*, which adorns the necks of boys.[12] This specific necklace, worn by the *Aakwampungu* (ancestors), is used to introduce the baby to the family clan. It is worn until adolescence. Many Aawambo communities are currently considered Christian, but among them there are still those who maintain traditional Aawambo cultural aspects. Laina Mwetupunga, a beading artisan, spoke about how some clans stitch *uuputu* on a baby's carrier, which represents the 'rearing stage of the baby.'

Apart from representing the status of the child's growth, the dark iron beads are worn by people participating in community events (*tai pokati kaantu*). The participants must wear them on the wrist of their right hand, as well as on both ankles (*eenghwakupindi*). The beads are believed to protect them from people who might have bad or evil intentions. This practice is currently upheld by some Aawambo communities who prefer to maintain traditional beliefs and methods. Many people prefer to find protection and refuge in their Christian beliefs. When a child grows older, they are adorned with different artefacts to represent this transition.[13] For example, during the *Olufuko* ceremony, a cultural initiation ritual for ushering girls into womanhood, participants are expected to wear *uuputu* beads around their legs and arms.[14] Mwetupunga elaborates further on how golden beads are associated with beautification purposes.[15] The *Olufuko* ceremony has been revived since 2012 as a local initiative to support and preserve cultural traditions.

The strands of beads are usually inherited from one's mother or bought by the family, and the amount of adornments depends on the wealth of a family. The more beads one wears, the wealthier one is perceived to be. According to Josef, when women married men of high social standing, such as kings (*eehamba*), the sovereign's councillors and headmen (*omalenga*), they showcased their riches (*emona* or *oipako*) by decorating their wrists (*oikesho*) and legs (*eenghwakupindi*) with iron beads.[16] In

10. 'Oombale Dhi Ihaka' 2019, 59.
11. Nampala, Shigwedha and Silvester 2006, 169.
12. Josef 2022.
13. Mwetupunga 2022.
14. Muashekele et al. 2018, 23.
15. Mwetupunga 2022.
16. Josef 2022.



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contemporary society, wealth is measured according to a person's monetary status or the accumulation of assets. In the past, wealth could be demonstrated by herds of cattle that one owned, which formed part of a bartering currency that enabled the purchase of valuable ornaments. Fillemon Gerhard Amunyela, a former blacksmith, emphasises how Aawambo men in the past used to buy iron beads for their wives to decorate their bodies as well as to adorn their *ondhelela* skirts. Aawambo women embellished their *ondhelela* skirts with iron beads to add weight, which created enough balance to have the skirt move from side to side as the wearer walked. *Ondhelela* skirts are popular gathered skirts that are created from pinstriped cotton fabric.[17] Exposure to foreign commodities has weakened this practice and many men gift fashionable, modern products, including jewellery, to their wives.

Therapeutic and commercial values were also associated with *uuputu* artefacts. Aawambo treated health issues related to blood circulation and broken limbs by using an *uuputu*.[18] Strands of beads were worn around the affected area, which was believed to heal after a certain time. Although darker iron beads were preferred for the healing process, fairer copper beads were also considered to have therapeutic value. Mwetupunga identifies copper beads, which are rose-gold in colour, as the preferred type for medicinal purposes. She further explains how 'a child who is struggling to learn how to walk, was believed to be suffering from bone deficiency. A number of strands would be wrapped around the legs and sometimes the wrists.' This was believed to strengthen the weak and/or fractured bones of the wearer.[19] This practice is still observed by many people who prefer traditional healing methods according to generational family practice.

The commercial value of the metal beads highlights an important aspect in the trading skills of the Aawambo people. Morner and Sevenson note that 'in the course of six decades, between 1850 and 1910, Ovambo societies were opened up to European merchant capital to missionary influence and colonialism.'[20] During the pre-colonial and colonial period, the metal artefacts were used as a form of currency for bartering goods. Early European travellers who voyaged to Namibia provide narratives about trading expeditions that took place on the banks of Lake Otjikoto: 'Specialised blacksmiths from Ondonga smelted the copper ore to create objects which were of symbols of wealth and prestige.'[21] The Aawambo people had economic interactions with each other and other ethnic groups, such as San (Ju|'hoansi), Herero, Nkhumbi and Nyaneka communities.[22]

The trading enterprise of the Aawambo people comprised domestic stock or utensils that could be exchanged with beads. Mwetupunga recounts how according to her grandmother, Ovimbundu (*Iimbundu*), people from Angola used to travel to Owambo to exchange iron beads (*uuputu*), conical welk shells (*eemba*), beaded shell necklaces (*eenyoka dokomulonga*) and glass beads (*oimona oilauve*). Mwetupunga describes how when the *Iimbundu* arrived in the kingdom they used to first report

17. Hamunyela 2022.
18. 'Oombale Dhi Ihaka' 2019, 60.
19. Mwetupunga 2022.
20. Shigwedha 2004, 23.
21. 'Stand together' 2020, 45.
22. Siiskonen 1990, 85.



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their presence to the king. Permission to barter within communities was authorised by kings. Thereafter, the kings and headmen were first given the opportunity to choose the best products.[23] Josef recalls how some men and women used to visit his home and exchange pearl millet, mahangu flour, dried beans, chickens, pigs and an Ovambo liquor known as *owalend*a, which was used against *uuputu.*[24] The localised monetary currency, which is accessible to many, has eliminated the bartering system.

## *Production of Metal Ores*

Pre-colonial metal production involved important technological activities that influenced socio-political and economic developments in the prehistory of sub-Saharan Africa.[25] Specialist blacksmiths among the Aawambo are documented more by the Kwanyama and Ndonga groups. Kwanyama blacksmiths mainly worked with iron quarries found 'in South Angola ten miles from a mountain called *Omupa,* a region inhabited by San (Ju|'hoansi).'[26]

Iron production was a ritualised process that was only permitted for certain families and was considered as work for men. The production operation involves either an ordinary smith (*omuleva*) or a master blacksmith (*oshivanda*) among the Kwanyama. The master blacksmith was culturally esteemed as a 'magician' who possessed special power and skill, which was acquired through a lengthy apprentice.[27] Blacksmiths were expected to observe specific taboos, which were 'metaphorically linked to procreation and gestation.' Disregard of these taboos was believed to bestow bad omens on the production.[28]

A role of master blacksmiths was to lead expeditions, in the company of a few scouts (*endango*) by travelling ahead of a group. The consent of San (Ju|'hoansi) communities, who inhabited the areas in which the expeditions intended to explore, was needed prior to the journey.[29] The Ndonga people, who mined copper quarries in the Otavi Mountains, were supplied with copper ore by the San (Ju|'hoansi).[30] A diary entry by Hugo Hahn, a German Missionary, on 18 July 1857 noted the following: 'We met two [San] who were taking copper ore from Otjorukaku to Ondonga on their account, where they sell it for corn, tobacco or calabashes. They estimated that around 50–60 tons of copper ore were being exported to Ondonga annually.'[31]

Blacksmiths attended the site with their bellows (*omupepo*), a hammer (*ofilwa*), an anvil (*oshikalo*) and tongs (*onghwato*).[32] Women could only assist with minor tasks, such as 'digging the ore and carrying it back to Ovakwanyama land in their basket fish-traps.' Men were responsible for performing more labour-intensive processes,

23. Mwetupunga 2022.
24. Josef 2022.
25. Mathoho et al. 2016, 2.
26. Loeb 2015, 189.
27. Loeb 2015, 188.
28. Mathoho et al. 2016, 5.
29. Loeb 2015, 188.
30. 'Oombale Dhi Ihaka' 2019, 62.
31. 'Stand together' 2020, 45.
32. Siiskonen 1990, 67–68.



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such as extracting the ore and smelting.[33] The smiths remained at the iron excavation sites for months. Only when they returned home did they forge the iron into the required products, including the *uuputu* beads.[34]

Hamunyela relates how blacksmiths first used to inform their parents (or their nearest relatives) about their trips to the O*shimanya* mine, where iron ore was extracted. He says the trips used to take place during the summer (*pokwenye*) after people had completed their agricultural activities.[35] A caravan of blacksmiths (*oshindubu*) usually camped at an *okwenye* when the summer weather was favourable. The additional food supplies, which consisted of mahangu flour (*omaufila*), dried beans and wild spinach were carried with a bellow, which could have potentially been spoiled if they had camped during other seasons. Blacksmiths brought their bellows and other tools to the production site and prepared iron ore into its purest form and then carried it home.[36]

Changes in the political sphere of Owambo interrupted the economic activities of the Aawambo. 'Things obviously changed after 1915, however, when the South Africans established their rule both in South West Africa proper and in Ovamboland.'[37] The new government soon issued several regulations concerning the activities and movement of locals. Expeditions to the various excavation sites could no longer take place due to a monopoly enjoyed by foreign mining companies.

Limited opportunities to harness trading networks directly impacted the livelihoods of blacksmiths and some subsequently obtained employment as contracted mine workers. Simultaneously, socio-cultural events were challenged, which resulted in improvised means of importing beads and new production methods for maintaining traditions. Josef recalls how Europeans drove the local blacksmiths out of business by confiscating mining areas that the latter had depended on for their supplies of metal ores. This invasion resulted in a loss of income for blacksmiths. In an attempt to maintain their craftsmanship, they use discarded iron material from metal pipes, for example, which were repurposed and recreated into what was desired.[38]

## *Uuputu Artefacts in Ethnographic Collections in Finland*

Examples of the beads worn during the pre-colonial period can be found among the deposited African ethnographic objects that were brought to Finland. The accumulation of articles found at the National Museum of Finland were contributed by mission workers, explorers, migrant workers and scholars. Birthed from the ideology of developing scholarly research, Finnish academics were diligent in recording and investigating foreign content and artefacts.[39]

33. Loeb 2015, 189.
34. 'Oombale Dhi Ihaka' 2019, 61–62.
35. Hamunyela 2022.
36. Hamunyela 2022.
37. Miettinen 2005, 46–47.
38. Josef 2022.
39. Merivirta et al. 2021, 7.



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Finnish missionaries operating among the northern Namibians were crucial agents in providing information about the Aawambo people. Objects brought to Finland were important for supplying a 'contextualised narrative for the display of the Finnish national collection and to suggest the progress and superiority of the Finnish culture and population.'[40] To justify their evangelical work among the Aawambo people, missionaries provided information in the form of images, artefacts and written documents. Martti Rautanen and Karl Emil Liljeblad are missionaries known for collecting a large assortment of Aawambo material culture.

Martti Rautanen was the first missionary to gain popularity among Aawambo people. He lived among the people, witnessing their daily socio-cultural activities and collecting traditional objects. He was therefore able to write detailed accounts concerning the Aawambo people. Some objects were gifted while others were acquired through bartering.[41] Moreover, some items belonged to local people, who were instructed to abandon their 'heathen' traditional attire to validate their conversion to Christianity. The first group of Aawambo Christians were converted in the 1880s.[42] The artefacts in Helsinki that were received from Rautanen include amulets, ornamentation and clothing. Rautanen acquired the most artefacts that were collected by Finnish missionaries. The objects owned by Rautanen were often presented to 'the Finnish audience to demonstrate and illuminate aspects of African culture.'[43] The display of such objects was intended to foster moral and economic support to fund his endeavours. In addition to delivering local presentations, temporary exhibitions of his 'African museum' were held to secure a permanent depository for them.

On 20 September 2022, I had the opportunity to visit the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki to view some artefacts created specifically with metal beads. The objects I saw consisted of pendants and girdles from diverse Namibian ethnic groups, including the Aawambo, Ovahimba and Ovaherero. The ornaments were fashioned from threaded combinations of ostrich eggshells, metal beads, seashells, carved wooden pieces, fur, recycled European-style buttons and industrially-produced chains. Some adornments had beaded details or cowrie shells attached to shaped leather parts or straps. The various adornments express similar messages that relate to ethnicity, identity, social status, the number of children and protection. In my opinion, the Aawambo metal beads produced during the precolonial period appeared larger in size and more angular in shape than modern beads, which indicates the advanced craftsmanship required to forge the objects.

In comparison to the precolonial beads, the modern beads are smaller and more circular. Such a size and shape were made possible by refined and recycled metal products. Figure 10.1. presents an example of metal beads that formed part of Rautanen's collection, stored at the Finnish National Museum in Finland. Figure 10.2. shows an example of a contemporary iron-beaded bracelet.

40. Merivirta et al. 2021, 7.
41. Koivunen 2019, 66–67.
42. Koivunen 2019, 66–67.
43. Koivunen 2019, 67.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Figure 10.1. Precolonial Aawambo iron beads. Martti Rautanen Collection, VK1049c:57, National Museum of Finland. Photograph: Loini Iizyenda (2022). CC BY 4.0.

Figure 10.2. A contemporary iron-beaded bracelet with ekipa (ivory or bone buttons) representing wealth. Photograph: Loini Iizyenda (2022).



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

## *Missionaries' Disruption of Socio-cultural Events: An Olufuko Ceremony and the Usage of Uuputu*

> This is really impressive and inspiring, the work done by missionaries has helped the people of Namibia, particularly those from the northern part of Namibia with education, and we appreciate their good work. We owe them a great deal. However, we feel as far as culture is concerned, they have done damage by encouraging people to forget their culture. *(Andimba* Toivo ya Toivo, Mission Museum guest book, August 2003).[44]

The impact of missionary activities on the material culture of converted Aawambo communities is an important dialogue, which is necessary for revisiting and reviving traditional skills. Finnish missionary activities began in the late nineteenth century and were influential in transforming the socio-cultural values and activities of the Aawambo people. The ideology of the missionaries was guided by their Eurocentric view of Aawambo culture, which was perceived as heathen and required the Aawambo people to convert to Christianity.

The *Olufuko* festival is one of the customary events of the Aawambo that was disregarded by the Finnish Mission. According to Kim Groop, *Olufuko*, or *Ohango*, as the female initiation ceremony was called among the Ndonga people, was one of the customs rejected by the Finnish Mission.[45] The missionaries perceived this event as a form of idolatry and as a means to enforce marriage among the participants. The missionary Albin Savola described *Ohango* as a ceremony whereby 'through the execution of a number of spells, all women in the kingdom who have reached marrying age are declared as marriageable.' His colleague Rautanen described *Ohango* as a national or public marriage and a festival of rejoicing, but also as 'one of the largest festivities of the [Ndonga] people and from start to finish full of all kinds of pagan ceremonies and idolatry.'[46]

In 1924, Finnish missionaries wrote the first church regulations for the emergent Lutheran Church in Ovamboland. *Ohango* was judged to be the worst of offenses, on a par with a return to heathenism, murder, arson, abortion, polygamy and divorce. Miettinen emphasises how Christians' participation in events such as *Olufuko* were strictly forbidden.[47] This offence may have affected the value of the metal beads, which formed part of the attire for the ceremony and formed an integral part of the inherited wealth of a family.

The black copper beads (*omakwendjenge*) formed part of the *onenga* coiffure that reached the knees of a bride and was worn in the initiation ritual among the Ovakwambi group. Kautondokwa conducted an ethnographic study of the revived Olufuko ceremony that was held in Ombalantu 2012. *Uuputu* beads formed part of the ornamental dress of the participant's mother, guardian and the participants themselves.[48] Kautondokwa describes the mother's outfit as consisting of *ondelela*, a red-and-black striped skirt, which was partly covered by *ondjeva*, that is, threaded

44. Hovila-Helminen 2008, 38.
45. Groop 2014, 6.
46. Groop 2014, 6.
47. Miettinen 2005, 315.
48. Kautondokwa 2014, 26.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

shells made from ostrich eggshells, along with a copper-beaded threaded apron at the front and a blue t-shirt. Her daughter, who participated in the event, also wore leather outfits adorned with *uuputu*, which creatively meandered from her ankles up her legs and on her wrists.[49]

The regulations concerning the participation of church members in cultural events is still respected today in the Lutheran Evangelical Church. Members are threatened with their membership of the church being renounced and that they need to take atonement lessons for their 'sin.' Saara Kuoppala writes about mothers who were reprimanded and had to undertake a schooling programme at their church to atone for the sin of taking their daughters to an *Olufuko* rite. One interviewee said that her mother had been banned from the Sunday sermon because of her participation in an *Olufuko* rite.[50] Dr. Abisai Shejavali, who is the former head of the Council of Churches in Namibia, wrote a piece in *The Namibian* in 2012 in which he explained why the Lutheran Church is against *Olufuko.*[51] According to Shejavali, the Lutheran Church is formed from baptised people who believe that they have been delivered from idolatrous worship. Shejavali emphasises that traditional rites, such as *Olufuko,* do not have anything to offer Christians. A baptised person 'has emerged as a new being' and 'therefore old customs should be abandoned.'[52]

## *The Interruption by Missionaries of Aawambo Socio-Cultural Skills: The Case of Sewing Groups*

The missionaries failed to learn about local cultural values and were influenced by their own intention to implement familiar European values. The strategies applied by the Finnish missionaries to civilise the converts actually paralysed the industrious, self-reliant attitude of the Aawambo people. This negative consequence resulted in a dependency syndrome, with imported clothes arriving from Finland and the introduction of European handicraft techniques.

The aim of the missionaries was to convince locals to wear more 'appropriate clothing,' which eventually became the norm. This development is discussed by Herman Tonjes, who explains how 'many women societies [in Finland] have taken part of this responsibility upon themselves by sending simple cotton cloth.'[53] These items were sent to various mission stations and were then distributed.[54] Nampala and Shigwedha mention how 'sewing groups were also established in Finland to sew clothes for Aawambo Christians.'[55] The Aawambo were already skilled in handcraft techniques suitable for their environment. Training locals in skills imported from Finland required European equipment and materials, such as sewing machines.

49. Kautondokwa 2014, 27.
50. Kuoppala 2018, 131.
51. Kuoppala 2018, 131.
52. Kuoppala 2018,131.
53. Tonjes 1996, 272.
54. Tonjes 1996, 272.
55. Nampala, Shigwedha and Silvester 2006, 197.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Furthermore, industrially-constructed fabrics were hindering existing traditional technologies and cultural values.

Apart from spreading new European forms of material culture, such as clothes, missionaries violated the community's fundamental socio-cultural principles by suppressing, modifying and even destroying the social systems that they found in place. This condemnation 'appeared most clearly in the religion [Christianity] principles and teachings. It meant, among other things, the abandonment of many traditional customs.'[56] Mwetupunga recalls the repercussions on the socio-cultural lifestyles of the Aambandja after they converted to Christianity. Some surrendered their traditional ornaments (*oipako)* to the missionaries, who had convinced the locals that they were heathen artefacts. Some of the Owambo people destroyed their ornaments by setting them on fire or crushing them.[57] Others hid them underground and died without informing their family members where they had buried them. Mwetupunga was fortunate to inherit all the wealth that her grandmother kept for the clan after she passed away. The wealth transferred comprised leather outfits (*oipa*), metal beads (*uuputu*), shell beads (*eenyoka*), a conical whelk shell (*eemba*) and metal anklets (*oongondo*).[58]

In this regard, it appears that missionaries' intentions in the community was to market and promote European values more generally, in addition to spreading Christian doctrine. The approaches applied to sustain the new image of the Aawambo converts has resulted in the underdevelopment of local skills and a defecit in the hereditary wealth of the surrounding communities.

## *Conclusion*

The Aawambo encounter with Finnish missionaries is often viewed as having been a fundamental development phase in the history of the community in terms of furthering the health and education of the Aawambo. Yet, the approach of Finnish missionaries towards Aawambo culture can be characterised as colonial. Apart from territorial expansion, 'colonialism may include acts relating to exploitative economic practices, the appropriation of material culture, and the production of racial hierarchies and ideologies of difference.'[59] Finnish missionaries regarded local culture as inferior to their own and expected Aawambo converts to dress and behave according to their European image. The imported cloth dresses that the Finnish missionaries brought with them lacked the representational aspect that was crucial to an Aawambo wearer before conversion. The missionaries' pietistic ideology also actuated the abolishment of significant cultural events, such as *Olufuko* and the related attire which included the esteemed *uuputu.*

Aawambo converts were taught European manual skills, such as sewing and knitting. Texts by the missionaries about the Aawambo people and their culture were derogatory. The information contained in these written documents was meant to

56. Shigwedha 2004, 3.
57. Mwetupunga 2022.
58. Mwetupunga 2022.
59. Merivirta et al. 2021, 6.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

attract more funding to their evangelical work and to save the 'heathen' community. The disruption caused by the ideology of Finnish missionaries resulted in a weakening of Aawambo socio-cultural values, including ornamentation.

The *uuputu* symbolised the wearers' transition into adulthood, as well as their clan association and wealth, and acted as protection from misfortune. The *uuputu* also served as a bartering currency and as a medicinal cure. Ornaments such as *uuputu* beads were crafted to serve various socio-cultural and economic purposes to support the livelihoods of the Aawambo. Thus, documenting knowledge on the production and cultural representation of *uuputu* is important in emphasising the enterprising capacities and self-sufficiency of the Aawambo people before the adoption of the missionaries' ideologies.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Towards Independence

# IV

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# SWAPO's 1976 Crisis and Nordic Transnational Solidarities: The Ailongas' Detainee Letters[1]

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*Abstract*

This chapter examines the solidarity work of Salatiel Ailonga, a Namibian refugee pastor, and Anita Ailonga, his Finnish missionary wife, just prior to and during their exile in Finland. By the time of their arrival in June 1976, the Ailongas had been labelled 'SWAPO dissidents' – members of Namibia's primary liberation movement, ostracised from it by the movement's exile leadership during SWAPO's 1976 Crisis. The chapter offers a brief account of this crisis and the Nordic countries' response to it before examining letters received, written and circulated by the Ailongas aimed at selectively publicising the detention of Namibians in Zambia and Tanzania and securing the detainees' release. By drawing attention to the Ailongas' letters, this chapter highlights a significant vein of Nordic-Namibian solidarity work done on the margins of Nordic governments and the broader international community, which supported SWAPO's dominant faction in 1976. As I argue, these letters contributed to protecting and freeing detained Namibians and to articulating an alternative to SWAPO's exclusive nationalist discourse. Also, the chapter suggests the value of research that examines solidarity during Southern Africa's liberation struggles through transnational social networks.

1. This chapter is adapted from my forthcoming book and was completed with financial support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. See Williams 2025.



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On Thursday 10 June 1976, Salatiel and Anita Ailonga landed in Finland. Upon entering the airport terminal in Helsinki, they were met by members of the Finnish Mission Society (FMS) and the Finnish press, who had learned of the couple's expulsion from Zambia. Excerpts from articles published the following day paint the scene:

> 'What a difference between our leaving Zambia and our being received here,' said the [Finnish-Namibian] missionary couple Anita and Salatiel Ailonga.[2]

> 'According to the Constitution of the [South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)], it is already two years past the date when we should have had the party congress,' Salatiel Ailonga said. 'The present leadership of Sam Nujoma has not agreed to that. Now this conflict concerning the leadership is not about ideological questions, or even so much about strategic questions, but SWAPO is chiefly criticized because of the misuse of funds and other forms of corruption.'

> Since April [many] 'dissidents' have been imprisoned. At the same time the Ailongas were deported and also a Norwegian-Namibian couple was deported […] Salatiel Ailonga commented, 'I am concerned about the situation and even for those who are not yet rounded up […] The on-going crisis in SWAPO is dangerous […] because, above everything else, it will help South Africa.'

> When will Salatiel Ailonga return to his home country which he has not seen in twelve years [a reporter asked]? Salatiel answered, 'In the near future. When Namibia is free.'[3]

Thus began Salatiel Ailonga's fourteen years of exile in Finland. Here I follow the Ailongas across the first two of these years, as well as several weeks immediately preceding them, when they received, wrote and circulated letters aimed at assisting Namibians illegally detained in Zambia and Tanzania. Through these letters, the Ailongas and their social network helped to protect and eventually release more than one thousand Namibian detainees. Moreover, they challenged the idea that to be fully Namibian one's views must align with SWAPO's leadership even as this notion became the *de facto* stance of the international community in 1976 through the United Nations' (UN) recognition of SWAPO as 'the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people.'[4]

Accounts of international solidarity with Namibia's liberation struggle highlight the significance of Nordic governments and organisations' support for SWAPO but have little to say about the Ailongas and other actors who took a different position in 1976. As the literature notes, the Nordic countries initially took little interest in anti-colonial politics in Southern Africa, and the FMS, whose missionaries had long worked in northern Namibia, were largely critical of SWAPO at its formation

2. 'Zambia utvisade missionärspar' 1976. English translation by Anita Ailonga.
3. 'Kriisi ravistelee Swapoa' 1976. English translation by Anita Ailonga.
4. UN General Assembly 31/146, 1976.



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in 1960.[5] Nevertheless, across the 1960s and early 1970s, Nordic solidarity with African liberation movements grew, culminating first in Sweden and then in Finland and Norway offering humanitarian aid to SWAPO and other liberation movements for use in their exile camps.[6] In this context, Nordic governments and several key organisations, including the FMS, did not openly criticise SWAPO for the detention of its members in 1976, lest such criticism undermine SWAPO's goal of achieving Namibian independence and Nordic governments' interest in leading the Namibian independence process. By contrast, the Ailongas assisted SWAPO members who were critical of their liberation movement's leadership and were deported from Zambia and stigmatised by SWAPO and its allies for this reason.[7] Nevertheless, in their response to SWAPO's 1976 crisis, the Ailongas saw themselves as working in solidarity with struggling Namibians. Moreover, they were assisted by others who were deeply involved in Namibian solidarity work but who worked outside the policies of the Nordic governments and church bodies that employed them to help Namibians detained in 1976. This chapter traces this social network, drawing from the Ailongas' letters and a range of archival and oral sources that elaborate on the content of the letters. In so doing, it draws attention to a significant vein of Nordic-Namibian solidarity work and contributes to scholarship on transnational solidarities during Southern Africa's liberation struggles more broadly.

## *SWAPO's 1976 Crisis and the Response of Nordic Governments*

In 1974 and 1975, between 4,000 and 6,000 Namibians fled through Angola to Zambia to join SWAPO in exile. As SWAPO's numbers in Zambia expanded significantly, tensions emerged within the liberation movement. Shortly after their arrival in Zambia, leaders of SWAPO in Ovamboland and the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) began to express concern about how the liberation movement was administering its affairs in exile, including its lack of a clear political programme and misuse of funds. They called on the movement to discuss these issues and to integrate its leadership structures at a party congress, which, based on resolutions passed at SWAPO's previous congress, was due to convene by the end of 1974. As new arrivals joined the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's guerrilla army, and were stationed at camps in western Zambia, the call for a congress came to carry further weight. From early 1975 onwards, soldiers complained about a severe lack of food and military supplies in SWAPO's camps. Moreover, they discovered that SWAPO was delivering weapons to the União para Independença Total de Angola (UNITA) even

5. For discussion of how the FMS responded to anti-colonial politics in Namibia during the late 1950s and 1960s, see Soiri and Peltola 1999, 55–59; Peltola 2015, 267; Williams 2025.
6. Sellström 1999 and 2002; Soiri and Peltola 1999; Ericksen 2000. Denmark did not extend bilateral aid to SWAPO and, as Sellström notes, was much more detached from developments in SWAPO in Zambia in 1976 than were Sweden, Finland and Norway. See Sellström 2002, 318.
7. According to Soiri and Peltola, 'Rev. Ilonga [sic] […] criticised SWAPO's policy too openly for SWAPO to tolerate' and therefore 'was deported from Lusaka together with his missionary wife.' See Soiri and Peltola 1999, 126. As we shall see, this depiction of the Ailongas is misleading and the only one in the Nordic solidarity literature.



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after UNITA had begun to stage joint operations in Angola with the South African Defence Force (SADF), SWAPO's archenemy.

Some members of SWAPO's exile leadership openly expressed concern about these issues and supported the calls for a party congress, among them SWAPO's Secretary for Information Andreas Shipanga. However, SWAPO President Sam Nujoma and his supporters did not support the call for a congress. Multiple contexts shaped the different responses of SWAPO officials to the party congress issue. Here it is sufficient to note that, during the mid-1970s, SWAPO and its allies were trying to consolidate its image internationally as a united, 'authentic' representative of the Namibian people even as the South African government championed the Turnhalle Talks, aimed at resolving the Namibia conflict inside the country without SWAPO's involvement. At the same time, SWAPO was under pressure to align itself with the détente negotiations between Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda and South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster, resulting in the restriction of SWAPO military operations on Zambian soil and assistance for UNITA.[8]

In this context, the Zambian government began to detain Namibians seen by SWAPO officials as supporting calls for a party congress. On 21 April, the Zambian Police raided the home of Andreas Shipanga and five other senior SWAPO members and detained them at Nampundwe camp on Lusaka's outskirts. Concurrently, from 21 to 23 April, the Zambian army transported at least forty-two soldiers affiliated with PLAN to a detention camp near Mwinilunga. Also, during that same week, the army began to disarm more than 1,000 PLAN soldiers at the front near the Namibian border in southwestern Zambia.[9] In July these soldiers, together with the detainees at Mwinilunga, were transported to Mboroma, a camp located near Kabwe, where they were detained for months by the Zambian army, cut off from all communication with the world beyond the camp.

The governments of Finland, Sweden and Norway were well aware of the conflict unfolding within SWAPO during this period, especially as it pertained to Andreas Shipanga and his ten co-detainees. Each of these countries had embassies in Lusaka and Dar es Salaam and diplomats there working directly with SWAPO.[10] Moreover, in the case of Finland and Sweden at least, some of these diplomats had previously developed close personal relationships with the detainees and with each other. Embassy personnel were, therefore, very attentive to developments within SWAPO as they unfolded and to silences in the official narrative of events projected by SWAPO and its allies thereafter. Indeed, as Tor Sellström, the author of a two-volume study on *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, records in his account of 'the Shipanga Affair,' the Swedish Embassy in Lusaka was incredulous as to SWAPO's version of events according to which Andreas Shipanga was guilty of espionage and primarily responsible for provoking unrest among SYL and PLAN dissidents.[11]

8. For further context and related references pertaining to SWAPO's 1976 crisis, see Williams 2015, 94–122.
9. At the time when they arrived in Helsinki in June 1976, the Ailongas were not aware of the fate of the PLAN soldiers at the front.
10. Sellström 2002, 314–319; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 126.
11. Sellström 2002, 314–315.



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Moreover, embassy officials considered the legal grounds for placing Shipanga et al. under 'protective custody' against their will as highly dubious.[12]

Nevertheless, all three governments instructed embassy officials not to intervene or comment publicly on the conflict. At first, this position seems to have reflected the embassies' efforts to decipher contradictory claims about the detentions and whether the detainees might be more than merely political dissidents.[13] Gradually, however, the detention issue was pushed to the background as Nordic governments and the wider international community responded to important developments in SWAPO's liberation struggle during the latter half of 1976. Importantly, the Turnhalle Talks were roundly challenged by Namibians who joined SWAPO in large numbers. In this context, the UN prepared for new rounds of negotiations with the apartheid government and worked to secure a new UN Commissioner for Namibia to lead the process, with the Nordic countries pushing for the Finn, Martti Ahtisaari.[14] With these developments and strategic priorities in place and the prospect of UN-led Namibian independence glimmering on the horizon, the Nordic countries overlooked the delicate matter of SWAPO's detentions.[15]

## *The Ailongas' Letters*

Nevertheless, there were several individuals, many of them people whose lives were deeply entangled with SWAPO and the Nordic countries, who engaged critically with SWAPO's detentions from 1976 to 1978. At the centre of this alternative solidarity community were Salatiel Ailonga (1932–2015) and Anita Ailonga (1934–present). Salatiel was born, raised and baptised at Nakayale, an FMS mission station in Ombalantu, western Ovamboland. After joining the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) and SWAPO in their founding years, 1959 and 1960 respectively, Salatiel fled Namibia for Tanzania in 1963, where he lived as a political refugee for the next decade and received a scholarship from the FMS to train as a pastor. In 1972 Salatiel and Anita met in Iringa, where Anita was working as a member of the FMS, following ten years of missionary work in Tanzania's Bunyakyusa region. Anita also had a long prior history of engagement with SWAPO and was granted SWAPO membership at the time of her marriage to Salatiel in December 1973. In January 1974, the Ailongas moved to Lusaka, Zambia, where Salatiel served as 'Chaplain to Namibians in Exile' – the first religious leader affiliated with SWAPO or any other Southern African liberation movement. Over two-and-a-half years, Salatiel and Anita (who also assisted the chaplaincy's work without pay) distributed humanitarian aid and offered pastoral services to Namibian refugees.

12. Sellström 2002, 315.
13. Soiri and Peltola 1999, 127; Sellström 2002, 315–316.
14. In 1977 Ahtisaari was installed as UN Commissioner for Namibia. In 1978 the South African government accepted UN Resolution 435 as the blueprint for Namibian independence, but it resisted following through on the terms of that resolution until 1989. For more on Ahtisaari's appointment as UN Commissioner for Namibia and his role in Namibia's democratic transition, see Chris Saunders' chapter in this volume.
15. Soiri and Peltola 1999, 127; Sellström 2002, 317–318.



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As the Zambian police and army detained SWAPO members on behalf of SWAPO leaders in April 1976, the Ailongas began to receive and circulate letters from those recently detained. The first two of these letters were hand-delivered to the Ailongas' home in Lusaka's Lilanda suburb on Sunday, 25 April – just four days after the first wave of arrests. Here is Anita's account of these events as recorded in her diary the following day:

> At 6 [am] somebody banged at the door […] In came two of the disappeared [Sheeli Shangula, the SYL's Secretary General, and Martin Taneni, a PLAN soldier] […] They had walked all the night from their place of [detention]. Salatiel only took trousers over pajamas, I a dress over my head, and we went with the men […] with a letter from [the detained SWAPO leader Andreas] Shipanga [...] We drove to [the home of Kari] Karanko [a diplomat at the Finnish Embassy]. Poor man. He had been drinking and it took him some time to figure out what our visit was about […]
>
> When Karanko got sober, he got hold of a correspondent from Reuters. When I later returned with copies of Shipanga's letter, [the correspondent] was already there. They intended to bring some of the boys to the Swedish Embassy. Then we went home [...] [Shortly after we arrived,] a resistance fighter still at large came to us with the letter they wrote at the front […] I started to duplicate it […] I completed [printing out the letter] at Shipanga's [home]. As [I was] leaving, the girls [there] said that the news from BBC had [already] released something from 'diplomatic sources' [about the detention of Andreas Shipanga].[16]

According to Andreas Shipanga, the letter that he gave to his fellow detainees before their escape was brief: 'Get the colleagues in touch with the best possible journalists you know. The sooner this sordid affair goes public, the better chance for us to come out alive […] Please advise [my wife] to contact a lawyer to bring *habeus corpus* case soonest possible.'[17] Although the letter does not explicitly address an individual, the intended recipient appears to have been the Finnish diplomat Kari Karanko, who, as noted above, ultimately received it.[18] As for the letter from 'a resistance fighter still at large,' this document was probably 'The PLAN Fighters' Declaration.' Written by soldiers at the front in mid-April 1976, the declaration presents a series of events that had occurred during the preceding weeks – the uncovering of caches of weapons hidden in the ground; evidence of SWAPO trucks delivering weapons to UNITA in the lead up to Angola's independence – all of which had led the soldiers to disobey

16. Anita Ailonga, Diary, 53–54, Ailonga Collection. I first accessed the Ailonga Collection at the Ailongas' home in Outapi, Namibia and later at Anita Ailonga's home in Vaasa, Finland. The collection is also housed at the National Archives of Namibia, but it is not yet open to the public.
17. A transcribed version of the letter is printed in Shipanga 1989, 111–112.
18. In his autobiography Shipanga indicates that he addressed his letter to a 'Finnish diplomat,' who later returned the document to him. See Shipanga 1989, 111–112. Karanko and Shipanga had known one another for years. During the mid-1970s Shipanga worked with Karanko in the context of administering Finnish humanitarian aid to SWAPO. See Ailonga, Diary.



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their commanders and demand an audience with the Zambian government and OAU Liberation Committee.[19]

Through copying and circulating these two letters, the Ailongas ensured that the Namibians detained in April 1976 in Zambia were not removed from the public eye. Moreover, the story of these letters highlights two important aspects of the Ailongas' solidarity work. First, many detained Namibians trusted the Ailongas. To understand this trust, it is important again to note Salatiel Ailonga's work as chaplain to Namibians in exile over the preceding two-and-a-half years. Central to this work were relationships that Salatiel developed while leading church services and humanitarian projects at SWAPO's Old Farm camp and receiving those who wished to meet him at his Lusaka home. While working with and listening to other exiles, Salatiel gleaned sensitive information about what was occurring within SWAPO's liberation war and made personal bonds with exiled Namibians who found themselves in difficult situations of all kinds, including those calling for a party congress. Thus, while Salatiel rejected the idea that he had aligned himself with an 'opposition faction' or 'splinter group' within SWAPO, many Namibians in Zambia associated him with those calling for the party congress and, indeed, he supported the idea that SWAPO should meet urgently to address its internal differences.[20]

Second, the Ailongas had access to a social network that was highly valuable to the detainees as they sought to tell their stories. Indeed, Sheeli Shangula was familiar with the Ailongas' network in Lusaka, including their relationship with Kari Karanko.[21] Anita's connection with the Finnish diplomat dated to the 1960s when she was a Finnish missionary in Bunyakyusa, and he was administering development projects at the Finnish Embassy in Dar es Salaam.[22] As the SWAPO crisis in Zambia reached its climax, Anita and Karanko met frequently to trade notes about recent events and strategise about how to assist the detainees and what to do if the police came for the Ailongas.[23] Moreover, the Ailongas knew that Karanko was already risking his professional career by personally helping Jimmy Amupala, an SYL leader who had evaded a raid by the Zambian police and was then taking refuge in Karanko's attic.[24]

For months following these events, the Ailongas and a few other individuals in their social network in Lusaka became the primary sources of information about the Namibian detainees for concerned global audiences. Some of this work revolved around the legal battle to release Andreas Shipanga and the ten other high-profile Namibians detained with him. Already on 25 April, Kari Karanko had contacted Solly Patel Hamir, a well-known Lusaka lawyer, who agreed to take on the detainees'

19. 'PLAN Fighters Declaration,' Ailonga Collection. For oral histories that address the creation of this document, see interview with Hauwanga 2007 and with Engombe, Ikondja, Ndeulita and Shikondombolo 2007.
20. For further details and related references, see Williams 2021; Williams 2025.
21. Sheeli Shangula was based in Lusaka and worked with Salatiel Ailonga to distribute humanitarian aid in SWAPO camps. See interview with Shangula 2007; Nathanael 2002, 118–119; Beukes 2014, 224–230.
22. Ailonga, Diary; interview with Ailonga 2022. At the time of SWAPO's 1976 crisis, Martti Ahtisaari was serving as the Finnish Ambassador to Zambia but was based in Dar es Salaam. Karanko was a leading representative of the Finnish government based in Lusaka.
23. Ailonga, Diary.
24. Ailonga, Diary, 49; Beukes 2014, 245.



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case.[25] During the following week, Hamir met with Anita, Shangula, Taneni and Esme Shipanga, Andreas Shipanga's South African born wife. Together they agreed that, with Hamir's legal assistance, Esme would submit an application for a writ of *habeus corpus* to the Zambian High Court on behalf of her husband.[26] For nearly five months, the Zambian state's Minister of Legal Affairs, Mainza Chona, prevented the courts from granting this writ, first on the supposition that Shipanga and his co-detainees were not detained but rather held in 'protective custody' and later on the premise that they were legally detained under Zambian emergency laws – a claim eventually rejected by Zambia's Supreme Court when insufficient evidence was provided of the detainees' threat to Zambian security. By the time the Zambian courts demanded Shipanga's release from detention, however, the Zambian state had flown him and his, by then, ten co-detainees to Tanzania, where they were dispersed at several prisons. There, where *habeus corpus* laws did not exist, they were beyond the grasp of the Zambian legal system, and Esme Shipanga was forced to drop the case. Nevertheless, the extended court drama and press coverage in Zambia ensured that Shipanga and his co-detainees captured news headlines across much of the world and were repeatedly discussed among organisations aiding SWAPO.[27]

At the same time, the Ailongas began to write letters aimed at informing particular audiences about the detentions. Salatiel's first two letters were written in late April and early May 1976 and addressed to the London office of Amnesty International (AI), offering detailed accounts of developments within SWAPO in Zambia as they were unfolding. The letters focus on the Zambian government's detention of Namibians and SWAPO officials' harassment of so-called 'rebels,' drawing from Salatiel's direct observations and conversations with Namibians who had themselves been detained or coerced.[28] Salatiel and Anita's deportation from Zambia to Finland one month later resulted in their separation from people and events in the African country. Nevertheless, within two weeks of his arrival in Finland, Salatiel sent lengthy reports describing the situation in Zambia to the UN Commissioner for Namibia, Sean MacBride, and to all of the pastors and church organisations that had supported his work as chaplain.[29] Also from early July onwards, the Ailongas received a regular flow of letters from Shipanga and his co-detainees. The first two letters were smuggled out of Nampundwe camp and sent to the FMS's Mission House in Helsinki and the LWF's headquarters in Geneva with requests that they be forwarded to the Ailongas. Later, the detainees smuggled letters directly from their Tanzanian prisons to the Ailongas'

25. Ailonga, Diary, 55–56. Hamir had defended members of the Zimbabwe Africa National Union (ZANU) accused of murdering ZANU leader Herbert Chitepo.
26. 'Solly Patel Hamir and Lawrence, Re: A. Z. Shipanga,' Ailonga Collection; Shipanga 1989, 113; Nathanael 2002, 138–139; Interview with Shangula, 25 March 2007. After Shangula and Taneni made these arrangements, they handed themselves over to the Zambian police and were returned to Nampundwe.
27. For references to related news coverage, see Williams 2015, 116.
28. Letter from Salatiel Ailonga to the Honourable Mr. D. Ennals, 30 April 1976; Letter from Salatiel Ailonga to the Honourable Mr. D. Ennals, 6 May 1976, Ailonga Collection.
29. Letter from Salatiel Ailonga to UN Commissioner to Namibia, 24 June 1976; Salatiel Ailonga, 'Memorandum: A short history of the Chaplaincy to Namibians in Central and East Africa, 1974 – June 1976,' Ailonga Collection.



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address in Vaasa, where the letters generally arrived within three weeks.[30] In turn, the Ailongas forwarded these letters to AI and other selected individuals and news outlets, drawing from detainees' recommendations and their own sense of where this information might contribute most effectively to the detainees' release.

One other person was deeply involved in raising the issue of detained Namibians in Zambia and Tanzania during this period: Hans Beukes. Beukes was a prominent SWAPO member – one of the first Namibians to access studies abroad and to petition on behalf of his country at the UN. From August 1975, his Norwegian wife, Edel, was assigned to the office of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) in Lusaka. Thereafter, Hans and Salatiel developed a strong relationship, bonding over shared concerns about the growing crisis in SWAPO. Just after the detentions began in April 1976, Beukes wrote letters to Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda and SWAPO's internal leadership respectively, emphasising the importance of freeing the detainees and allowing SWAPO to resolve its internal differences at a party congress.[31] After being tipped off to his possible detention in mid-May, Beukes left Lusaka for London – just a few weeks before he, his wife and the Ailongas were all formally deported from Zambia. In the United Kingdom, several encounters spurred him to further action on the detainee issue, including his receipt of two detainee letters, forwarded to him by the Ailongas and pleading specifically for Beukes' assistance.[32]

From September to December 1976, Beukes drew from his wife's salary as a Norwegian development worker to shuttle between Ski (his and Edel's home in Norway), Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki, London, Geneva and New York, where he engaged a range of officials whom he thought could intervene meaningfully in the SWAPO detainee issue. In addition to personally engaging AI and various church leaders, to whom the Ailongas had previously written, he approached state officials in Norway and Sweden, where he leveraged his personal connections to be granted an audience with high-ranking officials in both countries' Foreign Offices.[33] His most important intervention, however, was probably an article that he published in the Swedish paper *Dagens Nyheter* on 9 October 1976. Written under the pseudonym 'Pekka Ovambo' and based on a letter smuggled to Reuters' Lusaka correspondent, Beukes covered the story of more than 1,000 PLAN soldiers detained at Mboroma, a remote camp in the mountains outside Kabwe, northeast of Lusaka. There, the article reported, Namibians were living in desperate conditions, with some dying of malnutrition and others killed when, on 5 August, the Zambian army had opened fire on the camp's inhabitants. Beukes' and other articles based on the smuggled letter from Mboroma launched a debate about whether the Namibian detainee issue

30. Some detainees were eventually apprehended and were held in solitary confinement and had their food rations reduced as punishment for smuggling letters from Tanzanian prisons.
31. Although public archives lack evidence of whether these letters were received and read by their intended recipients, the letters circulated widely, especially among SWAPO activists in southern Namibia, who appear to have read these letters together with documents written by PLAN fighters and photocopied by the Ailongas. See Williams 2009, 160–163.
32. Beukes 2014, 266–268; Letter from Andreas Nuukuawo to the Ailongas, 29 July 1976; letter from Solly Mifima to Salatiel Ailonga, 29 August 1976, Ailonga Collection.
33. Beukes 2014, 272–273, 293.



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merely involved eleven registered prisoners in Tanzania, as SWAPO and frontline state governments maintained, or was a much bigger and more serious issue.[34]

For Salatiel Ailonga, Hans Beukes and others seeking to protect and free the detainees, the response of SWAPO's allies to their efforts was deeply distressing. Despite a growing body of evidence indicating that the detentions were unlawful and that the conditions in which most detainees were held were dire, the governments and organisations supporting SWAPO were unwilling to raise the matter directly with SWAPO's leadership. In the press, representatives of many organisations, including the Nordic governments, simply repeated SWAPO's official narrative, as detailed in 'the Ya Otto Report,' the document which SWAPO's internal commission of inquiry issued to its allies about the conflict in June 1976. According to that report, SWAPO had become a victim of 'enemy intrigues and infiltration,' led by South Africa and West Germany, which had targeted 'reactionary, opportunistic, ambitious and disgruntled elements within SWAPO,' above all Andreas Shipanga. In turn, Shipanga and his cronies had allegedly provoked unrest among the SYL and PLAN, resulting in 'the revolt of SWAPO cadres' and the need for Zambian government intervention.[35] Although Ailonga and Beukes are not mentioned in the report, they were formally expelled from SWAPO at a meeting of the liberation movement's Central Committee in late July and their names were publicly denounced by SWAPO officials then and thereafter as they tried to defend their liberation movement's version of events.[36]

As the months carried on, with no resolution of the detainee issue in sight and a seemingly desperate situation unfolding outside the media's gaze at Mboroma camp, the Ailongas, Hans Beukes and few sympathetic contacts in northern Europe maintained contact with one another, sharing letters with news and encouragement. And, gradually, imperceptibly even to them, their solidarity work began to take effect.

## *The Detainees' Release*

In early December 1976, Bishop Colin Winter, the former head of the Anglican Church in Namibia and founder of the Namibia International Peace Centre in the United Kingdom, travelled to Tanzania. During his visit, he was granted permission to meet the detained Namibians in their prison cells and to hold a private meeting with Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere.[37] In addition to being a high-profile anti-

34. Letter from Hans Beukes to Salatiel Ailonga, 9 October 1976, No. 1397a, 'SWAPO Krise 1976,' VEM; Beukes 2014, 270–272; Williams 2015, 112.
35. 'Report of the Findings and Recommendations of the John Ya Otto Commission of Inquiry into Circumstances which led to the Revolt of SWAPO Cadres between June 1974 and April 1976,' 4 June 1976, Katjavivi Collection, Series B1, Category 3, File 2, UNAM. For a more detailed summary of the report's creation, content and reception, see Williams 2009, 110–115; Williams 2015, 116–118.
36. Telegram from Moses Garoeb to Salatiel Ailonga, 18 August 1976, Ailonga Collection; 'Swapo explains purges' 1976; Anita Ailonga, 'A Walk in the Wilderness,' (unpublished manuscript), 121, Ailonga Collection.
37. 'Bischof Winter,' File 1397a (SWAPO Krise 1976), VEM; letter from Nuukuawo, Shikomba, Taneni and Moongo to the Ailongas, 7 April 1977; letter from 'Your Comrades' (Mifima and Shipanga) to Salatiel Ailonga, 30 April 1977, Ailonga Collection.



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apartheid cleric with a personal relationship with Nyerere, Winter was a friend of the Ailongas, who visited them on several occasions in Lusaka, including on 23–24 April 1976, just after the first round of detentions.[38] Winter was moved by the Ailongas' news of developments within SWAPO in Zambia, promising that he would speak 'with others who could find a way to help.' After the Ailongas' deportation from Zambia to Finland, Winter was one of a few chaplaincy donors who followed up with expressions of concern about the detainees and the Ailongas.[39]

According to the accounts of both men regarding their meeting, Nyerere told Winter that he had taken the eleven detained SWAPO members on President Kaunda's personal request and 'was anxious to get them out of his hands' – especially as 'fellows keep coming here asking about them.'[40] Thus began a dialogue between the governments of Tanzania and Sweden – Tanzania's closest Nordic ally and the destination of many prior Southern Africa asylum seekers – about the possibility of Sweden granting Shipanga and his co-detainees' political asylum. Although Sweden was reluctant to embrace this proposition due to how it could impact its relationship with SWAPO and Zambia, subsequent developments forced both Zambia's and Sweden's hands. On 27 April 1977, Sakarias Elago and Hizipo Shikondombolo, two of the Namibians who had been detained at Mboroma, presented themselves to a BBC reporter in Nairobi, where they had arrived after escaping from the camp and traversing more than 2,000 km in extremely difficult conditions. The harrowing stories of their own and their comrades' experiences at the camp prompted the Zambian government to intervene at Mboroma where the Namibian detainees (who were, indeed, over 1,000 in number) were given a choice: leave SWAPO and register with the UNHCR or re-integrate into SWAPO following a SWAPO-led reintegration process.[41] Meanwhile, Nyerere continued to search for ways to release the eleven Namibians detained in his country, quickened, perhaps, by articles in the Swedish press, drawing from knowledge about SWAPO's crisis and human rights abuses in Zambia that the Ailongas' letters had done so much to establish.[42] In the end, Nyerere took matters into his own hands. After informing Nujoma that he would release the detainees unless SWAPO provided credible evidence that they had collaborated with

38. During Winter's first visit with the Ailongas in Lusaka, he suffered a heart attack while they were together preparing for dinner. The Ailongas rushed him to the hospital and Anita looked after him for over a week until his wife, Mary Winter, could travel from England to Zambia and aid him in his further recovery. See A. Ailonga, 'A Walk,' 54–55, Ailonga Collection.
39. Letter from Colin Winter to the Ailongas, 14 July 1976, Ailonga Collection.
40. Sellström 2002, 319. Winter and Nyerere independently commented on their meeting in subsequent correspondence with Sweden's Foreign Ministry. On the day when Nyerere made his recorded comment, Martin Ennals from AI was visiting the Namibian detainees in Tanzania. See letter from Nuukuawo, Shikomba, Taneni and Moongo to the Ailongas, 7 April 1977, Ailonga Collection.
41. For further details, see Williams 2015, 119–120.
42. Tor Sellström identifies two articles published in *Dagens Nyheter* by Per Wästberg, the newspaper's chief editor and an anti-apartheid activist, as having been particularly influential. See Sellström, 2002, 321–322.



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the enemy and, as no evidence was forthcoming, he asked for the UNHCR to push for political asylum with viable countries on the Tanzanian government's behalf.[43]

On 25 May 1978, 'Africa Day,' the eleven Namibians detained in Tanzania were released from prison. Two weeks later Andreas Shipanga joined Kenneth and Ottilie Abrahams, long-standing SWAPO dissidents, at their home outside Stockholm to found SWAPO-Democrats (SWAPO-D), and in August 1978 Shipanga returned to Namibia to launch the new party together with three of his co-detainees.[44] The majority of those detained with Shipanga opted not to affiliate with SWAPO-D, and six settled in the Nordic countries, where they were granted political asylum. By the late 1980s, these individuals had become the nucleus of a SWAPO dissident community in northern Europe, working with Salatiel Ailonga and a German Lutheran pastor, Siegfried Groth, to advocate for the protection of Namibian refugees threatened by SWAPO, especially those detained in SWAPO's camps in Lubango, Angola.[45]

## *Conclusion*

Clearly, then, the Ailongas' letters illuminate a very different history of Nordic-Namibian solidarity work than that which has previously been recorded. Even as Nordic governments bolstered global support for SWAPO from the mid-1970s, social networks emerged between Namibians and their supporters that transcended these institutions' official policies and challenged the detention of SWAPO members in Zambia and Tanzania. The letters discussed in this chapter examine one such network, centred around the Ailongas and their contacts, who spanned Namibian exiles, Nordic government officials and northern European church leaders. Certainly, the Ailongas' network was marginal to understandings of Namibian solidarity projected by SWAPO and the international community in 1976. Nevertheless, it was influential, enabling the release of Namibian detainees in 1977 and 1978 and presenting an alternative to SWAPO's exclusive, nationalist discourse that resurfaced again during the late 1980s and in subsequent years.

In making these points, the chapter contributes to an emerging body of scholarship on Southern Africa's liberation struggles, highlighting 'transnational' and 'un-national' perspectives that are effaced in historiographies organised around national liberation movements, their international allies and state-run archives.[46] Through the Ailongas' letters, the chapter draws attention to a social network, shaped by histories of Finnish missionaries and Nordic development workers in Africa, and yet barely visible in research on Nordic countries' solidarity with African liberation movements. The members of this network were deeply committed to Namibia and yet their solidarity

43. In the Swedish case at least, these arrangements involved the UNHCR applying to the Swedish Immigration Board directly without going through Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Sellström 2002, 323.
44. The Abrahams had a personal relationship to Shipanga that dated back to their shared political activism in Cape Town in the late 1950s and journey into exile together in 1963. For further information about the founding of SWAPO-D, see Sellström 2002, 325–326.
45. For further details and references, see Williams 2025.
46. See, for example, White and Larmer 2014; Alexander, McGregor and Tendi 2017; Dallywater, Saunders and Fonesca 2019; Williams 2021.



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work was marked less by the political calculations of nation-states and nationalist movements, than by interpersonal intimacies and values that crossed national borders. Moreover, they expressed their solidarity in a manner that challenged the dominant view adopted by the Nordic countries and the international community. It follows that the Ailongas' letters are valuable sources for re-appraising Nordic solidarity during Namibia's liberation struggle. Moreover, they open our imagination to an array of people and networks that will remain excluded from liberation histories as long we take the national frame of international solidarity for granted.

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Martti Ahtisaari, Sam Nujoma and the Independence of Namibia

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*Abstract*

Namibia's long history of colonisation under Germany and then South Africa came to an end with independence in March 1990. In the lengthy decolonisation process that led up to independence, a leading role was played by the Finnish and international diplomat Martti Ahtisaari. From the mid-1970s, Sam Nujoma, the first president of Namibia's leading liberation movement, SWAPO, had a complicated relationship with Ahtisaari, who became the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations and head of the UN mission to Namibia. When Nujoma, then President of Namibia, came to write his memoirs, he was very critical of Ahtisaari for his decision, on the very day that the United Nations mission to Namibia eventually began its work in 1989, to allow South African forces to attack the SWAPO guerrillas who appeared in northern Namibia. This chapter explores the ins and outs of Nujoma's relationship with Ahtisaari over time, and analyses what the Namibian leader said about Ahtisaari's role in bringing about the independence of Namibia. The chapter concludes with some reflections on why the two men brought different perspectives to bear on the way in which Namibia's decolonisation process unfolded. Though they inevitably saw that process in different ways, the liberation leader and the UN official both played crucial roles in achieving Namibian independence.



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Namibia was created as a colony by Germany in the last decades of the nineteenth century, though its northern boundary was not defined until well into the twentieth. South African troops entered what was then called South West Africa during the First World War, defeated the German forces and occupied the territory. After the First World War, the territory was awarded to South Africa to administer as a Mandate under the newly-formed League of Nations. After the Second World War, the new United Nations took responsibility for the territory, though the apartheid government of South Africa refused to accept this. In 1966, the leading nationalist organisation, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) began an armed struggle against South African rule of the territory. When the dispute over the status of the territory was taken to the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 1971, the judges ruled that South Africa's continued occupation was illegal and that the regime should withdraw. Then followed a long process in which South African rule of the territory was challenged, on the one hand by SWAPO militarily and on the other in international fora, of which the most important was the United Nations. In 1978 the UN Security Council agreed to set up a mission to go to Namibia to arrange a transition to independence. That mission was to be headed by the Finnish diplomat Martti Ahtisaari.

In the final stages of the very convoluted process leading to Namibian independence on 21 March 1990, Ahtisaari played a key role as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and head of the UN mission that finally went to Namibia in 1989 to help organise the first democratic election in that country and to oversee its transition to independence. From the mid-1970s, Ahtisaari had interacted with Sam Nujoma, the founding-president of SWAPO, which had been recognised by the Organisation of African Unity and the UN from the early 1970s as Namibia's sole liberation movement. When Nujoma, who was sworn in as the first President of the new nation on 21 March 1990, completed, with the help of others, a memoir of the liberation struggle, he presented a nationalist, anti-colonial account of how Namibia had moved to independence, in which he gave a very one-sided view of Ahtisaari' s role. Nujoma's book was the work of a political leader who sought to justify and celebrate the role he and his movement had played in taking Namibia to independence.[1] This chapter examines what Nujoma said about Ahtisaari and tries to set this in context.

While there is no doubt that Ahtisaari was a central figure in the process that took Namibia to independence, the only recent general history of Namibia in English fails to accord him more than a passing mention.[2] What Nujoma wrote about Ahtisaari is mentioned briefly in the only account to focus directly on Ahtisaari's role in Namibia at any length: the two chapters in the biography of Ahtisaari by the journalists Katri Merikallio and Tapani Ruokanen, published in Finnish in 2011 and in English in 2015.[3] Though their book is well-researched and draws on interviews with Ahtisaari himself as well as others, it contains no references, so its sources cannot be verified,

1. Nujoma 2001. Randolph Vigne of the Namibia Support Committee in London helped draft it and it was to have been published by Vigne's friend, James Currey, but the project was then taken over by others and given to a publisher known for her books on Kwame Nkrumah and other 'revolutionaries'.
2. Wallace 2011, 305.
3. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015. Cf. Saunders 2016; Johnson 2015.



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and it lacks a bibliography. What Merikallio and Ruokanen wrote about Namibia should be examined in the light of other relevant writing and primary material. In this chapter, there is not scope to do more than focus on what Nujoma wrote about Ahtisaari, or did not write about him, for what Nujoma does not say is also revealing.

In commenting on what Nujoma has to say about Ahtisaari in his autobiography, I shall inevitably be sketchy, for Nujoma's references to Ahtisaari are idiosyncratic and they leave out major aspects of Ahtisaari's work to advance the cause of Namibian independence. In particular, Nujoma fails to acknowledge Ahtisaari's key role as head of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia in the run-up to the first democratic election held in the country in November 1989. A full critical study of his achievement in heading that mission and concluding it successfully cannot be attempted here. What this chapter will do is offer some reflections, drawn from the sources available to me,[4] on what Namibia's leading political figure said on the role of Ahtisaari in the Namibian peace process.

## *SWAPO and Ahtisaari before the 1980s*

Though Nujoma does not mention it in his memoir, he first encountered Ahtisaari in the 1960s when, as a student, the latter had headed an organisation looking after Namibians who were given scholarships to study in Finland.[5] It was natural for Ahtisaari to take a particular interest in Namibia, given Finland's historic ties with Ovamboland, missionary and other. But it was when Ahtisaari was Finland's ambassador to Tanzania, based in Dar es Salaam, from 1973 that he and Nujoma met regularly and Ahtisaari learned in detail of SWAPO's struggle for independence. Dar es Salaam was a key site for the Southern African liberation movements, and there Ahtisaari, who also served as Finnish ambassador to neighbouring Zambia and newly independent Mozambique, developed close ties with a number of the Southern African liberation movements. He worked with the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee and served on the Board of the UN Institute for Namibia in Lusaka.[6] Though Nujoma does not mention this in his memoir, he got to know Ahtisaari well enough to call on him informally in Dar es Salaam and to enjoy meals at the Ahtisaari home.[7]

4. Research for the chapter was handicapped not only by my inability to read Finnish and the inaccessibility of the SWAPO archive in Windhoek, but also by the destruction of one of the world's leading collections of Namibiana in a fire that destroyed the University of Cape Town's African Studies Library in April 2021. It took time after the fire for the full extent of the loss to become apparent, and efforts to reconstitute some of what had been lost proved difficult and, at least for the time being, mostly unsuccessful. Cf. Saunders 2021.
5. Ahtisaari 1996, 62 and the interview with him, conducted in 1996, in Soiri and Peltola 1999, 181–188.
6. Ahtisaari 1996, 65.
7. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, chapter 7. On Dar es Salaam as a hub for liberation movements, see especially Roberts 2021. A British lawyer, Cedric Thornberry, who went from the London School of Economics to observe a political trial in Windhoek in 1974, thereafter regularly briefed Ahtisaari on Namibian affairs: Thornberry 2004, xi.



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Meanwhile the United Nations (UN) had recognised Namibia as a 'special responsibility' because of its international status as a former mandate under the League of Nations, and the UN Security Council appointed a UN Commissioner for Namibia to look after the interests of the territory. In 1976 Ahtisaari became the second holder of that post. Nujoma's first reference to Ahtisaari in his memoir is to say that SWAPO had supported his appointment. But he goes on to say, hinting at the conflicts that were to develop in the relationship SWAPO had with the Finnish diplomat: 'Ahtisaari had been friendly when he was the Finnish Ambassador to Tanzania, and we had known him through his membership of the Finnish Social Democratic Party. He was to play an important role for years to come, though not always as our ally.'[8]

As Commissioner for Namibia – a post that Ahtisaari himself called 'Delegate for Namibia' – Ahtisaari, in his words, 'spoke as it were with the voice of Namibians,' and SWAPO was recognised by the UN General Assembly as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people. As his account of the complex story of Namibian decolonisation progresses, Nujoma expresses increasing disillusionment with Ahtisaari, in large part because of the 'other hat' that Ahtisaari assumed in relation to Namibia, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Namibia. In that role he had to be an impartial mediator in dealing with the various players involved, and in time it led to his heading the UN mission set up in terms of the key UN Security Council Resolution 435 of September 1978.[9]

Nujoma does not mention it, but SWAPO was not in favour of Ahtisaari taking on this additional role. Ahtisaari was not involved directly in the formal mediation efforts on Namibia by the Western Contact Group (WCG) of Western countries that were members of the UN Security Council in 1977–1978. However, he did help Donald McHenry, the leading United States mediator, to frame the WCG's proposals in 1977 that led to the settlement plan that was unveiled in early 1978. This involved a UN presence in Namibia while a democratic election was held. From Nujoma's point of view, Ahtisaari was now seen by the SWAPO leadership as associated with the Western negotiating team that was putting pressure on SWAPO to make concessions and to accept a plan for a UN-organised election. SWAPO was highly critical of the concessions that were made to the South African government during the WCG's negotiations, and it was only strong pressure from Angola and other Frontline states that persuaded SWAPO to accept the UN plan. SWAPO viewed that plan with suspicion, not trusting that the South African administration, which would remain in place until independence, would allow a free and fair election to take place.

Nonetheless, when Ahtisaari arrived in Ovamboland in northern Namibia on his first visit in 1978, he was greeted with enthusiasm by SWAPO supporters, who thought his visit heralded the end of South African rule. Then and later some Namibians named their children after him. Ahtisaari thought that his was an odd name to choose because Namibia was largely desert and Ahtisaari meant 'the island of the ancient Nordic god of water.' A report in *The New York Times* explained the naming of children after Ahtisaari in the following manner:

8. Nujoma 2001, 257. On page 287 he gets the date wrong. On the way in which Ahtisaari succeeded the Irishman Sean MacBride, see Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 85.
9. Ahtisaari 1996, 68; Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 90. The title of their chapter 8 is 'With Two Hats to Namibia.'



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> [It] reflects the close religious and, many would say, political ties that link northern Namibia, where most of the population lives, with snowy Finland, ties that have made the local offshoot of Finland's Lutheran Church a powerful supporter of independence over the years. For Mr. Ahtisaari is both a Finn and a member of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, which has been the principal missionary presence in northern Namibia since the 1870s […] Northern Lutheran families often gave their children a Finnish name borrowed from an esteemed missionary. Calling them Ahtisaari was in that tradition.[10]

When Ahtisaari met Nujoma in Luanda, Angola, in February 1979, it was in his new UN role. Nujoma writes of that meeting:

> It was clear to me that they [i.e., the UN mission, headed by Ahtisaari] did not represent the UN members who had supported us in our struggle but rather the element that wanted to settle the Namibian questions once and for all, whatever the concessions to South Africa that might be necessary, against the interests of the Namibian people.[11]

This was hardly a fair assessment, for the UN mission was investigating the modalities of implementing the UN plan for a transition to independence in Namibia. It did not represent any particular UN members, nor was it for the UN to make concessions to the South African government.

After the independence plan was embodied in UN Security Council Resolution 435 of September 1978, the South African government raised a series of objections to the UN Secretary-General's initial statement on how he intended to implement the plan. One South African allegation was that the UN was biased in favour of SWAPO and against the so-called internal parties in the territory. Ahtisaari, while increasingly criticised by SWAPO, had perforce to deal with the South African government, as the occupier of Namibia. Throughout his time as UN representative, he had to counter accusations voiced from time to time by South Africa that he was pro-SWAPO. The UN team that Ahtisaari headed was very disappointed that because of the South African objections, the plan for a transition to independence was not implemented in 1979, as he and others at the UN had hoped it would be.

## *A Decade of Delay*

When Nujoma next mentions Ahtisaari and others serving on what he calls 'yet another UN working team to South Africa,' it would seem that he is referring to a visit that Ahtisaari and other UN officials made to Southern Africa in 1980, for Nujoma writes: 'the negotiating game concerning Namibia was almost up.' Here he is alluding to the coming into office of the Reagan administration in the United States in January 1981. The apartheid regime in Pretoria knew that the Reagan administration would not exert the necessary pressure on South Africa to make it agree to implement the

10. Lewis 1989. A Namibian man, born in 1990, called Martti Ahtisaari Makanga, also known as Ahti. Paananen 2020.
11. Nujoma 2001, 293.



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UN plan and so to concede Namibian independence.[12] When the UN arranged a so-called pre-implementation meeting in Geneva in early 1981 at which all the Namibian parties were represented, that meeting soon collapsed, for the South African government made it clear that it was not willing to allow implementation to begin. In the years that followed, Chester Crocker, the US Assistant Secretary of State, tried to mediate an agreement for the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of the Cuban forces from Angola. As a UN diplomat, Ahtisaari could not actively support the mediation, but he was kept fully informed and in 1986 he helped bring the Angolan government back into the negotiations by going to Luanda and asking President dos Santos what Crocker said were 'all the right questions'. Crocker added: 'Ahtisaari's high credibility and diplomatic skill enabled him to speak with candor.'[13]

After a number of chapters in which he recounts the ten years of delay in the Namibian independence process, during which the conflict gradually intensified in southern Angola, Nujoma next mentions Ahtisaari when the SWAPO leader visited the UN headquarters in New York in 1988. That was the year of the breakthrough in negotiations that finally saw the South African government agree to implement the UN plan. Ahtisaari was mostly only on the fringes of these negotiations, but he did speak in support of the agreement reached between Angola, Cuba and South Africa at Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo in December 1988.[14]

After commenting that the UN Council for Namibia, which was made up of representatives of countries sympathetic to SWAPO, 'had done much' to further SWAPO's cause, Nujoma says that Ahtisaari, who as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Namibia was the key UN person charged with implementing the UN plan, 'was much less favourably disposed [than the UN Council] towards SWAPO.' Here Nujoma again fails to understand that Ahtisaari, as an international civil servant, could not express sympathies for any state or liberation movement. Nujoma goes on to say that Ahtisaari 'was seen by the Western powers as the man to handle the implementation of Resolution 435, leaving the Council with virtually no role in the implementation,'[15] which fails to recognise that it was the UN secretariat, not the Council, that was tasked with implementation. When implementation did finally begin, the Namibian children who had been given Ahtisaari's name when he had first arrived in Namibia were over ten years old. Interviewed as he finally began the task of heading the UN mission to Namibia, Ahtisaari said that he had lots of 'sisu' (the Finnish word for stamina), adding, 'I need it. I've waited 10 years to do this job.'[16]

## *1 April 1989*

Implementation began on 1 April 1989, as the UN Security Council had authorised. It is when he comes to the events of that day that Nujoma is most critical of Ahtisaari, in a section of his book that he headed 'Ahtisaari and a serious step backwards.' Besides

12. Nujoma 2001, 288.
13. Crocker 1992, 337.
14. Crocker 1992, 445. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015 are wrong on the month: 110–111.
15. Nujoma 2001, 376–377.
16. Lewis 1989.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

his view of what happened on that day, Nujoma offers new commentary on how he viewed Ahtisaari at that time. He says that Ahtisaari 'had for some time shown himself to be more concerned with his career at the United Nations than with his responsibilities towards the oppressed people of Namibia under illegal South African occupation. This had meant his becoming very much a collaborator with the US and British over such issues as "UN supervision and control" of the forthcoming elections and over South African charges of UN's partiality towards SWAPO.' Nujoma continued:

> He had greatly disappointed us in recent months when we heard rumours that he had tried persuading the Nordic governments to withhold the funds that they, Sweden most of all, had given SWAPO for humanitarian assistance of [sic] a number of years. He had failed, except with his own country, Finland, but this action had made it clear to us that this man […] was prepared to bow to the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the US and the UK, whose economic interests in Namibia were primary, and who were therefore prepared to assist in South Africa's violations of the cease-fire agreements.[17]

Much of this comment verged on the libellous: Ahtisaari's mission was to achieve the independence of Namibia, and to do that he had to act impartially. He had to investigate any violation of the ceasefire agreement, whether by SWAPO or by the South Africans and to ensure that UN funding did not benefit SWAPO to the disadvantage of other parties. He was an agent of the UN Security Council, which had, to the anger of SWAPO and the Non-Aligned Movement, reduced the strength of the UNTAG mission in early 1989.[18] The dispute over that funding had delayed the deployment of the mission in Namibia ahead of 1 April, but that could not be blamed on Ahtisaari.

When he comes to the events of 1 April, Nujoma writes as follows:

> Ahtisaari allowed himself to be convinced that there were no SWAPO forces in Namibia before 31 March 1989. When fabricated evidence of People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) "incursions" was produced, Ahtisaari swallowed the lie and agreed to permit the South African re-deployment of its 101 Battalion, who were in combat readiness. This diabolical secret plan had the full support of both the Reagan administration and British Prime Minister Thatcher. At this crucial and critical hour for Namibia's freedom, Ahtisaari's actions betrayed our cause and resulted in the deaths of many innocent civilians.'[19]

*The Namibian* newspaper held similar views, with one of its headlines saying 'UN to Blame. Bloodshed could have been avoided if Ahtisaari had acted.'[20] The paper did not go on, however, to explain how he could have acted to avoid bloodshed.

Nujoma's account of what happened on 1 April is both wrong in fact and self-serving, for it was he who gave the order for SWAPO fighters to enter Namibia,

17. Nujoma 2001, 396–397. On Finnish support to SWAPO see especially Soiri and Peltola 1999, 132, on Swedish support, Sellstrom 2002, 380–381. Cf. Heino 1992.
18. Tsokodayi 2011.
19. Nujoma 2001, 397.
20. *The Namibian*, 5 April 1989, quoted in Shubin 2008, 233.



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thinking that they could establish bases in northern Namibia and ask UNTAG to monitor them, though there was no provision for this in the UN independence plan. Nujoma's misjudgement led to the deaths of over 300 members of PLAN at the hands of the South African forces. Though SWAPO had been excluded from the 1988 negotiations over the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, it knew what had been agreed during those negotiations, and it was unrealistic for Nujoma to expect that there would be UNTAG personnel in northern Namibia on 1 April. Merikallio and Ruokanen are among those who suggest that in taking his unnecessary risk, Nujoma was influenced by Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and by his suspicions of South African intentions. Ahtisaari's own interpretation was that Nujoma mistrusted the process and, not believing the election would be free and fair, wanted his fighters on home soil to influence the process.[21]

Ahtisaari had to react to the infiltration from southern Angola into northern Namibia of heavily armed SWAPO combatants, and to South African insistence that its forces be allowed to confront them. The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who was present in Windhoek, encouraged him to concede this, and, not wanting South Africa to abandon the entire settlement plan, he permitted a limited number of its forces to move out of their bases to attack the SWAPO guerrillas. Had he not acted as he did, he was sure that the South Africans would have released their troops anyway from the bases to which they had been confined.[22] Instead of the implementation of the UN plan being thrown off course at the very beginning, his actions helped ensure that did not happen. The UN process was put back on track and led to a successful conclusion. Though Nujoma and other SWAPO leaders remained of the view that the South African forces should not have been allowed to attack the SWAPO guerrillas, they, like the South African government, wanted the transition process to continue and so tried to hide their bitterness, which re-emerged in Nujoma's text.

## *After April 1989*

Nujoma's last reference to Ahtisaari is merely to mention, almost in passing, that on 1 November 1989 he and the UNTAG press spokesman found that the South African claim that it had intercepted UNTAG radio messages concerning an infiltration of PLAN fighters into northern Namibia had no truth to it.[23] This rumour added to SWAPO's suspicions that the South Africans were trying to rig the election and its fear that the UN was not doing enough to prevent South Africa influencing the result. This reference to Ahtisaari apart, readers of *Where Others Wavered* will probably come away with the grossly misleading view of him as one who hampered the process leading to Namibia's independence instead of advancing it.

21. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 128. Nujoma probably also wanted to be able to boast that PLAN had liberated the north.
22. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 121.
23. Nujoma 2001, 419.



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Though Ahtisaari hardly deserves to be called 'King of Namibia,' the title of the relevant chapter in the Merikallio and Ruokanen biography,[24] his role in the country was key in the period of the implementation of the UN plan. His position was an extremely delicate one, because he had to work alongside the South African appointed Administrator-General, Louis Pienaar, in a country still administered, until independence, by South Africa. Nujoma does not see fit to mention any of this in *Where Others Wavered*. That those closest to Ahtisaari in 1989 appreciated his achievements as head of UNTAG can be seen in the most detailed account of his work in that role, that by Cedric Thornberry, published in 2004. Ahtisaari had to manage a mission involving 8,000 UN soldiers and civilians, which included a battalion of over 900 Finnish peacekeepers.[25] Nujoma makes no reference to, say, the Code of Conduct that Ahtisaari negotiated with the party leaders and was followed by the parties during the pre-election campaigning, as well as during and after the elections. The Code laid down the ground rules for political conduct in a country that had not experienced a free democratic election. When he reported to the Security Council on 6 October 1989, the Secretary-General described it as a document of 'central importance.' On 14 November, when he announced the result of the election, Ahtisaari was able to declare it 'free and fair.'

## *Conclusion*

It is apparent, then, that what Nujoma wrote about Ahtisaari's role in the process taking Namibia to independence is a gross distortion of that role. Why did he write as he did? The two men had got on well initially, with Ahtisaari seen by Nujoma as the sympathetic representative of a small neutral country in a Cold War in which SWAPO received all its weaponry for its armed struggle from the Soviet Bloc and saw the Western countries as allies of apartheid. Ahtisaari was chosen for his initial UN post with the support of the non-aligned countries. It was only after he had been appointed Special Representative by the Secretary-General that he was seen by Nujoma as associated with the Western countries who had devised a scheme to take Namibia to independence, a scheme that Nujoma did not like but which SWAPO came to realise was the best game in town. The long delays in implementing the UN plan for a transition to independence were very frustrating for Nujoma and help to explain his misjudgement on the eve of 1 April 1989. It seemed to Nujoma and others that Ahtisaari had been persuaded by Thatcher and the South African Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, to allow the South African forces to attack the SWAPO fighters, and this explains Nujoma's use of 'betrayal.'

While SWAPO remained suspicious of South African dirty tricks and the role of the UN, Ahtisaari saw his task to a successful conclusion, for he was able to declare the first democratic election free and fair. That election was for a Constituent Assembly to draw up a constitution for the new country. Finally, on 21 March 1990, Ahtisaari was able to see the South African flag lowered and the new Namibian one raised, in a

24. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, chapter 9. He is also called 'Deputy King.' See, Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 115.
25. Rysta and Lindfors 2006. Cf. Saunders 2007; Hearn 1999; United Nations n.d.



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ceremony attended by Nelson Mandela, indicating that the process leading Namibia to independence would help take South Africa as well from apartheid to a new democracy.[26]

After independence was won, Ahtisaari retained his interest in Namibia, as the country sought to adopt a neutral foreign policy in the post-Cold War world. Some claimed that he became President of Finland because of his role in the Namibian settlement.[27] As President, Ahtisaari was welcomed when he returned to Namibia in 1995, on which occasion he was given honorary citizenship. In 1997 a primary school in Windhoek was renamed after him on his 60th birthday.[28] He returned in 2000 to attend the tenth anniversary of independence celebrations and then remained silent in the face of Nujoma's attack on him when *When Others Wavered* appeared in 2001, Ahtisaari was again invited to return to Windhoek in 2010 to attend the celebrations that marked thirty years of independence and included the transfer of power from Nujoma to his successor as President of Namibia, Hifikepunye Pohamba. Now Ahtisaari was welcomed not only as the former President of Finland but as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. His Nobel award was awarded in part for his efforts to broker peace in Kosovo and Indonesia, but also for his role in bringing peace to Namibia and taking the country to independence.

Nujoma's criticisms of Ahtisaari's UN role should be understood in the context of the liberation struggle. Nujoma led a liberation movement involved in an armed struggle against South African occupation of Namibia. Ahtisaari was sympathetic to the cause of an independent Namibia, but as an international civil servant his first loyalty was to the UN for which he worked. As a realist, Ahtisaari knew that the apartheid regime in Pretoria was strongly against SWAPO coming to power in Namibia and he had to work within the confines of a situation in which South Africa was the occupying power. He came to accept that an agreement on the withdrawal of the Cuban troops from Angola was a way to gain the independence of Namibia and that the American plan to secure that withdrawal was 'a bold and adroit move', but had to remain neutral on the issue. 'Of course, you can say it would have been far more honourable to thump the table and demand that the South Africans get out of Namibia', he told his biographers, 'But they were just not going anywhere […] Principles alone do not solve anything. There is nothing immoral about the fact that you talk to all parties.'[29] Nujoma too came to accept that one had to talk to all parties, but he and Ahtisaari, playing very different roles, not surprisingly did not always agree on how to bring about the goal they both wanted to see: the independence of Namibia.

26. Ahtisaari contributed a foreword to Van Wyk et al. 1991.
27. See, for example, Shubin 2008, 303 n. 5.
28. The Finnish teachers' labour organisation arranged the renaming of the Wanaheda Primary School in Katutura as a way of honouring him. 'Martti Ahtisaari Primary School' 2008.
29. Merikallio and Ruokanen 2015, 111 and 103.



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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Outlining the Finnish Stance towards Namibia through Finnish Foreign Policy Publications: The Case of 1985

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*Abstract*

Between 1959 and 1995, the Foreign Ministry of Finland published an annual volume of key foreign policy texts, *Ulkopoliittisia lausuntoja ja asiakirjoja* (Statements and Documents on Foreign Policy). This chapter uses the 1985 volume of the series to examine the official Finnish stance towards Namibia. The Namibian aspiration for independence was a major subject in international discourse in the 1980s and an important foreign policy issue for Finland. The international position of Finland in the 1980s, combined with the long history of Finnish-Namibian relations, international decolonisation consensus and the acceleration in calls for Namibian independence, all play a role in determining the perspective of Finnish viewpoints towards Namibia at this time. The findings highlight the importance of Namibia as a long-lasting partner of Finland and Finnish diplomatic efforts to support Namibia's independence. The Namibian cause was also an opportunity for Finland to assert its own presence on the global stage. Namibia was used by the Finnish Foreign Ministry as an example of what it could achieve in the international arena. Finland advocated on behalf of the Namibian cause on a variety of international stages, thereby highlighting the importance of Namibian independence and, at the same time, emphasising Finnish actions through Nordic and UN executives.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Finland has a special relationship with Namibia,[1] which dates to 1860s, when the first Finnish missionaries arrived in what is now northern Namibia.[2] The Finnish impact in the country has been ever-present since and has focused on missionary work, education and healthcare. While Finnish actors in Namibia initially sought to remain (politically) neutral, they became involved in the Namibian fight for freedom and independence from the 1950s. During the Cold War, politicians in Finland tended to conceptualise and utilise decolonial arguments through international developments and events. Thus, the situation in Namibia has been a crucial foreign policy issue in Finland.[3]

In historical research, Finnish foreign policy has been described as *sui generis*, that is, as different from other countries. The historical context of World War II and the Cold War contributed to the formation of Finland's unique foreign policy status.[4] Similarly, the foreign policy of the Namibian independence movement also had discernibly unique features. By the early 1980s, Namibia was one of the few areas in Africa that had yet to achieve independence.[5] Namibians had established preliminary diplomatic connections within present-day Namibia and Southern Africa before German colonisation began in the 1880s. In the 1920s, Namibians began engaging in international diplomacy and contacted the League of Nations regarding their own right to rule. After World War II, amid the continent-wide decolonisation movement, Namibians sent an appeal for independence to the United Nations (UN). As a result, a UN resolution in 1966 called for the cessation of South African rule. In 1969, the UN Security Council ruled that South African control in Namibia was illegal.[6]

Given that Namibia has been one of the most notable African subjects for Finland, it is unsurprising that the amount of foreign policy material produced regarding the country was more ample when compared to many other countries. Hence, delving comprehensively into the relationship and stance between these two countries can be a daunting task and a comprehensive analysis of the material is impossible within the confines of this article. However, since the 1950s, the Foreign Ministry of Finland has published an annual collection of the most important public representations of official foreign policy. The subjects covered by these volumes include the abolition of apartheid and Namibia's ambition to achieve independence. This chapter examines Finnish-Namibian relations via the lens of official Finnish foreign policy through an examination of the 1985 volume of the book series *Ulkopoliittisia lausuntoja ja asiakirjoja* (*ULA*, Statements and Documents on Foreign Policy) published by Foreign

1. References to Namibia in this chapter cover both the contemporary Republic of Namibia as well as the former territory and mandate of South West Africa, which is unequivocally equal to present-day Namibia. This singular reference to Namibia is utilised throughout to simplify terminology.
2. For more information about the first missionaries, see, Peltola 1958; Peltola 2002.
3. Eirola 1990, 169–176, 183–185; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 67, 82–85, 90.
4. Alasuutari 1996, 11–12, 155, 159–161; Meres-Wuori 1998, 1–2, 93; Blomberg 2011, 42–54, 66–69. Heino also describes how Finnish foreign policy towards South Africa has been *sui generis*. Heino 1992, 7.
5. Bösl 2014, 5–6; Gleijeses 2017, 489–490. Piero Gleijeses describes how Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Namibia were 'The Last Round' of African states that gained independence.
6. Meres-Wuori 1998, 32–33; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 7–10; Saunders 2014, 27–30; Saunders 2017, 239; Gleijeses 2017, 489–490; Commonwealth Business Communications, n. d.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

Ministry of Finland between 1959 and 1995. This year has been chosen due to the high number of Namibia-related entries contained in the book and due to the tensions between the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and Namibia at the time.[7] Opposition within the UN Security Council to both the RSA and its apartheid system was also particularly noticeable in this year, with multiple recommendations to sever all ties to the regime.[8]

This chapter will continue with a brief description of the annual publications and a methodological and theoretical analysis of their use as source material, as well as providing a brief outline of the general features of the annual publications. It will then delve deeper into the content of the 1985 volume, describing the common features of the texts. Finally, the conclusion evaluates the findings vis-à-vis Finnish foreign policy towards Namibia in the mid-1980s.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse remarks on Namibia's status in order to pinpoint aspects of the Finnish stance towards Namibia. Such an analysis will help to ascertain the circumstances and context in Namibia that were deemed to be the most consequential for Finland in 1985. This chapter seeks to introduce and provide opportunities regarding how contemporary Finnish-Namibian relations can be approached and examined. It will highlight three separate but overlapping themes in terms of the Finnish stance towards Namibia: Finnish attitudes against South African apartheid, long-lasting support for Namibia's right to obtain independence and Namibia as a subject in Finnish bilateral relations.

## *The Book Series in Focus*

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the situation in Southern Africa was being viewed in Finland in the mid-1980s. The single units of research material in this chapter constitute entities that are based on facts and are positioned by narratives.[9] Texts referring to Namibia will be examined both as a singular view on the subject and as an instance of the wider Finnish stance towards Namibia and the international decolonisation/self-governance movement. When analysing the same subject on multiple levels, a broader view provides extensive ways to define attitudes and to pay attention to the 'plot' of how this relationship is being presented.[10]

In the case of political speeches and texts, the '[u]nderstanding and interpreting partly overlap,' meaning that rich material leads to analysation of both literal and underlying meanings. Implied meanings can often be the most meaningful content. Simultaneously, the text works as a mediator between information it contains and the recipients who interpret the given information. For this chapter, the combined form of foreign policy addresses includes the forum and the text itself with the possibility to evaluate characteristics of the performance.[11] This chapter considers what the 'real' aspirations of these texts were, as they could highlight Namibia without really

7. Luoto 1990, 43–45, 53–54; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 147–148.
8. Kiljunen 1990, 128–130.
9. Lawler 2002, 214–216.
10. Lawler 2002, 217.
11. Sauer 2002, 118–122, 132, 137.



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discussing the country. The Finnish involvement in Africa during the Cold War was a consequence of increased possibilities in foreign policy for Finland and a crucial means to participate in international politics without becoming too embroiled in the superpower rivalry of the era.[12] The distinct stance of Finland against colonialism can be identified as an overall part of the country's Cold War foreign policy.[13]

The first *ULA* yearbook, published in 1959, included material relating to the years 1956–1958 and after that the yearbook included documents and material from the previous year.[14] The purpose of the publication was to compile the most crucial public documents regarding the foreign policy of Finland. The publication was also intended to serve as an authoritative guide and to provide a comprehensive overview of the central concerns of Finnish foreign policy at the time.[15]

Each volume comprised a collection of texts and publications and followed roughly the same division based on separate chronological sections. Themes covered in the books varied and were selected on the basis of the most important, or at least prolific, themes of the year.[16] The books covering the years 1985–1987 include a section with the heading *Suomen suhtautuminen eteläisen Afrikan tilanteeseen* (Finland's stance on the situation in Southern Africa), an indication of the relevance of this subject in Finland at the time.[17] This section contains speeches and press releases regarding the Finnish stance towards South Africa and Namibia.[18] The main discourse and actions in Finland were concentrated on activities within the UN and concerning Nordic cooperation.[19] Reference catalogues for the years 1956–1986 were also published. Catalogues indexed the contents of the book series according to three categories: subject, country and individuals. Namibia is listed in every volume between 1966 and 1986.[20]

The length of the volume varied over the years, but on average each publication consisted of a hundred texts.[21] On average, Namibia was mentioned in eight texts per volume between 1966 and 1986.[22] It is vital to note that being mentioned in the text is not the same thing as being addressed. Some of the references consisted of being simply mentioned on the list of somewhat similar subjects. Thus, the focus is on the

12. Alasuutari 1996, 181–184; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 16, 79–80.
13. Soiri and Peltola 1999, 5, 7, 16, 68, 72; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 81–85. Soiri and Peltola emphasise that 'the questions of apartheid and colonialism were closely connected.' Soiri and Peltola 1999, 68.
14. The series covered the years 1956–1994. NB: When citing the *ULA* books, the year in the footnote refers to the year addressed in the book, not the year of publication.
15. *ULA*, 1968, foreword; *ULA*, 1971, foreword.
16. Recurring themes in books were, for example, Nordic cooperation, trade policies and disarmament issues.
17. *ULA*, 1985; *ULA*, 1986; *ULA*, 1987.
18. *ULA*, 1985, 176–190.
19. Kiljunen 1990, 131; OECD 1995, 35–36; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 5, 7, 122; Blomberg 2011, 76–78.
20. *ULA*, *Asiahakemisto, henkilöhakemisto ja maahakemisto, vv. 1956–1981*; *ULA Asiahakemisto, henkilöhakemisto ja maahakemisto, vv. 1982–1986*.
21. Between 1959 and 1994 the number of texts was at its lowest in 1964 (35) and at its highest in 1974 (223).
22. Between 1966 and 1986 the amount varied from 3 to 14 times per year, except in 1985, when Namibia was mentioned in 30 different texts. The mean for these years is approximately 8.6, with the 1985 book included, and 7.5 without it.



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cases in which the given subject is actually discussed. The publications and documents that were included in the volumes were representative of the most important official disclosures regarding Finnish foreign policy. For a text to be included in the book, which contained approximately a hundred texts, signalled its importance to Finnish foreign policy. The changing themes over the years only reinforces this interpretation, as only the most meaningful themes were included in the volumes.

## *Finland against South African Apartheid*

The illegitimacy of the South African regime was increasingly covered and condemned internationally as the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) was engaging in fighting against South African forces in the late 1960s. The membership of Finland in the UN Security Council in 1969–1970 and the decision in 1973 to channel Finnish aid to southwestern Africa via national liberation movements were pivotal moments that marked the increased interest of the Finnish government in Namibia. The decision by the Finnish authorities was based on the view that the liberation movements were representative of the Namibian people and that support was crucial for them to achieve independence. However, Finnish policymakers did not approve armament of such organisations. Christian A. Williams highlights this Nordic-Namibian solidarity work in support of SWAPO in his chapter in this book. Simultaneously, the discussion on decolonial aspects increased in Finnish politics and general support on these movements was favoured.

Finnish membership of the Security Council also raised the international status of the Nordic country and led to foreign efforts to influence its African agenda. The main aim of the Finnish government was to spark a discussion and to achieve consensus on the subject in the UN. To further this goal, Finland vied for influence among African and Asian countries. Finnish efforts in the UN on behalf of Namibia, a country which Bösl describes as a 'true child of the United Nations,' emphasise the characteristics of the relations between these two countries. The advocacy of the institutions of international order as a contribution to an effective and legitimate UN system signalled the increased importance of global governance that aimed to solve international problems. For Finland, opposition towards the South African regime and support for Namibia were two faces of the same coin and overlapped with the foreign policy goals.[23] The internationally favoured concept of decolonisation worked in favour of both policies.

Namibia was one of many developing areas that Finland wanted to help as part of its international agenda. Foreign Minister Paavo Väyrynen articulated this stance at the UN General Assembly on two occasions: in a speech delivered on 24 September 1985 and in a summary speech at the 40th session on 17 December 1985. Nonetheless, Namibia seemed to occupy an especially important place in Finnish thinking. Väyrynen remarked that 'there is a special reason to re-emphasise that Namibia is a unique responsibility of the United Nations,' partly due to the South African invasion

23. Vesa 1990, 146–147; Eirola 1990, 174–175, 184–188; Heino 1992, 6–22; OECD 1995, 16; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 7–18, 55–59, 69–83, 103–104; Siitonen 2000, 38; Bösl 2014, 9; Engh 2021, 127; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 68–69, 82–85.



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of Angola in September 1985. The independence claims helped Finland to justify its efforts to undermine the South African apartheid, as developments were delayed by the actions of the South African regime. Väyrynen also stressed that Finland had been one of the leading actors in the UN in regard to Namibian independence. Additionally, a Finnish peacekeeping battalion was told to be ready to be stationed in Namibia if sanctioned by the UN.[24]

Discussions with other Nordic countries offered one of the main forums for the expression of Finnish foreign policy. Together they pursued anti-apartheid policies, supporting the countries of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) and funding numerous liberation movements.[25] The decision to support the SADCC countries was stated in the communiqué of a meeting of Nordic foreign ministers in Oslo in October 1985.[26] In the same year, the Nordic countries also published a joint programme that listed all the measures they were willing to enact against the apartheid system in South Africa. Strikingly, however, this programme did not include any remarks about Namibian independence, even though it did cite multiple UN Security Council resolutions regarding the situation in southern Africa.[27]

It can be argued that an acknowledgement of the aim of independence for Namibia was merely a secondary goal of the anti-apartheid activities of Finland. To pinpoint this, a Finnish government press release from July 1985, regarding the situation in southern Africa, only briefly mentioned Namibia. Instead, it focused on the abolition of apartheid in the RSA.[28] It appears that the Namibian cause was sometimes merely justified through the prism of the 'evilness' of the Republic of South Africa, instead of its own legitimate claim. Finnish foreign policy texts tended to be aimed more against the South African regime than in favour of Namibian independence. It seemed to be the preferable order: the end of apartheid was a necessary precursor to Namibian independence.

In a statement made by Väyrynen during a referral debate of the Finnish parliament regarding prospective actions against South Africa in late 1985, the abolition of apartheid and Namibian independence were mentioned in the same order: the former before the latter. Väyrynen, however, did not state outright that one should occur before the other.[29] In a speech that Väyrynen delivered at a Paasikivi Society meeting in 16 September 1985, he even assessed that the whole question on Namibia was at risk of being overshadowed because of the internal situation in the Republic of South Africa.[30]

However, Finnish foreign policy actors did not necessarily see any conflict of priorities here. Due to South African rule in Namibia, it might have been perceived that independence in Namibia needed approval from Pretoria, which could not be achieved before the abolition of apartheid. Consequently, Finnish foreign policy

24. *ULA*, 1985, 34–49, 58–63.
25. Vesa 1990, 148; OECD 1995, 35–36; Meres-Wuori 1998, 101; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 5, 15, 121–123, 138–139; Gleijeses 2017, 487; Engh 2021, 133–135.
26. *ULA*, 1985, 124–126; Kiljunen 1990, 131–132.
27. *ULA*, 1985, 182–186; Kiljunen 1990, 131–132.
28. *ULA*, 1985, 176.
29. *ULA*, 1985, 187–190.
30. *ULA*, 1985, 448.



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actors may have judged that it was futile to invest greatly in the lateral phase of the process in 1985. Yet, a clear expression of this mindset is not indicated in the yearbook. Additionally, the position of Namibia was also unique as it was battling for independence against an adjacent occupier. This was dissimilar to European colonial rule in Africa, and hence meant that the relationship between Namibia and South Africa would be quite different to the other African countries after their independence.

## *Namibia's Right for Independence and the Long-Lasting Relations with Finland*

During the first half of the twentieth century, the area of Namibia was only known in Finland through the missionary activities of *Ovamboland* (*Ambomaa* in Finnish). In the 1950s and 1960s, awareness of Namibia shifted towards foreign policy issues. The critical moment in this shift was the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960. The growing resistance against colonialism and racism in southern African liberation movements was increasingly discussed in Finland in the 1960s.[31] The UN charter condemned all discrimination, and hence in Finland the oppressive actions of the South African government in Namibia were interpreted as being illegal. Yet, the UN could not agree on the measures required to enable the change.[32] Concurrently, the missionary work altered as the Namibian church evolved in the 1960s, and in the 1970s it seceded from Finnish influence to become an independent church.[33]

For a small nation such as Finland, foreign policy was always of crucial concern. Nonetheless, it had to pursue matters in a sensitive manner throughout the Cold War, due to the proximity of Soviet Union and because of the experiences during and immediately after the Second World War. Hence, Finland deliberately focused on issues in less developed countries that were the most removed from superpower rivalries. Decolonisation, Namibia and liberation movements formed an integral, but not the most important, part of Finnish foreign policy and in many ways provided Finland with more room for manoeuvre in terms of its influence.

From the 1970s until the late-1980s, Finnish influence in Namibia was twofold: while NGOs and Lutheran missions continued to aid Namibians locally and promoted peaceful resistance, Finnish foreign policy strived to actively support the Namibian liberation movement internationally. The difference in these two actor groups can also be measured in terms of the swiftness of action. Whereas NGOs and other organisations could adapt rapidly in different situations, Finnish foreign policy shifted slowly but steadily in favour of Namibia.[34]

31. Kiljunen 1990, 126–127; Vesa 1990, 146–147, 160; Eirola 1990, 183–185; Heino 1992, 6–22; OECD 1995, 16; Meres-Wuori 1998, 104–106; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 7–18, 55–59, 69–83; Siitonen 2000, 38; Saunders 2014, 30; Bösl 2014, 5; Engh 2021, 132–13; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 82–83.
32. Kiljunen 1990, 130–131; Vesa 1990, 146–148; Eirola 1990, 186–187.
33. Eirola 1990, 176.
34. Kiljunen 1990, 126–127; Vesa 1990, 146–147; Eirola 1990, 181–183; Heino 1992, 10–11, 27–29; OECD 1995, 22; Soiri and Peltola 1999, 55–110; Siitonen 2000, 9; Saunders 2014, 27–28, 30; Bösl 2014, 5; Engh 2021, 134. For more on the role of civil society (NGOs) in Finland towards Namibia, see Soiri and Peltola 1999, 18–54.



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No matter what the plausible priority was in terms of the Finnish viewpoint (abolition of apartheid prior to Namibian independence), the status of Namibia and Finnish attitudes towards it were still crucial as Finnish foreign policy representatives outlined. At the twentieth anniversary seminar of the Paasikivi Society on 12 November 1985, Väyrynen stressed the importance of Finnish membership in the UN and how this international body highlighted the Finnish-Namibian relationship. For Finland, Namibia had been one of the major subjects of debate at the UN from the early 1970s, due to the century-long missionary connections it had in the region. Many UN motions were initiated by Finland at this time. In his speech Väyrynen referenced Finnish efforts to establish the Namibia fund in 1970, the Finnish motion at the UN Security Council against the RSA presence in Namibia in 1971, the representation of Finland in the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) and the Finnish motion on establishing the Nationhood Programme for Namibia in 1976.[35]

To support Namibian independence, Finland took a stance against colonialism and for a people's right of self-governance. This was emphasised in the speech delivered by Väyrynen, in the culminating event of Namibia Day in Helsinki on 26 August 1985.[36] Again, opposition to apartheid was a prominent theme in the speech, but Väyrynen also highlighted that Finland had been supporting Namibian claims in the UN because of the long history between the two areas and initiating actions to its independence. Finland wanted to emphasise long-term decision making in advance of an independent Namibia and wanted to keep Namibians aware of the support of Finland.[37] The long-lasting relationship with Namibia and the international movement towards decolonisation provided new possibilities for Finnish foreign policy.[38]

The Namibian aspiration for independence was also promoted as the South African regime in Namibia in the 1980s was judged to be illegal by the UN. Väyrynen highlighted this on 29 November 1985 in the Finnish Parliament during a plenary session held concerning the implementation of a law to restrict trade with RSA.[39] As international focus was on the abolition of apartheid in the RSA through the imposition of sanctions, Finnish politicians saw a chance to advance the Namibian situation.[40] Additionally, the tense atmosphere in the area had led to increased violence from the South African regime, which pushed Finns even more towards supporting Namibia.[41]

The contemporary perception of Finland's non-colonial history and general opposition to neo-colonial influences in Africa eased its activities towards southern African states.[42] The Namibian claim for independence appears to have appealed to Finnish policymakers as the subject was extensively heightened in Namibia-related

35. *ULA*, 1985, 57.
36. Known as Heroes' Day after independence. The day commemorates the beginning of the Namibian War of Independence. On 26 August 1966, the Namibian liberation fighters engaged for the first time with RSA government forces. Commonwealth Business Communications, n. d.
37. *ULA*, 1985, 177–179.
38. Soiri and Peltola 1999, 100–101; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 83–85, 89.
39. *ULA*, 1985, 187–190; Saunders 2017, 239–240.
40. *ULA*, 1985, 177–179, 187–190.
41. Luoto 1990, 50; Eirola 1990, 175–176.
42. Soiri and Peltola 1999, 100–101; Suonpää and Välimäki 2021, 83–85, 89.



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speeches and publications. The long history between the Finns and Namibians could have also provided psychological consolidation to the claims of the latter and not just any other group of people in Africa. However, the independence objective was almost always associated with other international issues. Thus, from the Finnish point of view, it was closely related to more general human rights issues in the Global South and widespread decolonisation movement.

## *Namibia as a Common Denominator for Finnish Bilateral Relations in Africa and Beyond*

The subject of Namibia was also present during state visits to Finland and by Finnish diplomats in Africa in 1985.[43] Namibia was mostly, but not always, mentioned in relation to other African countries. Väyrynen visited Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe during a tour of Africa in January 1985. During these visits, he addressed the Namibian situation with local political leaders. In Tanzania, the question of Namibia was raised in terms of the legitimacy of Namibian self-determination. Väyrynen praised President Julius Nyerere for his role in facilitating the joint meeting of foreign ministers from Nordic countries and South African frontline states[44]. He also commented favourably on the overall effort of the frontline states in regard to achieving Namibian independence.[45]

In Zambia, Väyrynen emphasised that Namibian independence 'had been [a] waited much too long' and pinpointed Finnish political efforts to achieve this goal. He linked the Finnish-Namibian relationship to contemporary Finnish efforts to support Namibia financially and on the international stage, and underlined the financial dimension towards southern African countries.[46] During his visit to Zimbabwe, Väyrynen by and large followed the same discourse as he had during his previous two visits to Zambia and Tanzania. Again, he questioned the legitimacy of South African rule and highlighted the Namibian right to self-determination and role of the international community in enforcing it.[47]

When Zambian and Tanzanian diplomats visited Finland in February and June 1985 respectively, the Namibian situation was again discussed. In the speech delivered by President Mauno Koivisto of Finland to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, the former emphasised the role of the latter in efforts to find a peaceful solution in southern Africa and in solving the Namibian question. Koivisto also wanted to ensure that countries shared the same motif: 'I think we do agree that there will be no lasting solution [in Namibia] unless the abhorrent system of apartheid is abolished.'[48]

President Koivisto and Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa expressed sympathy for Namibians to Julius Nyerere and acknowledged the influence of the Republic of South

43. For more on the judicial status and hierarchy of state visits to and from Finland, see Meres-Wuori 1998, 178–183.
44. Tanzania, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola. Saunders 2017, 241.
45. *ULA*, 1985, 338–342.
46. *ULA*, 1985, 343–347.
47. *ULA*, 1985, 348–352.
48. *ULA*, 1985, 356–359.



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Africa on African countries. Remarkably, this was the only time in the 1985 *ULA* publication when a statement regarding the problematic conditions in southern Africa went alongside a recognition of its influence in other African countries, especially in terms of the Namibian situation.

The visit of Nyerere also sparked something special. Despite long-lasting relation and activities in the UN, Finnish policymakers positioned Finland further away from Namibia in comparison to other countries and partly in a spectator role. Koivisto merely admitted sharing the uneasiness and concern of Nyerere regarding the future of Namibia without any indication of any further Finnish diplomatic initiatives. Furthermore, Sorsa stated that Finland would simply monitor developments towards Namibian independence. Additionally, Namibia was now clearly positioned to be the 'last colony in the African continent.'[49]

Namibia was also a matter of interest in state visits by Finnish ministers to countries outside Africa. In Norway, Väyrynen was convinced that the Nordic Working Group on South Africa would enhance Nordic frontline action towards the independence of Namibia.[50] Similarly, when visiting Czechoslovakia in 1985, Sorsa insisted in a speech that world governments should keep in mind the Namibian situation and the illegitimacy of the South African regime.[51]

During these state visits, the Finnish objective seems to have been to frame Namibia as being a subject of mutual concern to both Finland and the host country. Namibia was emphasised as being an important subject for Finland and at the same time the significance of others was also highlighted, sometimes as being more crucial than Finnish foreign policy initiatives. In contrast to the general promotion of the Finnish role in promoting the Namibian cause during multilateral meetings, Finnish policymakers seemed to place more emphasis on the promotion of the role of other countries in meetings with Finland. There might have been some uneasiness in promoting the Finnish role in the process and maybe the underrating of Finnish actions was stressed in an attempt to try and make other countries take responsibility for certain measures. The risk of being perceived as playing too significant a role as actors in the sequence could have led to other countries abstaining from taking any proactive measures because of the sense that Finland would initiate everything.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has examined the Finnish stance on Namibia through a collection of foreign policy texts in the 1985 *ULA* yearbook of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The narrative suggests that support for Namibian independence was very strong among Finnish policymakers and relied heavily on Finland's active role in the international community, especially the UN, and long-term relations between Finland and Namibia.

49. *ULA*, 1985, 406–411. Translated by the author. The original text reads: 'Afrikan mantereen viimei[n]en siirtomaa[a].'
50. *ULA*, 1985, 375–380.
51. *ULA*, 1985, 424–426.



https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

From Namibia's point of view, the Finnish texts seem to seldomly put forward real argumentation and discussion about the African nation. Instead, the issue was utilised to heighten the problematic nature of apartheid and the delicate situation of vulnerable people who were under South African influence as a whole. Using Namibia as a frequent example, it addresses its significance as being more important than many other African counterparts. Namibia can be perceived as being a perfect example for Finland to emphasise broader contemporary problems in international relations and Finland's position in the world both ideologically and factually.

The independence of Namibia seemed to be a self-evident goal, but there were only a few concrete suggestions regarding how to obtain it. Namibia was an entity that was always in the background but rarely truly addressed. The highlighted importance of Namibia and its common history with Finland were ever present, but the true meaning was not transmitted. It is likely that the texts providing the most concrete actions to resolve the Namibian situation were not included in the yearbook as they were either concealed or did not adequately express a broad view of the case. The forums in which the subject of Namibia was addressed and the difficulty of finding solutions that would satisfy all parties might have also hindered Finland from providing anything concrete and to rely on general viewpoints on the subject.

Continuous but inconsistent usage of Namibia in Finnish foreign policy dialogue tends to give the country a two-fold role: being at the same time seemingly very important and somewhat irrelevant. Could this dichotomy be explained as an attempt to keep Namibia in the minds of others while not making the country a sole target of Finnish foreign policy? The risk of such over usage of a single target could have easily had a negative influence on its core value and even turn against itself.

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52. Headlines of the texts and headings are translated by the author of the chapter.



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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

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https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.28

# Abstract

## Colonial Aspects of Finnish-Namibian Relations, 1870–1990
Cultural Change, Endurance and Resistance

Edited by Leila Koivunen and Raita Merivirta

This edited collection re-examines the long history of Finnish-Namibian relations through the lenses of both *colonialism without colonies* and anti-colonialism. The book argues that although Finland never acquired colonies, Namibia was once treated in the areas of culture and knowledge formation in a manner now recognised as colonial. Namibian people's ways of being in the world was transformed when the Finnish Missionary Society started its work in Owambo in 1870 and introduced Christianity and European modes of education, medicine, material culture and social practices. In time, cultural colonialism faded and during the Namibian struggle for independence from South African rule in 1966–1990 Finns took an actively anti-colonial approach. The book was written as a collaborative effort of Namibian, Finnish and South African scholars.



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