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Becoming Who We Are:
An Examination of Identity Construction
Among the German Colonists and
the Indigenous Southwest Africans
In the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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But most of all, I wish to thank God, in whose image and likeness all people are created. We are diverse, but we are all a part of the human family created and loved by God. Soli Deo Gloria!

Introduction

When I consented to do a Master's thesis on the topic of Namibia, I had no idea how much this process and what I learned from it would coincide with my own personal journey. I was tasked with working in the Namibia Archives and told to find a box, examine and catalogue its contents, and see where that led me.

What I discovered was that instead of merely cataloguing dusty old documents from the struggle for Namibian independence, what I had really stumbled upon was a Pandora's Box filled with intriguing hints about two (but in reality, many more than two) peoples. One group was comprised of the many tribes who were the indigenous people of what was then known as German South Africa (later Namibia), while the other was the waves of German colonists who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And what intrigued me most of all as I read through the documents was the concept of sociological, and even theological, identity construction.

The documents in the box included reports made by the Odendaal Commission,[1] and various contemporaneous meeting notes from other committees[2]. These documents reported on how the South African administration, then charged with governance of South West Africa, described the conditions in the region. This included comprehensive descriptions of the land, the economics, the education, the resources, and the indigenous peoples. This latter group, to my

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[1] The Odendaal Commission. *Commission of Inquiry Into South West Africa Affairs (The Odendaal Commission),* Special Committee on the Situation With Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, Conference Room Paper No. 64/1.

[2] These include Robson, Mr. John F. *SC III Note on the Meeting*, United Nations: New York 10017, United Nations Council for Namibia Room 3310, 1975-1983; Robson, Mr. John F. *SC III Note for the Chairman*, United Nations: New York 10017, United Nations Council for Namibia Room 3310, 1971-1983; Robson, Mr. John F. *SC I Note for the Chairman*, United Nations: New York 10017, 112th; Meeting (Closed) TB/yc Wednesday 5 January 1983 A.M. (Following Plenary) Trusteeship Council Chamber; and Lusaka, H.E. Mr. Paul J. F. (Zambia), Temporary Chairman. *Note for the Chairman*.

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chagrin, was described in great detail, even down to the tone of their skin color! This appalled me, but it also sparked my interest in exploring how the indigenous peoples may have viewed themselves versus how the colonists described them. What I wanted to learn was how a people's sense of their cultural identity was formed, both from the standpoint of people who chose their own identity and from those who were forced by oppression to unite to construct a new identity.

This is a multifaceted question. The question of how identity is formed on an individual basis lurks in the background, but for the more focused purposes of my argument, I shall explore only how identity is constructed on a sociological level.

But even narrowing it down to identity construction on a sociological level contains layers of questions to be considered. For indeed, the ingredients in the recipe that is the formation of a people's identity include items such as race, religion, economics, politics, traditions and history, to name only a few. Some of these categories overlap with each other, and there are many strands to be sorted before one can arrive at any clear sense of what makes a people who they are.

While being very different from each other, there was at least one thing that the German colonists and the indigenous West South Africans had in common, and this surprised me: Both groups had to construct their identities using one part self-determination and another part imposed from without. I entered this research journey believing that the indigenous West South Africans were a people whose identity was forced upon them, while the German colonists chose their own identity. And while this statement is true, it is not adequate. For while the indigenous people were indeed defined by the colonists, they already had their own unique traditions, cultures, religions, etc. What they had to navigate, then, was how to incorporate these native

qualities with the new roles they faced as oppressed people who were struggling for their own independence.

The story of the German colonists parallels this. For as much as they were given the opportunity to forge their own identity in the new land they inhabited, they still were heavily influenced by the culture of the homeland. Later, after both World Wars, they also had to navigate their new status as subjects of the South African government who were mandated with administration of the country after Germany lost both wars.

This then, is an attempt to explore how peoples construct their own identity, from within and without. The story is told within the era of the German colonial occupation of Southwest Africa from the late 19th century until the period just after the Second World War. It is a story with a grand scope, and it has helped me understand the dance of individuality and communality that I believe is choreographed by God.

In this thesis, I will make three main assertions: First, I claim that sociological identity construction is not solely accomplished through a peoples' self-determination, but is also affected, positively and/or negatively, by their interaction with other cultures. I further claim that the hybrid identity that results will share elements of both the original culture and that of the peoples with whom they interact, while still being unique from both. Finally, I claim that underlying and overarching all such identity constructs is the biblical assertion that all of humanity shares a common identity as children of God.

Admittedly, arguing these claims requires a great deal of narrative describing the history of these peoples. The reader is therefore asked to be patient as we chart some of the history of the German settlers and that of the indigenous peoples of Southwest Africa. Such narration is

essential to considering these claims, because it is only in knowing where a people come from that one might begin to understand them as they are now.

      Scripture tells us that in the beginning, "God created humankind in his [sic] image, in the image of God he [sic] created them; male and female he [sic] created them."[3] This then is our ultimate identity as children of God. I believe this identity both transcends and is lived out in the identities we have as unique peoples. My hope is that in describing the similarities and differences between the identity constructs of the indigenous West South Africans and that of the German colonists, we may see what unites us as peoples, as people and as children of God. *Soli Deo Gloria*!

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[3] Genesis 1:27, New Revised Standard Bible (NRSV), (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 2009). I acknowledge the non-inclusive language utilized in the NRSV, and while I do not endorse non-inclusive language, my desire is to remain faithful to the original language of whatever sources I cite.

Chapter One
Social Identity Construction Theory

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall offer a brief discussion of an admittedly complex concept: How does a group of people construct a common social identity? To address this question, I will consider the work of two psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John Turner[4], whose studies in the late 1970s offer an intriguing and useful framework for considering social identity construction. What we shall discover here in examining their work will be used in later chapters to explore how the indigenous peoples of Southwest Africa and the German colonists formed their own identities.

Tajfel and Turner name three types of cognitive functions that together comprise a group's social identity. The first of these, *social categorization*, involves classifying people, both inside one's group and outside one's groups, according to certain characteristics which the individual members share in common. For example, one might have a group of jazz enthusiasts, or of daughters, or of Democrats. This categorization includes various types of demographical information, some of which is chosen by the individual (such as someone who chooses to have an interest in jazz or a particular political persuasion), while some have no choice in the category into which they fall (daughters, for example).

The second function is *social identification*. In this stage, we choose to identify ourselves with members of a particular group whose characteristics we share and value. In this function, there is a subtle but important distinction to be drawn. Here, the person not only chooses to enjoy jazz or be a Democrat, for example, but it is taken a step further when the person chooses to

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[4] McLeod, Saul. *Social Identity Theory* (2008). Retrieved from http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html. Accessed online 14 May 2013.

affiliate with other like-minded people. And in the case of a demographic which was not chosen by the person (such as the role of being a daughter), this person might choose to affiliate with a group of daughters outside her own family to share common interests and goals.

Finally, we get to *social comparison*, in which we compare our group to other groups in order to feel good about ourselves. It is easy to see how this final stage can easily slip into prejudice, although this is not necessarily always the outcome. Jazz enthusiasts, Democrats and daughters might note that they are different from, say, those who prefer reggae music or are Republicans or are brothers, but they do not automatically have to take the stance that they are superior to those who are "not them."

With Tajfel and Turner's theory in mind, we will now explore in the following chapters the history of the German colonists and the indigenous Southwest Africans. The stories of both peoples will then be rewoven back into the tapestry of the theory of social identity construction to consider how each group became its own distinct people. Finally, we will take a brief look toward the future and ask what role identity construction might still be playing in Namibia today.

Chapter Two
The Germans: From Settlers to Sudwesters

<u>Introduction</u>

Some of the research for this chapter was done by reading *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* by Daniel Joseph Walther.[5] Walther's book covers two periods of history in which the Germans lived in South West Africa (SWA), 1894-1919, and again 1919-1939. These are the period of German settlement and self-rule in what became Namibia prior to World War I (WWI), and the years of the South African mandated administration after WWI up to the advent of World War II (WWII). Walter's book focuses primarily on the Germans, with little reference to the indigenous population, as might be expected from the title of his work.

Hence the work deals with the struggles, culture, achievements and mistakes made by the German colonists. These I will explore in some depth to illustrate how their identities were transformed from strict German nationalists who happened to live abroad, to two groups, German loyalists and South West African settlers. Then in the third stage, the settlers finally became Sudwesters, a new cultural group which was an amalgam of the German nationalism inherent in the older generation of settlers and their children who identified more with the new land in which they lived rather than with the Fatherland. It was this latter group whose identity, while shaped by both old and new, was nevertheless unique in its emergence.

Another work I studied for this chapter was an article by Gretchen Bauer[6] in which she reviewed Walther's book[7]. Bauer is critical of Walther's book because she believes he basically

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[5] Walther, Daniel Joseph. *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Ohio University Press, Athens, 2002).

[6] I am indebted to Larry Henning, who facilitated my correspondence with Richard Lindberg, and to Mr. Lindberg for contacting Solveig Kjeseth, who provided me with much helpful information, including the lead on this article by Gretchen Bauer.

ignores the role of the indigenous populace in his book about the German colonists. Her review

is short, but I shall examine her claims vis à vis Walther's work to examine the way the German

settlers constructed their identity in South West Africa. I shall also use her claims that he ignores

the indigenous populace to segue into discussing in the next chapter how the indigenous South

West Africans saw their own identity, and how it was affected by the German settlers and the

struggle for independence.

From Germans to Settlers

In order to discuss how the Germans came to be in South West Africa, one must first

issue a disclaimer that one person's "settler" is another person's "invader." Depending upon the

lens through which one chooses to view any historical event, one may see the event as

benevolent, oppressive or at least indifferent. In discussing Walther's book and its implications, I

will use the terms "settlers" and "colonists" interchangeably while refraining from using terms

with negative connotations such as "invaders" or the like. When I discuss Gretchen Bauer's

review of Walther's book, I shall attempt to see through her eyes how the neglect of the mention

of the indigenous population might warrant labels with negative connotations. However, I shall

avoid such labels and instead describe my understanding of what actually happened while

inviting the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about how or if to label the Germans.

As stated previously, the first part of Walther's book deals with the years from 1894-

1919, the years of German colonial rule of South West Africa. Walther writes, "Before that year,

various concession companies had essentially run the region from 1884 to 1890, with little

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[7] Gretchen Bauer. "Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia (Book)." *International Journal Of African Historical Studies* 36, no. 1 (February 2003): 245. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCO*host* (accessed February 19, 2013).

official German interference."[8] From this one might think that the population was comprised solely of German settlers and indigenous Africans. However, many of these concession companies were under British control,[9] and there were also a number of Afrikaaners living in the region.

In the early 1890s, two groups of indigenous peoples, the Herero and the Nama, fought with each other over possession of land for grazing of their herds.[10] Eventually, these groups found one thing upon which they could agree and unite: to rebuff the encroachment of Boer occupation and control in the lands over which they fought.[11] When the German settlers eventually assumed control over the region, the Herero and Nama peoples rebelled against the German occupation in 1904.[12] This led to devastating losses for both indigenous groups: the Herero lost 80% of their population and the Nama suffered the loss of 50% of their people.[13]

When the violence in the region finally ended, the German settlers then turned their attention toward strengthening their own presence in South West Africa against the interests of white non-German inhabitants such as the Boers and the British. They found in these early years great support from the homeland for this endeavor. Walther writes, "The presence of these non-Germans motivated authorities in Berlin and Windhoek (the capital of SWA) to pursue a policy of settlement in Southwest Africa to secure it as an economically viable German colony."[14]

The pursuit of this policy of settlement included an intentional emphasis on planting and growing a farm-based society. "…[C]olonies offered a locale, away from the homeland's cultural

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[8] Walther, 9.
[9] Walther, 10.
[10] Jeremy Sarkin and Carly Fowler. "Reparations for Historical Human Rights Violations: The International and Historical Dimensions of the Alien Torts Claims Act Genocide Case of the Herero of Namibia." *Human Rights Review* 9, no. 3 (September 2008): 335-337. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 10, 2013).
[11] Sarkin and Fowler, 339.
[12] Sarkin and Fowler, 333.
[13] Sarkin and Fowler, 333.
[14] Walther, 10.

and social changes, to preserve a preindustrial, agrarian vision of Germany [sic] society."[15] The

goal was that:

> …colonization would not only contribute to turning the region into an economically viable German colony but would also provide emigrants with a place to preserve their cultural identity. In essence, the cultural guardians desired to create a second Germany, a place where their vision of Deutschtum could be realized.[16]

As important as economic success in the colony was, the German government was most

eager to recreate in South West Africa what they saw as the ideal German society. This did not

mean, however, that they saw life in the homeland as ideal. In fact, one of the reasons for

colonization could be construed as a desire for a second chance at the German ideal.

> They wanted to build a new German nation in SWA [South West Africa], away from the anxieties and dislocations resulting from industrialization and the dissatisfaction over the "incompleteness" of German unification – that is to say, a Germany without social, regional, and confessional divisions.[17]

To accomplish this, Theodor Leutwein (territorial captain, 1894-98; governor, 1898-

1905)[18] looked to the example of the indigenous people the colony had so recently suppressed

(thus engaging in the social comparison stage of identity construction). "Leutwein knew that the

Herero successfully raised cattle, and based on their experience he decided that the future of the

colony lay in raising livestock for the world market."[19] At first, Leutwein allowed former

servicemen to purchase land at a reduced rate because he recognized the difficulty of attracting

immigrants with capital for investments to cross the ocean and forge a new life on another

continent. "However, colonization by former soldiers was for him a temporary measure until

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[15] Walther, 10-11.
[16] Walther, 12.
[17] Walther, 12.
[18] Walther, 10
[19] Walther, 14.

more suitable immigrants – settlers who could establish a profitable cattle industry – would arrive."[20]

And while waiting for those "more suitable immigrants" to arrive, Leutwein knew that in order for the colony to survive, a new group of German loyalists would have to be created with the import of women into the colony. Women were perceived as the custodians and transmitters of German ideals and culture. Because women traditionally were charged with the raising of children, they held the future of the German colony in their hands as they engaged in the socialization of identity.

> While it was the father who passed his citizenship onto his children, the educated and propertied class maintained that "the mother gives them, in most cases, their language and therefore the feeling of affiliation to their race."[21]

So the Deutsche Kolonial-Gesellschaft für Südwest-Afrika (DKG), a para-governmental organization that promoted German colonialism, began a campaign of sending young German women to SWA to serve as domestic servants for the ex-servicemen with the hopes that they would be found suitable as wives.[22] But not just any young German women would do. Well-to-do German women need not apply.

> A young lady, who came from a better family circle and enjoyed a better education, would have difficulty finding a husband who only approximately corresponds to her demands.[23]

Walther goes on to say,

> Because of the cultural and educational level of the white male population and the rigors and demands of life in SWA, the DKG sent only "simple," healthy young German women (einfache Mädchen) who were not afraid of hard work. Furthermore, they had to possess knowledge of agrarian labor (e.g., cattle breeding, gardening, planting) as well as of basic household chores like cooking,

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[20] Walther, 14.
[21] Walther, 47.
[22] Walther, 48.
[23] Correspondence from DKG official Mertens to Kuhn, Cassel, 23 Aug. 1899, BAP 61K01/176, as quoted in Walther, 49, footnote 17.

ironing, washing, and sewing. The society believed that this was the type of woman settler that SWA needed and wanted.[24]

This "cherry-picking" of women deemed suitable for colonization indicates that the Germans were engaging in social categorization and identification.

As mothers, one of the most important tasks was to make sure the children were raised speaking the German language, "language being 'a metaphor for culture.'"[25] Thus, mothers teaching their children the German language was Step One in the formation and maintenance of loyalty to the Fatherland in the next generation.

This commitment to inculcating the German language will also be seen in the emphasis the colonists placed on German-language education when children became too old for their mothers to educate them in the home. Although the state had initiated educational programs since 1894, "a comprehensive program was not instituted until 1906."[26] Thus began Step Two of the creation of the next wave of loyal Germans in SWA. But Step Two also inaugurated a change in attitude, for no longer was the goal only to create loyal Germans abroad. The goal was now expanded:

> Over time, children were supposed to transfer their love of Heimat to a love of their native region and, eventually, to love of the entire German nation.[27]

Thus, loyalty to SWA was encouraged as a necessary outgrowth of loyalty to the Fatherland. This loyalty would, it was hoped, enlarge to a vision of a united German nation, including the Fatherland and the colony. They even included study of SWA in the curriculum

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[24] Walther, 49.
[25] Walther, 54.
[26] Walther, 66.
[27] Walther, 75.

because "officials believed local studies would engender a feeling of belonging to the 'new'

Germany while simultaneously strengthening the bond to the old homeland."[28]

This next stage of identity construction, that of the colonist who sees his or her own SWA

identity as an extension of loyalty to Germany (Deutschtum), was reflected in several ways.

From nomenclatures used for SWA localities to the intentional modeling of SWA infrastructures

after those found in Germany,[29] the message was clear: The German colonists were a unique

extension of German culture across the sea. And for a while, this suited the settlers quite well.

> To ensure that this would always remain so…the cultural elites, in Germany and
> SWA, utilized the media, activities, and structures to demonstrate this ambiguous,
> at times tenuous, connection.[30]

This included the development of several aspects of culture, including music (even their own

territorial anthem), poetry, architecture and fairs.[31] This development puts the SWA German

colonists in the first two stages of Tajfel and Turner's model, that of social categorization and

social identity, but at this point they had not really taken the next step into social comparison, at

least not with the Fatherland (of course, they did differentiate themselves from the indigenous

population).

Another component of this cultural identity formation was the construction of churches

and the creation of confessional communities.[32] Walther notes, "Churches and religious

communities not only served spiritual needs but also acted as community builders."[33] From

Walther's perspective, one gets the impression that religion was subsumed into the culture in

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[28] Walther, 75.
[29] Walther, 87.
[30] Walther, 97.
[31] Walther, 97-98.
[32] Walther, 98f.
[33] Walther, 99.

much the same way as music, poetry, architecture and fairs. It was a piece of their identity, but not their entire identity.

But events in the Fatherland and elsewhere would soon force the settlers to re-examine their identities, moving them into the third stage of social identity construction, *social comparison.* For the World Wars changed the landscape, as well as the administration, of life in SWA, and the settlers had to decide who they were in the wake of it.

After the Germans were defeated in WWI, control of SWA was transferred by the League of Nations from SWA to South Africa on October 1, 1920.[34] Walther remarks in several places that the South African administration treated the Germans and the South Africans equally. He writes, "Nonetheless, the administration made no distinction between Germans and South Africans in the granting of state land and financial subsidies."[35] However, Walther also asserts, "Despite the South Africans' apparent generosity, Germans in SWA and in Germany distrusted them."[36]

This lack of trust was demonstrated in a pamphlet published by the Reichsstelle für das Auswanderungswesen (RfA, the Reich office for emigration after 1924).[37]

> The pamphlet commanded the German before emigrating to remember two things: "I am a German" and "I enjoy the hospitality of a foreign country." In elucidating the first point, it emphatically demanded that he "not forget…[his] old homeland in the new country." It enjoined the immigrant to find contact with other Germans and "cultivate in the new circle German customs and German ways."[38]

From the words of this pamphlet, one can see the cracks in the wall of solidarity between settlers and the Fatherland. Suddenly, instead of being the powerful settlers from a strong Fatherland,

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[34] Walther, 113.
[35] Walther, 114.
[36] Walther, 114.
[37] Walther, xiv.
[38] Walther, 118f.

both the settlers and the Fatherland realized all too well that there was a new power in the land, and they feared the loss of their identity.

But how the settlers and the Fatherland dealt with this threat was very different. As illustrated in the above quote, Germany was eager to remind the settlers of their cultural origin and identity and strengthen them in their commitment to being good Germans. But for the settler, both the defeat the Fatherland suffered, which resulted in South African administration, and their own growing sense of being a separate people from the Fatherland, caused them to begin to view themselves autonomously. Thus the stage of social comparison began, and one way in which this was reflected was in the way the settlers began to view the role of women, and especially of female German émigrés, in SWA. As stated previously, before WWI Germany had a policy and program of introducing women into the colony who would provide domestic service for the servicemen who inhabited the region, with the goal that these women would prove suitable for marriage. But "[i]n 1930, the dispatching of women to SWA was almost suspended."[39] Deutscher Bund (German League) chairman Albert Voigts wrote in 1929 "that women from Germany were no longer needed. He said that SWA's own young women were now old enough to cover the mandate's needs."[40] The fact that the cessation of female immigration into SWA was considered indicates a new wind blowing, bringing in a whiff of discontent with the Fatherland. The effect on German immigration and population in SWA was subtle yet important. Walther concedes,

> Statistically, the German population did increase…furthermore, the number of German women in the mandate rose. But their numbers remained consistently below the number of men entering the country. And, most importantly, the increase in the Afrikaner population, more than doubling its number since 1921, diminished the German accomplishments.[41]

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[39] Walther, 127.
[40] Walther, 127.
[41] Walther, 128.

A decrease in the amount of women immigrants was feared, Walther writes, because, "the majority of newcomers were single men who might marry outside of their nationality,"[42] and because women "would preserve German customs and traditions in German families as well as provide enough children to ensure the continued existence of the Southwestern German schools."[43] So while a few Southwest African Germans were beginning to be confident enough of their own identity to discourage the continuation of the immigration of women from the Fatherland, others saw a compelling need for this immigration to continue. The formation of a new group who would come to be known as Südwester was thus in its embryonic stage.

And what further encouraged the development of this new cultural group was the fight for the existence of German schools taught in the German tongue. Walther writes, "In the eyes of Southwestern Germans and their supporters in Germany in the interwar period, German schools were just as essential for the preservation of Deutschtum in SWA as settling German men and women there."[44] Walther adds, "During the 1920s the majority of German children attended German private schools"[45] although the South African administration increasingly offered free education. German private schools were increasingly suffering financial hardships, and it was hard for Southwestern Germans to commit to educating their children in private schools, despite their desire for the inculcation of German identity, because they simply could no longer afford to do so. And despite the seemingly good opportunity of a free education for their children, the Southwest Germans had their reservations about this apparent South African benevolence:

> Even though the administration acted more than fairly, many in the German
> community could still not shake the feeling that the South African government
> had hidden motives. They believed that it still wanted to gain control of
> Südwester youth, and since the best way to do that was to educate them in state

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[42] Walther, 129.
[43] Walther, 129.
[44] Walther, 130.
[45] Walther, 150.

schools, they therefore worked very hard to maintain the justification for independent German schools; maintenance of the language would facilitate German sway in the region.[46]

In the years that led up to the Second World War, the Südwesters faced yet another possible ingredient in their identity formation: the National Socialist (Nazi) Party:

> The founding in 1932 of a chapter of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP – or the National Socialist German Workers' Party) in Southwest Africa not only further strained relations between the Germans and the Afrikaners, it also threatened the fragile unity within the German camp.[47]

The Südwesters felt torn between their animosity against the South African administration and their desire to be free from the conditions in the Fatherland that drove them to colonize SWA in the first place.[48] And it also divided the settlers among generational lines, with the older settlers showing greater distrust of the Nazi party than the second generation of settlers.[49] Various attempts were made by the Nazi party to make inroads into the hearts and minds of the settlers, with varying degrees of success, but according to Walther, "Not all Southwestern Germans accepted this. They still rejected Nazi influences and saw Southwest Africa, not Germany, as their homeland."[50] Thus, the attempts of the Nazi party to convert SWA to their philosophy was counterproductive, at least in part, in that for some Südwesters, it strengthened their own autonomous identity, not as Germans, but as Southwest Africans. The cognitive dissonance between what they remembered from the Fatherland, versus what it had become now and what it was trying to become in Southwest Africa, forced them to begin to decide their own social identity.

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[46] Walther, 151f.
[47] Walther, 166.
[48] See Walther, 166f.
[49] See Walther, 170.
[50] Walther, 177.

Nazi attempts at incursion into SWA came to a screeching halt in September 1939 when

Germany invaded Poland, resulting in South Africa declaring war on Germany on September 6,

1939.[51] Freedoms that the Southwest Germans once enjoyed under South African administration

were ended:

> The South African government then banned various German organizations,
> including the Southwest League and the school associations. Many Germans were
> interned or placed under house arrest, and the authorities kept files on many
> Südwester because of their party affiliation or sympathies.[52]

This act further divided the German SWA. Walther claims that most of the Germans wanted to

remain loyal to Germany, as did the younger generation, but that "[t]hey disagreed over the

means to achieve their goals and over what it ultimately meant to be a German."[53] In addition to

a rift developing between the first generation settlers and their children, there also emerged a rift

between the first and second wave of settlers from Germany. Walther writes,

> Long-term inhabitants concluded that their definition of Deutschtum differed
> from that of the Nazis….They fully expressed their affinity for Southwest Africa,
> even if it was under South African control. Nonetheless, this affinity remained
> problematic for many Southwestern Germans, including those who had lived
> there for decades and had strong ties to the region.[54]

Walther's book ends with a chapter on the post-War years and describes a gradual

process of increasing cooperation between the German Southwest Africans and the South

African government. After years of struggle to gain the right to have German declared as an

official language, "in 1958 the SWA Legislative Assembly passed a resolution that raised

German to being the third administrative language."[55] Southwest Germans were enticed into

loyalty to South African administration by "guaranteeing them a special position in the new

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[51] Walther, 177.
[52] Walther, 177.
[53] Walther, 178.
[54] Walther, 179.
[55] Walther, 181.

apartheid system."[56] Still, Walther, notes, "the Germans continued to distance themselves from the Afrikaners, believing themselves to be culturally and linguistically superior to their partners in apartheid."[57] And it is here that the real split between the settlers and the Fatherland becomes most apparent:

> [The Südwesters] pointed out their long cultural tradition and its ties to Germany. At the same time, the Southwestern Germans viewed the Germans in Europe – the Germans of the Federal Republic – as outsiders. They saw them as people living in a decadent society and driven by material concerns.[58]

By comparing themselves with the Afrikaners and with the indigenous, the Südwesters had evolved into their own unique identity. They were finally a people unique from Germany, but not from the German ideal for which they had come. They remained loyal to the culture and ideals of the Fatherland they had known, but this Fatherland no longer existed. It had been replaced by a new Germany, inhabited by people who were defeated not once but twice in wars that spanned the first half of the 20th century. Thus the Southwest Germans focused on trying to be their own people, loyal to ideas abandoned in the then present-day Germany, living out this loyalty in a land they considered home, far from Germany geographically and culturally.

When the struggles for Namibian independence were raging, Walther describes a political paralysis on the part of the German Southwest Africans:

> Political abstinence and indecisiveness are distinctive features of German Southwesterndom. They are among the several characteristics that distinguish them from their kin in Germany and what makes them German Südwester and not just Southwestern Germans.[59]

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[56] Walther, 182.
[57] Walther, 182.
[58] Walther, 182.
[59] Walther, 183.

Apartheid played a role in strengthening their unique identity, "[b]ut this did not hide the fact that divisions still existed."[60] These differences were encompassed by the differences in the scope of the vision of what SWA was to be. It had been founded by people who sought to recapture an ideal of "a middle-class, agrarian ideal of Germany,"[61], and "[u]rban and discordant images were conspicuously absent from the Southwestern landscape."[62] But Walther describes an evolution of the ideal, acknowledging that although the agrarian ideal existed, "the local conditions influenced and affected their identity. They were indeed Germans, but with a decidedly Southwest African twist."[63] This twist included passionate adherence to apartheid and to the ideal of a society that was lost to Germany long before the settlers arrived in SWA.

Walther's book concludes with a very brief mention of life post-Namibian independence. He describes how the Südwester still cling to their ideal of what German society should be, but he also claims that they believe "Namibia is their Heimat."[64] Which invites speculation as to what the indigenous Southwest Africans think of this "Heimat" created on their own soil. Gretchen Bauer, in her article published in the *International Journal Of African Historical Studies,*[65] rightfully asks where the indigenous African people come into Walther's narrative. She notes, "Though the book is supposed to be about constructing notions of citizenship and nation in areas 'populated by a large indigenous population,' the indigenous population is nearly absent from the analysis."[66] Although by Bauer's admission Walther's book was to be about the German settlers in SWA prior to WWII, she asks how Walther could have ignored the role of the various African peoples who lived near and with the Germans. These Germans who became Südwester

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[60] Walther, 184.
[61] Walther 187.
[62] Walther, 187.
[63] Walther, 187.
[64] Walther, 192.
[65] Bauer, 245.
[66] Bauer, 245.

were not created in a vacuum. Indeed, while their identity was surely shaped by the Fatherland and by their own unique ties to SWA, it was also indelibly stamped with their interaction with the Herero/Nama wars and with the Ovambo, "whose men built the infrastructure and extracted the minerals in the young colony, are nowhere to be found."[67] For as we shall soon explore, the identities of the indigenous Africans were affected by the presence of the German (and other) settlers; so too were the identity of the German settlers affected by the Africans with whom they interacted and over whom they (at least temporarily) ruled. It is to the story of indigenous people which we now turn.

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[67] Bauer, 245.

Chapter Three: From Many Peoples to One Namibia

<u>Introduction</u>

The country now known as Namibia is comprised of many different peoples, 87 percent of whom are a mix of native African tribes.[68] The largest of these tribes are the Ovambo, followed by the Kavango, the Herero, the Damara, the Nama, the Caprivian, the Bushmen, and the Tswana.[69] Another group of people known as the Basters, are descendants of Cape Colony Dutch and black African women.[70] The rest of the nation's population is of European extraction.[71] The Herero, Damara and Nama have historically been cattle herders[72] in the central part of the country[73] while "the Ovambo, Kavango, and East Caprivian peoples, who occupy the relatively well-watered and wooded northern part of the country, are settled farmers and herders."[74] The northern area tribes had little contact with the central area tribes, and "German colonial rule destroyed the war-making ability of the tribes but did not erase their identities or traditional organization."[75]

Such are the demographic descriptions of the indigenous peoples of SWA from reference resources. One finds similar descriptions in the primary documentation in the Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibian Archives, but within the reports studied there[76] the descriptions

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[68] Badertscher, Eric. "Namibia." *Our World: Namibia* (August 2011): 1. *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 29, 2013).

[69] Badertscher.

[70] Badertscher.

[71] Badertscher.

[72] Sarkin and Fowler, 335.

[73] US Department of State Bureau of African Affairs. "Background Note: Namibia." *Background Notes On Countries Of The World: Republic Of Namibia* (July 2008): 1. *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 30, 2013).

[74] US Department of State Bureau of African Affairs, "Background Note: Namibia".

[75] US Department of State Bureau of African Affairs, "Background Note: Namibia".

[76] The Odendaal Commission. *Commission of Inquiry Into South West Africa Affairs (The Odendaal Commission),* Special Committee on the Situation With Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, Conference Room Paper No. 64/1, Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibian Archives, Box 7, Folder 1, Nov. 2012.

given, while striving for impartiality, nevertheless hint at an imposed identification that in some cases seems to objectify the indigenous peoples. For example, while the Odendaal Commission Report gives population statistics on the various tribes who lived in the area, it also curiously describes the color of the inhabitants' skin, not just in terms of black versus white, but even describing the Bushmen as having "light yellowish skins,"[77] and the Damara as "a dark negroid people."[78]

Yet despite these descriptions of the inhabitants' skin tone, the Odendaal Report also contains much useful information about the people's history and conditions in which they lived when the report was issued in 1962. It describes the social and political organization, or lack thereof, of the tribes. The Bushmen are described as "traditionally nomadic,"[79] (while allowing that by 1962, "the greater part of these people have settled down and have been drawn in the economy of the southern sector of the country.")[80] The Report claims that for the Bushmen, "No political organization exists in the traditional patterns and there is no central authority which binds all the Bushmen groups. Within the band, leadership is determined by age, personality and hunting prowess."[81] Thus, according to the Odendaal Report, for the Bushmen, identity construction focused on the individual tribes which collectively were called Bushmen (including the Khaug, Heikum and Barakwengo).[82]

Another group the Report mentions at some length are the Nama. The Report lists two groups who are considered Nama: early settlers and "the so-called Oorlams or foreigners who passed through the country on their way south."[83] While still describing the people's physical

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[77] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 2, para. 3.
[78] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 6.
[79] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 3.
[80] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 3.
[81] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 5.
[82] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 2 para. 3.
[83] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 8.

characteristics ("They are generally light in colour and short of stature."[84]), it also describes their political organization as patrilineal with an elected Chief chosen from a ruling family.[85]

In its description of the Herero people, the Odendaal Report describes not only their economic system ("land among them was the property of the whole group, and while no boundary set limits to individual grazing grounds, every head of cattle had its owner"[86]), but also the terrible price paid by these people at the hands of the Germans who "in 1903-1906 brought upon them untold suffering."[87] The result of this German suppression of the Herero people was that it "shattered their tribal cohesion and though it has risen again [by the time of the Report in 1962], government policy has been designed to undermine it."[88]

Of the Ovambo people, who are the largest ethnic group in SWA[89], the Report says, "They are matrilineal…and they have a well-developed political organization with heredity chiefs."[90]

In a book describing the role of missionaries in SWA, we see an acknowledgement of the fact that the indigenous people had their own culture long before the colonists arrived:

> The most unfortunate thing about even the best missionaries is that most of them never took the pains to relinquish their European conceptions of all Africans as godless and savages…Neither was civilization introduced by the European missionaries or colonists. Africa had its own civilization before they came. The Europeans did not learn these truths:…[91]
>
> In the years before the arrival of the Europeans, Africa achieved a cultural progress equal to and often superior to that of Europe. During the African metal age that began 500 years before the birth of Christ, the African people began to cultivate the soil, build great cities, develop their arts, smelt and work iron ore,

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[84] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 3, para. 7.
[85] See Odendaal Commission Report, p. 4, para. 11.
[86] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 4, para. 14.
[87] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 4, para. 14.
[88] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 5, para. 16.
[89] See Odendaal Commission Report, p. 6, para. 20.
[90] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 6, para. 20.
[91] Nambala, Shekutaamba. *History of the Church in Namibia*, Oliver K. Olson, editor. USA: *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 1994, p. 118.

and build complex social systems. African craftsmen were skilled in leather, wood, glass, gold, ivory, copper, tin, silver and bronze.[92]

These descriptions of the indigenous peoples of SWA are offered to show that they indeed did have a cultural, societal and in some cases even a political identity long before the German settlers, and then the South Africans, attempted to impose one upon them. In terms of Tajfel and Turner's social identity construction theory, they had already passed through the stages of social categorization (cattle-herders, farmers, nomads, etc.), social identity (tribes who were cattle-herders, farmers or nomads) and social comparison (certain styles of dress and customs made each tribe distinct from its neighbor).

But as diverse peoples living in the same land, what they lacked during the colonial era was a sense of shared identity that could unite them as a people who could reclaim their sovereignty over their own land. This shared identity would come later when the two World Wars finally changed the political landscape of the country, breaking the hold of the German colonists in favor of a new set of rulers (the South Africans), and later finally emerging in the wars that led to Namibian independence.

Diverse Tribes That Unite

While much more could be said of the development of these peoples' culture in the modern era, for the purposes of this study I am limiting myself to examining some of these tribes in the pre-colonial and colonial eras. This will allow for a comparison of the indigenous people's identity construction vis à vis that of the German colonialists.

Some mention needs to be made as to my methodology in choosing resources for this task. The Report of the Odendaal Commission was written in 1962. It describes to some degree

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[92] Phillips, Claude S. *The African Political* Dictionary (California: ABC-CLIO Information Service, 1984), 28, quoted in Nambala, Shekutaamba. *History of the Church in Namibia*, Shekutaamba Nambala, (Oliver K. Olson, editor). USA: *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 1994, p. 118.

the history and demographic information of the indigenous Southwest Africans, but it does so through the lens of the era in which it was written. One struggles to find documentary evidence produced by the indigenous people of how they viewed themselves during the colonial area. However, there are a few notable exceptions.

Two master's theses were written by Namibian students which shed some light on the interaction of pre-colonial tribes in the north with the European settlers and how the tribes' cultures were affected. These students, Lovisa Nampala and Vilho Shigwedha, were the first Namibian students who were granted a Master's degree in History from the University of Namibia.[93] Both authors relied heavily on oral interviews as evidence for their arguments, but they also supplemented it with travels to national archives in Windhoek.[94]

Nampala's work studied "Christianisation and Cultural Change in Northern Namibia."[95] She describes the indigenous people as religious beings before and after missionaries and colonists arrived in her homeland. Nampala asserts that Western missionaries used native beliefs and customs and transformed them by explaining them in "Christian" terms. One example of this is the Aawambo (one of the northern tribes) belief in a deity who they say called himself Kalunga. Nampala describes Kalunga as "the creator…endowed with the highest authority and power over the whole creation"[96] who "was everywhere and saw everywhere, but it was believed that he sometimes stepped down to earth in different forms and revealed himself to any persons he wanted."[97] She further mentions that, "Many of those to whom he revealed himself were

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[93] Lovisa T. Nampala, and Vilho Shigwedha. Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change: Perspectives from Northern Namibia, *Volumes 8-9 of Basel Namibia studies series*, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2006, ix. Accessed via Google Scholar on March 29, 2013.
[94] Nampala & Shigwedha, Introduction by Jeremy Silvester, p. xii.
[95] Nampala & Shigwedha, p. xix.
[96] Nampala, 17.
[97] Nampala, 17.

women and they were regarded as lucky."[98] From this she draws the conclusion that, "Here one can clearly point out that there were similarities between traditional and Christian beliefs."[99]

Nampala also states that she agrees with John Mbiti's claim that "every African people have a word for God and often other names which describe him."[100] She describes African traditional religion by asserting that "Africans in general believed that there was a link between creation and the creator, between creatures and plants, and between the living and the departed."[101] She, like Mbiti, sees African religion as not a set of doctrines to be taught but as the whole of life instead.[102]

From these general discussions of religion, Nampala goes on to list specific ways in which she says missionaries and colonists have transformed traditional African customs and beliefs. These include baby naming customs, courtship and marriage rites, drumming rituals and funereal customs.[103] In his introduction to Nampala's work, Jeremy Silvester (her advisor for the project) cites how a traditional wedding ceremony that featured a song about how a young man proves his manhood was changed with the advent of colonization. "One of the songs sung during a traditional wedding (*efundula*) ceremony shows the way in which the journey to go on a first contract became incorporated into a 'traditional' song as a new way for young men to prove their manhood."[104]

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[98] Napala, 18.
[99] Nampala, 18.
[100] Nampala, 18. See also John S. Mbiti's *Introduction to African Religion*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975, p. 12 where Mbiti writes, "Through the ages, therefore, religion has been for Africans the normal way of looking at the world and experiencing life itself. For that reason it is found wherever people are. It is integrated so much into different areas of life that in fact most of the African languages do not have a word for religion as such. They only have words for religious ideas, practices and objects or places."
[101] Nampala, 19.
[102] Nampala, 21.
[103] Nampala & Shigwedha, p. xix.
[104] Nampala & Shigwedha, Introduction by Jeremy Silvester, p. xiii.

In the same book, the work of Vilho Shigwedha is also included. Shigwedha's master's thesis dealt with the way in which traditional costumes were affected by colonial presence. His central thesis, as described in the introduction to the book in which it is contained, is, "that traditional clothing was a major indicator of the value system of the communities which wore them."[105] Like Nampala, Shigwedha believes that the western colonists and missionaries influenced the native traditions, in this case, the style of women's clothing and the way they wore their hair. To summarize, Shigwedha is critical of the way in which his culture has been affected by outside influences. But he also recognizes the fact that his people embraced, at least in part, these changes.

Another way in which the people's culture was redefined by European colonial influences is in the example of the Herero "flags." The term "flag" is not to be confused with our common use of the word to refer to a piece of cloth that is designed to represent a nation. While the Herero "flag" does indeed describe a colored piece of cloth used to represent individuals and people, the group of people themselves are so identified with these colored cloths that they are also called "flags":

> The most elaborate public use of color and body symbolism in the articulation of Herero social groups has occurred in the context of a ceremony formalized in 1923…and performed annually thereafter. This ceremony is that of the Herero "troops" and the larger organizations, the "flags," of which they are a part. For many, the use of colored cloth to express national political affiliations is the direct extension of its use in this context to express local, gendered, and historical identities.[106]

These ceremonies, Hendrickson says, were developed because

> The imagination of Namibian identity, the struggle both to choose representations of the polity and to assign lasting meaning to them, has been developing since the

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[105] Nampala & Shigwedha, Introduction by Jeremy Silvester, p. xvi.
[106] Hendrickson, Hildi. "Bodies and Flags: The Representation of Herero Identity in Colonial Namibia", in *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, Hildi Hendrickson, editor. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 215.

Germans claimed colonial control over the territory of South West Africa in 1884.[107]

Combining the old with the new, the ceremonies include "veneration of the ancestors at the sacred hearth and observances at the graves of the important patriarchs with military-style drilling, paraphernalia, and uniforms."[108] What matters at these ceremonies is not the style of the garment, but the color which ties the wearer to unique subgroups of Herero people, or even to individuals within those groups.[109] Both men and women are involved in these ceremonies.[110] What they wore on their bodies represented who, and whose, they were.

Contrast this bodily identification with the introduction by the Europeans of a national flag. While Hendrickson asserts that "explicit European attempts to inculcate the use of a 'national' flag for the purposes of rallying Africans to unified action were essentially ignored by Herero people,"[111] nevertheless the Herero did eventually adopt the practice of banner flags rather than body flags. There is a subtle but important difference between body and banner flags that I believe speaks of a difference between the indigenous Africans and the German settlers. Hendrickson notes

> The uniform, which is both the sign of and the ticket to rightful membership in the troops and their ceremonies, records both the individual's achievements within the group and subsumes the individual within the whole, unified body of the celebrants.
>
> The flag organizations, the cloth markers, and the colors *are* the people, unified in their commitments to the whole.[112]

Thus for the Herero, their "flags" demonstrated individualism which strengthened the community in which they lived. This is different from the European (and American) use of a flag

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[107] Hendrickson, p. 213.
[108] Hendrickson, p. 217.
[109] See Hendrickson, p. 219.
[110] See Hendrickson, p. 222ff.
[111] Hendrickson, p. 234.
[112] Hendrickson, p. 238f. Emphasis is in the original.

as a banner which proclaims national patriotism and identity without reference to individual

members. The fact that the Namibian people as a whole eventually adopted their own national

flag speaks of the influence of European settlement, but the body flags remain an important

reminder of their own cultural history.

One more piece of the puzzle needs to be added to our exploration of the history of the

indigenous people, and this piece is admittedly indirectly related. The other documents in the box

in the Namibia Archives, the U.N. Notes, shed some light by implication. One may examine the

contents of these documents and discern concerns for the people of Namibia as they existed in

the late 1970s and early 1980s, and from this extrapolate backwards as to the culture of the

indigenous Southwest Africans as it existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[113]

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[113] The *Notes* compiled by Mr. John Robson spanned the years from the 1960s through the early 1980s and described various United Nations' efforts at publicizing the state of affairs (i.e., apartheid, the struggle for Namibian independence) prior to the realization of Namibian Independence on 21 March 1990. Some of these efforts included:

- The establishing of weeks honoring UN solidarity with the people of Namibia (and with the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), the people's liberation movement
- The drafting of a Namibian economic map
- The production of a feature film
- The production of various print publications including *The Namibian Bulletin* and *Namibia – A Unique UN Responsibility*
- The production of posters (including the updating of *Namibia, A Trust Betrayed*, which was to be ready for distribution during the 33rd regular session of the General Assembly and to be printed in English, French, Spanish and German) and, *inter alia*,
- The issuance of a Namibian postage stamp

From these artifacts, one sees an emerging picture of the international group (the United Nations) attempting to aid in the promotion and legitimization of the fledgling Namibian nation. Some of these artifacts, including the feature film, the print publications and the posters, sought to correct a misconception of the indigenous Southwest Africans. Others, such as the Namibian economic map and the Namibian postage stamp, seem more purposed toward the legitimization of the peoples' right of sovereignty. While none of these artifacts state anything definitive about the Namibian peoples' identity construction, they do hint at the notion that these were people whose identity was not well understood by others outside of Namibia (or even, it may be argued, inside of Namibia under the years of the German settlers or of the South African Mandate).

For the record, it should also be noted that some of these *Notes* were either written in French (which I am unable to read and did not have translated due to time constraints) or were handwritten and were therefore difficult for me to read.

Conclusion

This tension between traditional African customs and the influence of the culture of the colonists is hard to untangle. Certainly one must admit that the indigenous people's cultures did indeed change when the settlers arrived. Both the indigenous people and the German colonists were engaging in their own social identity construction, and the intermingling of the two groups had an effect on the outcomes for both. I invite the reader to consider the question of whether or not the outcomes were positive for both groups.

Epilogue:
Post Colonial Namibia:
United For Independence, But Then What?

To explore such a vast concept as identity construction among the indigenous people of Southwest African and the German colonists who settled there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and to do so in the limited space of a Master of Divinity thesis, one must accept certain constraints. Therefore I did not go into great detail on the individual expressions of social customs and religion among either the Südwester or the indigenous Southwest Africans. Both groups either had (in the case of the native Africans) or developed (in the case of the Germans) rich cultural and religious practices in SWA. My goal was to describe how social identity construction played out in the history of the indigenous Southwest Africans and in the Germans who colonized their land, and to consider what affect that had on their respective histories.

So how does the definition of identity construction apply to the construction of Südwester and Namibian identity? My contention is that in both cases, they follow similar lines of development, despite the differences in some of the factors which shaped them.

Groups of German settlers came over to colonize Southwest Africa with the hope of making it into the idealized version of German agrarian society that they believed was no longer present in Germany itself. Thus stages one and two of their social identity construction were initiated. But this dream soon came face to face with the situation they faced when they arrived, including the Herero-Nama uprisings which they brutally repelled. Stage three of social identity construction, that of comparison with other groups, was thus inaugurated with the blood of the indigenous peoples of SWA.

Their identity, however, was not stagnant and would soon undergo another change with the advent of the two World Wars. Germany's loss of both World Wars caused the colonists to

evaluate and redefine who they were. Eventually, their experiences caused them to evolve into a new people. This people, the Südwester, retained the vision of the ideal agrarian society which they carried over from Germany (or as Tajfel and Turner might say, they chose to identify with the characteristics of their heritage with which they agreed), but they merged it with a love and patriotism for their new homeland in SWA. Were these changes imposed on them against their will? The answer is likely a mixture of yes and no. But by and large, despite the challenges the World Wars created for the settlers, it seems that their self-identification as Südwester was a change they desired and attained freely (in Tajfel and Turner's language, they engaged in social categorization and identification).

For the indigenous peoples of SWA, they also had their own unique tribal identities before the arrival of the Germans. We have seen how their geographical location in large part determined their occupations, either as herders or farmers. We have also seen how they had their own unique costumes and cultural practices surrounding major life events such as birth, marriage and death. And we acknowledged the pervasive nature of their traditional religion, and how it was not simply a part of their lives, but how instead it was lived out **as** their lives. In the social construction theory, we would say that the indigenous Southwest Africans had, as individual peoples, engaged in social categorization, identification and comparison. But they did so as separate peoples, not as a unified group of Namibians.

The arrival of the German colonists had, of course, a deep and lasting impact on their sense of identity. The brutality of the Herero-Nama wars likely instilled in the survivors a myriad of effects, including perhaps fear and anger against the Germans. And a more subtle (and potentially insidious) influence was effected by the German occupiers, as was seen in the theses written by Lovisa T. Nampala and Vilho Shigwedha. Native styles of dress and customs reflected

a change in how they saw themselves. For good or for bad, the indigenous Africans were becoming Westernized. Thus, at the level of social comparison, they were both willing participants and subjects. *Willing participants*, in the way in which they chose whether or not they wished to adopt Western dress and customs. But *subjects* in the way in which the German colonists brutally compared themselves with the Herero and Nama people, found them wanting, and thus committed genocide against them.

One must be careful, however, in placing a value judgment on the indigenous people's decision to embrace Western customs. Certainly one may bemoan the loss, or at least the changing, of traditions. But that is a judgment made from outside. Nampala and Shigwedha's theses indicate that at least from their perspective, and from that of the people they interviewed, these changes were undesirable. However, the fact remains that the indigenous Southwest Africans were indeed changed, even to the point of largely adopting Christianity as it is expressed in the Lutheran tradition.

I leave the patient reader with two questions, however, that still linger in my mind: First, If the people of Namibia were able to construct their identity from many tribes who united in their common struggle against the oppression of German and South African domination and apartheid, what unites them now that independence has been won? Surely they still face common enemies, for example, poverty and AIDS. But is there something more positive that they can claim as their own to unite them? This is the challenge of all Namibians today. The following quote, taken from the Odendaal Report, sums it up nicely:

> To suggest, as the Commission does, that the cultural and linguistic differences make a central government impossible is surely to border on the absurd for it is like saying that multi-cultural and multi-lingual states do not and cannot exist anywhere. It would seem…that the function of a Mandatory Power would have been to lead the different peoples towards the achievement of common values, a common society and a common citizenship by emphasizing, not the differences as

if they were immutable, but the common interests, the common goals and a common destiny of the peoples and country of South West Africa.[114]

And my final point of pondering: How would the identity construction of both groups have been different if it had fallen more along the lines of an accompaniment model as it is expressed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran World Federation today. What if the Germans had seen the indigenous Africans, not as a resource to be suppressed and/or exploited, but as partners? What if the indigenous people had been given the freedom to either welcome the newcomers or to refuse their entry? Of course, these are merely speculations, but they do point toward further exploration of not only identity formation but of how we as Lutheran Christians cooperate in the *Missio Dei* in the world today. Had we the time and space to track the role of Lutheran accompaniment in the struggle for Namibian independence, we would have been able to demonstrate how the *Missio Dei* was lived out in a way that brought freedom and self-determination to the people of Namibia. For ultimately, what this paper and any other papers that might be written about the formation of identity in Southwest Africa over time really explore is how people who are born with the identity of being children of God figure out what that means to them. That is the birthright of all people everywhere, and my prayer is that some day we will all honor and celebrate our relationship as children of God, which unites us as brothers and sisters in a way that crosses all ethnic, religious, economic, political and any other human-made barriers there may be.

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[114] Odendaal Commission Report, p. 27, para. 92.

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