Inequalities in Namibia

-what happened to the socialist dream?

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Abstract

Namibia is today the most unequal country in the world. It is 21 years since they gained independence, at that time the party that was and still are in power had the rhetoric of a socialist party. The divisions of the society are enormous, but to do a class analysis of the country is made difficult because of the ethnic divisions, which has its roots partly in the tribes that existed in the region before the colonialisation and partly in the apartheid regime.

Nyckelord

Inequalities, Socialism, Class differences, Ethnic groups
Acknowledgments

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Last, but definitely not least, a big thank you to all my informants, for taking part in my research and making it possible to accomplish.
Introduction

Namibia is the number one country in the world regarding inequality ranges and fifty one percent of the population is unemployed.\(^1\) It was the last country on the African continent to become independent, as late as 1990, from South Africa. This didn’t happen without struggle, and Namibia’s history is, as with most old colonies, not a pleasant one. It all started when the Germans invaded Namibia in the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century and began the fight for “the Second Reich” and their first ethnical cleansing and genocide took place. Later on Germany lost the so called “German Southwest Africa” to South Africa.\(^2\)

Already after the Second World War, today’s Namibia pledged to the UN to get support against South Africa and the discriminating laws that were applied, but without any response. This lead to the birth of various political movements in Namibia, the biggest ones being SWANU and SWAPO, the first one being a friendlier organization started by members of the Herero-, Damara- and Nama people and the latter, started off as friendly by the Ovambos, but soon adopted guerilla tactics. Not until SWAPO attacked the South African military, did they get any recognition from the UN, who then started to discuss the possibilities of independency with SA. The suggestion from South Africa was then that Namibia could become independent, but only if it was divided into eleven different countries, one for each ethnic group. This seems to only have been a way to destroy any kind nationalism within the area.\(^3\)

The division never came through, but just the fact that they tried to do it and that the apartheid regime introduced homelands for all the ethnic groups, and the fact that Africa had completely different countries before the Berlin Conference in 1984,\(^4\) made me wonder what the differences between the groups in Namibia looks like today.

The biggest ethnic group in Namibia is The Owambo people, who accounts for about half the population. They belong to the south-western Bantu group, but are culturally closer to the agriculturalists of Central Africa, from where they migrated a long time ago. They are mainly habited in the northern part of Namibia, in the former “Owamboland”, which was the name of

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\(^{1}\) Lecture: Advanced Sociology of Namibian Society, Volker Winterfeldt, UNAM, 2011-03-01

\(^{2}\) BBC documentary: Genocide and the Second Reich, David Adetayo Olusoga, 2010-09-13

\(^{3}\) B. Davidsson, Afrika i det tjugonde seklet (Stockholm 2001), p. 170

their homeland. After independence this area was divided into four regions—Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto, today usually referred to as the “O-region”. The Ovambo people are further divided in eight subgroups.\(^5\)

The second biggest group, with as little as 9.3% of the population, is the Kavango tribe, which actually consists of five different tribes.\(^6\) They live in the Okavango region in the north-eastern part of Namibia and are traditionally living off fishing, hunting and pastoralism.\(^7\) By size, the Herero group and the Damara group are equally big, with each of them equivalent to 7.5% of the population.\(^8\)

The Hereros should have been a larger group if it wasn’t for the German genocide which particularly affected this group. They used to live in the central parts of the country, but are nowadays spread out. They were given two different homelands, Hereroland East, which was located in the Omaheke region in the central-east part of Namibia and Hereroland West, located on the Otjozondjupa region—also located in the east, but further north. Historically, the Hereros were nomadic people who herded cattle.\(^9\) The Damaras on the other hand are traditionally hunter-gatherer people, and are originally from West Africa. They escaped to the mountains when being hunted by the Hereros and the Namas, because they were stealing their cattle. The Damara homeland is situated in the western highlands. Today, most of the Damaras are living outside the former Damaraland, most of them on farms and in urban areas.\(^10\)

Namas, the so called “red people” or “hottentots”, had their homeland in the southern parts of the country, which is extremely arid. There are today 14 different tribes of the Namas in Namibia, they are all originally from the Southern parts of Africa and they are related to the San people.\(^11\) The San, who have been nicknamed “the Bushmen”, used to live all across Southern Africa but have been forced by the Europeans and by the people coming from north-east Africa to move into the Kalahari Desert. Traditionally, all the different subgroups of the San were nomadic hunters.\(^12\)

\(^6\) Ibid. p. 4
\(^7\) Ibid. p. 35
\(^8\) Ibid. p. 4
\(^9\) Ibid. p. 67-76
\(^10\) Ibid. p. 128-131
\(^11\) Ibid. p. 114-116
Another nomadic group is the Himba, who are cattle herders. They have their homeland in former Kakaoland, today’s Kunene region in the very north-east of Namibia. The Himbas are very isolated from the modernisation and globalisation that are taking place elsewhere in Namibia and there is almost no trace of European culture in their lifestyle.\textsuperscript{13}

The Caprivians were counted as one group. Actually they consist of numerous tribes, all of whom live on the north-west Caprivi- strip. The geographical isolation has resulted in their reliance on traditional subsistence economy, which is a mix of hoe-farming, pastoralism, hunting, gathering and fishing.\textsuperscript{14} The smallest ethnic group is the Tswana people, who constitute about 0.6% of the population. They are originally from The Northern Cape in South Africa, and migrated through Botswana before spreading to Gobabis in the eastern part of Namibia.\textsuperscript{15}

Apart from those groups with tribal history, the ethnic groupings that were made during the apartheid regime were the Rehoboth Basters, who are descendants of mainly white fathers and Nama mothers. They moved from South Africa to Rehoboth in Namibia, which became a semi-autonomous authority within the country. Most of them are dedicated Christians and live with western values.\textsuperscript{16} To further confuse matters there was an additional ethnic group known as the Coloureds, comprising all of those that didn’t fit in anywhere else; those who had parents from different ethnic groups, or one white and one black parent, although the majority of them are born from Coloured parents.\textsuperscript{17} The last grouping is the white ethnic group – which consists of all Europeans, no matter what language they speak or where they are from.

So, as you can tell, Namibia is a country of diversity. Is this why it is so unequal? And, what happened to the socialist dream that emerged in the country by the time of independence? It has after all, been 21 years, and yet, it is the most unequal country in the world.

**Subject of inquiry and purpose**

The main aim with this research is to look into the inequalities in Namibia. Are there any inequalities along ethnic lines in the country today? What happened to the socialist dream that

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p. 85
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 55-64
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. p. 138
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. p. 138-139
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 141
seemed to emerge in the country by the time of independence? What is the political situation nowadays, and what is the hope for the future regarding the inequalities? To be able to answer those questions, it is also a necessity to look into how the history has shaped the country to become what it is today, even though I have decided that I won’t look into the difference between the white and the black population. Not because this isn’t important, but because it is obvious that there are still inequalities between black and white people, with 0% of the German speaking population living in poverty. On the other hand, no research has been done on inequalities between different ethnic groups in Namibia since independence, simply because the term “ethnic groups” is outdated and belongs to the apartheid system. My purpose is of course not to differentiate groups, but I do find it necessary to look at, partly to see if it is as corrupt as many people express feelings about. SWAPO, which is the leading party, mainly consist of Owambos – does this show in everyday life in Namibia? Are there groups who are more marginalized than others?

So, in short, questions to be responded are: Do people from different ethnic groups have the same opportunities to have a life outside poverty? What are the inhabitants own perspective on this? How have the history shaped the country regarding inequalities? What happened to the socialist dream and what is the political situation today?

**Method**

After very careful consideration I have decided to use ethnomethodology as a method in my study. This is because I believe in its starting points, that social life is created by constantly changing processes and that an analysis of people in everyday life can help to see through these processes. Above all, I have chosen this method because I think it suits my subject and it has a relatively free approach.

**Scientific view**

Ethnomethodology is founded by Harold Garfinkel as a way of studying everyday life with a method that is seeking to learn about daily life activities as a phenomenon in their own rights. The most important thing in ethnomethodology is that research is indexical and reflexive, which means that the meaning of an action depends on the situation that it occurs in and that talking is not just a recreation of the social reality. It is a way of using common sense to achieve

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knowledge about social structures.\textsuperscript{22} Mr. Garfinkel himself describes ethnomethodology as “The earmark of practical sociological reasoning, wherever it occurs, is that it seeks to remedy the indexical properties of members’ talk and conduct”.\textsuperscript{23} He is also mentioning that scientific rationalities doesn’t make sense to use when studying the everyday life, since this will only be used as ineffective ideals.\textsuperscript{24} What is important, on the other hand, when doing this kind of research is that any occasion whatsoever can be studied, and that no inquiries should be left out.\textsuperscript{25}

Ethnomethodology has been seen by some as an approach, like symbolic interactionism, while others claim it is an approach steeped in a vision.\textsuperscript{26} Since ethnomethodology does not advocate any particular technics, the idea is to use various qualitative methods derived from the ethnographic tradition.\textsuperscript{27} I have therefore been carrying out fieldwork which to a large extent has consisted of observations, especially participant observation in order to listen to and participate in conversation - something that is common in ethnography and are essential within ethnomethodology in order to take part of everyday conversations.\textsuperscript{28} I have, as a supplement to these observations been doing qualitative interviews, that I will describe in more depth later on, in order to get more specific answers to my questions and to be able to see the world through someone else's eyes. The field data has been combined with previous research, statistics and then connected to theories. Conny Svenningson addresses in his book that it can sometimes be good to mix methods to strengthen the empirical body of information; therefore, to get a better result for my qualitative data, I have supplemented it with a bit of quantitative data.\textsuperscript{29} However, this only serves to compliment the qualitative empirical data.

In the analysis I have categorised the collected data by looking at similarities and differences in interviews, observations and previous research and woven it together in the figures. I will go further into how the analysis is done later.

\textsuperscript{22} Harold Garfinkel, \textit{Studies in Ethnomethodology} (New Hampshire 1967), p. viii
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p. 10-11
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. p. 283
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. p. 32
\textsuperscript{26} Nylén, Ulrica, \textit{Att presentera kvalitativa data – Framställning för empirirevissning} (Malmö 2005), p.44
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p. 45
\textsuperscript{28}Bryman, Alan, \textit{Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder} (Malmö 2002), p. 276-277
\textsuperscript{29}Svenning, Conny, \textit{Metodboken} (Eslöv 2003), p. 94
Description of field and demarcation

Namibia is a huge country, 823 145 sq. km, with very few inhabitants – it is one of the most sparsely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This, together with the fact that there are so many different tribes/ethnic groups in Namibia has made the demarcation the hardest part of the whole research. Three important aspects that I have completely been cutting out are the age, the gender and the disability perspective. I have been interviewing people from different age groups and both females and males, to be able to get a greater perspective, but this is not something that I have been looking deeper into. The reason for this is simply that each one of those three topics would have needed a large amount of time to research. Time that I unfortunately didn’t have.

The demarcation does not stop there. As I stated earlier, there is a lot of ethnic groups in Namibia, and even more subgroups within them. It wouldn’t have been possible for me to cover all of the groups in five months’ time, which forced me to choose which ones I was going work with in an early stage of my research. Some of them were easy, the Ovambo group for example was a self-written part of my thesis, since a little more than 50% of the population belongs to this group and SWAPO mainly consists of Ovambos. San people, or “Bushmen” was also an easy choice, since it’s widely known that they have been marginalized for hundreds of years. Apart from those two, it was difficult. After doing some reading and talking to people, I ended up choosing to concentrate on Himbas and Damaras as well. During my research I also got in touch with Coloureds, Rehoboth Basters, Caprivians and people living in the Kavango.

Observations

I have during my time in Namibia been engaged in the society in a lot of different ways. Most of my observations have been of the participant kind, without people knowing that I’ve been doing this research. This has not always been the case, though I sometimes have mentioned what I’m doing in order to get people to talk about the subject without having to interview them. Because the topic inequalities is very much a in the hot spot in Namibia at the moment, this has not always been necessary. The reason why I have, in most cases, not letting people know about it, is regarding the ideas of ethnomethodology, to study people in their everyday life. It has also made it easier to get into the field and take part in meetings etc., one of the advantages of using the “hidden” observation method.

Places where my participant observations have taken place has been in lectures at the university, in church, in taxis (since the system in Namibia works like that, that you always travel with other people), at social events, visits at different organisations and projects, while volunteering at different schools and by talking to people running guesthouses and hostels as well as to hitchhikers that I picked up during my field trip around the country.

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31 Alan Bryman, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* (Malmö 2002), p. 278
I have also been doing some observations without participating, for example when visiting the informal settlements outside Windhoek and Swakopmund, and by looking at the different standards of living in different areas of the country. The two former homelands that I unfortunately couldn’t visit were the Kakaoland of the Himbas, because of flooding and the Namaland, simply because the time wasn’t enough.

One could therefore say that I have been taken on all the four different roles as an observer that Alan Bryman is describing in his book about social research methods; complete participant, participant as an observer, observer as a participant and a complete observer.  

**Interviews**

Since the basics in ethnomethodology is to study people in their day to day life, doing interviews at first seemed a bit difficult, but something that I felt was essential to be able to reach some kind of empirical saturation. It was also necessary to get peoples own, full, perspective on inequalities, how they define class and what they think the society looks like rather than just my own understandings from the observations. As Eva Fägerborg mentions, the individual perspective in an interview creates possibilities to get closer to experiences and to make the material filled with nuances. I have made several attempts to make the interviews as close to a “normal talk” as possible, by letting the informants decide where to meet and in some cases met over a lunch to make the situation more relaxed.

Since I have been using a Dictaphone and recorded the interviews, it was always going to be an interview, and no matter how low profile I’ve been trying to keep, my presence, comments and behavior will always have had an impact on the outcome. To try to avoid this to the highest possible degree, I planned the interviews on beforehand by using the seven steps that Steinar Kvale is describing in his book about qualitative interviews. He is in the beginning of the book describing different approaches of an interviewer, one which he names “the traveller”, meaning that this person is learning during the process of interviewing and might start reflecting over things that he or she has seen as obvious before, through the conversations. This is something I can really identify myself with, and I think it is something most people who are trying to understand a different culture would do, no matter how much reading that has been done before.

I have been trying to be objective and to get rid of my preconceptions, which weren’t very many, since this field is new to me. I did mention earlier that I knew about that the San people have

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33 Eva Fägerborg: Intervjuer in Lars Kaijser & Magnus Öhlander (red.), *Etnologiskt fältarbete* (Lund 1999), p. 55
34 Ibid. p. 66
35 Ibid. p. 57-59
36 Steinar Kvale, *Den kvalitative forskningsintervjun* (Lund 1997), p. 85
37 Ibid. p. 12
been discriminated for a long time and somehow I had an understanding that the government was corrupt. This is the reason why I started interviewing someone who is Owambo and works for the government, to see things from a different point of view and to be more open minded. Regarding the San, I have just tried to listen to others rather than letting my own understandings shine through.

I have mainly used semi-structured interview guides, in other words, I had prepared themes and questions, but was very flexible about this and in most cases asked questions regarding the informants answers rather than following the guide exactly. Some of the interviews should even be regarded as unstructured, where I just came back to some of the themes in my guide and let the informants talk freely about inequalities, ethnic differences and politics. This added on to creating a situation that felt more like a natural conversation, or like the informant were telling their story and I was there to listen and asked questions out of curiosity. All my informants have known the purpose of my research before they agreed to participate, and depending on their own approach initially in the interviews, I have used one structure or the other.

**Informants**

In order to find informants, I have used a combination of so called “convenience selection” and “snowball selection”. The first one is just what it sounds like, people who happen to be available there and then. This doesn’t mean that I have been interviewing anyone, but people that I have met that would be interesting to interview. The latter means I initially actively looked for people who were relevant for the study and then, through them got in contact with further respondents. People have been extremely helpful and introduced me to very useful contacts, but it has been difficult to reach severely poor people as well as people from certain ethnic groups.

One big problem I was facing when finding respondents was the language barriers. Since English is the national language in Namibia, most inhabitants nowadays speak it, some better than others. I actually picked informants that spoke English well, to try to avoid misunderstandings- which still are easily done when neither of us are speaking our mother tongue. I made an active choice not to use an interpreter, because of the ethical issues that may have arisen as well as one more step were statements could have been misinterpreted or misunderstood.

I ended up doing eight interviews all together, two with expat Germans, two with Owambos, two with Damaras, one with a Coloured South African and one with a man from the Caprivi.

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38 Steinar Kvale, *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (Lund 1997), p. 117
40 Ibid. p. 114
41 Ibid. p. 117
region who is working to improve the rights of San people. I will give a closer introduction to who my informants are in the analysis chapter.

**Analysis**

When analysing my empirical material I have used the ad hoc method. This is, according to Steinar Kvale, one of the most common analysis methods of interviews. It basically means that you use a variety of techniques to create sense to your material. I have been reading through the transcriptions of the interviews as well as my notes from the observations to get a general impression before going back to the parts of particular relevance. I have then been going deeper into these as well as finding patterns between the material and categorizing quotes and situations under different themes. After that I have been organizing the themes in relation to each other in order to create a logical theoretical context, which is a part of the ad hoc method.

**Ethical reflections**

It is always important to reflect over ethical issues that might occur when doing research where people are involved, and especially when it comes to sensitive subjects. The question “are there any inequalities between different ethnic groups?” is touching an incredible sensitive subject in Namibia. Partly because, as I mentioned earlier, the ethnic division was made during the apartheid regime and is no longer formally valid. For me to ask this question, as a white person, could be seen as very offensive. This is something I have been aware of, and therefore been very clear with my intentions and the purpose of my research. Another reason why it could be sensitive is if the person being interviewed is feeling that he or she is being discriminated because of her/his ethnical belonging. That is also something I have been reflecting over on beforehand, to avoid the situation Kvale is mentioning, where the interview turns into a therapeutically conversation.

I have been trying to be neutral while doing the interviews but at the same time getting close to my informants and to really understand them. Oscar Pripp talks about the method of pending between closeness and distance, which means that you are getting close by trying to reach an understanding for different perspectives and actions while you are keeping the distance by putting yourself outside your own understandings in sensitive questions. This is what I have been keeping in the back of my mind during the whole research period. I have also kept in mind what Kvale says about the ethical principal about beneficence verses damage, in other words, the benefits of the research should be greater than the damage it is causing. It doesn’t seem like

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42 Steinar Kvale, *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (Lund 1997), p. 184
43 Ibid. p. 185
44 Ibid. p. 118
45 Oscar Pripp:Reflektion och etik in Lars Kaijser & Magnus Öhlander(red.), *Etnologiskt fältarbete* (Lund1999), p.46-47
46 Steinar Kvale, *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (Lund 1997), p. 110
anyone of my respondents have been offended or been feeling bad in any other way from taking part in my interviews even if they have been talking about sensitive subjects. As I did say, they all got informed what the purpose of the study was, and they all mentioned that it was important, which is probably why they spoke so freely about it.

Giving information about the research is part of the ethical guidelines given by the Swedish Institute of Research that I have followed. The other guidelines are the demand of approval, the demand of grant of enjoyment and the demand of confidentiality.\(^47\) I informed all my respondents about those guidelines both by giving them a letter as well as telling them about it. The confidentiality turned out to be the most appreciated, though some of them even said that they wouldn’t tell me, or anyone else about some of their opinions in public. On the other hand, a few of them wanted me to use their name, which I took the decision not to. Confidentiality is always a tricky part, especially in a country like Namibia, where the inhabitants are few. Because I have been using the snowball selection in some cases, a few respondents may be able to identify each other, but I have been trying my best not to reveal their identity. One problem regarding ethics in my research is the fact that I have been doing a lot of observations, and most of them without telling people that I have been observing what I’m doing. This means that those people haven’t been informed, but since I’m not revealing their identity I don’t think it will be a problem.

**Methodological discussion**

There is a lot that could have been done differently in my research. First of all, the demarcation could have been done in a variety of ways. The topic is widespread and the time for collection of data was not that long, which means that I could have been narrowing it down even more. The problem then is that I would definitely not have been able to look at the ethnic perspective of inequalities. I could also have chosen to include white people to a greater degree, but as I mentioned earlier, this has been done many times before. It can somehow seem strange that I have done interviews with Germans and even South Africans, but I did pick those respondents because they have, or are, involved in trying to change the society or are part of organisations doing evaluations of different governmental practices. This means that they do have a good insight of what the situation looks like for a great number of people. I have been using it as an outside perspective from the inside, because they all live in Namibia and are a part of the society. It would have been incredible interesting to do more interviews with people from the actual tribes, and I did really try to find a San person or someone belonging to the Himba tribe, but didn’t manage to find any. If I had more time, this would definitely have been possible and that would have added on a lot to my research. The same thing counts for Rehoboth Basters.

\(^{47}\) Oscar Pripp:Reflektion och etik in Lars Kaijser & Magnus Öhlander(red.), *Etnologiskt fältarbete* (Lund1999), p.51-53
I could also have chosen to use an interpreter to be able to interview really old or uneducated (which is usually an indication on poverty), people. I gave some of the reasons why I didn’t do this earlier, it would also have been a lot more time consuming.

Methodology wise, I did mention that I, before I started looked into different options and with careful consideration decided to use ethnomethodology, because I did think it suited my research best. This doesn’t mean that there weren’t other options. I could for example have been using Grounded Theory, but since I’m not aiming to generate a new theory but rather clarify what’s going on and to understand a society this didn’t feel right.

**Theoretical views and key concepts**

There are quite a few different theories and concepts that can be used to make it easier to understand and explain the social situation in Namibia today.

**Urbanisation** refers to a mass movement of people into the cities. This is something that usually is connected to industrialisation or social changes into a modern society. When talking about urbanization in the Third World, there is a term called “over-urbanisation”, which means that the cities have got a large population that can’t get in to the formal economy. Urbanism describes the patterns of social life in cities and points for example at great divisions of labour, less contact with relatives and an increase of social conflicts.  

**Globalization** is a broad theory. It has been described primarily from an economical perspective by Anthony Giddens, but he is also pointing out its importance for politics, technology and culture. He is saying that it is a mixture of processes that are changing our way of living. It is changing our way of living through different social and culture developments, for example by the introduction of a worldwide information system, the global patterns of consumption and the cultivation of cosmopolitan lifestyles.

**Marxist socialism** has a moral assumption, namely that a capitalist world is a fundamentally unjust place and therefore must be transformed. The communist manifest is mentioning that every class struggle is a political struggle. Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels are presenting the idea of even out class differences by a revolution, and saying that this must be made by proletarians who organize themselves to overthrow the power. When such a revolution is completed, the proletariat would conquer democracy to create a proletariat empire that will take away the

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51 Lecture: *International Relations*, Lesley Blaauw, UNAM, 2011-03-18
bourgeoisie capital and centralizing power to the state. When the proletariat by revolution has overthrown capitalism Marxists believe that the legitimacy of class existence disappears, and the power of the proletariat, a classless society, occurs.

**African Socialism** is the kind of politic that grew big when many African countries started to become independent and the classless society was the model of the modern times. Many countries have had the Marxist socialism as a role model, but in almost all cases this has failed in one way or another. One of the problems with socialism in Africa is the lack of ideological consciousness amongst the majority of the population; another one is that class has not been the focus of the liberation struggles, but rather a nationalist anti-colonial focus. Bade Onimode is stating that African Socialism should be recognised as a dividing ideology of state capitalism.53

**Nationalism** in Africa is quite different from nationalism in Europe. In Europe, the term "nationalism" arose in the 1800s among people who spoke the same language, shared the same culture and same story and wanted from this formation of independent states. In Africa, nationalism was a result of anti-colonialism and thus closest to an evolution of Pan Africanism.54 Pan Africanism is a movement that started in America, where blacks were united because of their skin color, regardless of where they came from. This movement has latter worked to liberate Africa, and been fighting for that Africa will be led by Africans and be entirely African. They held a congress in 1945 in Manchester, where African nationalists set new standards for African liberation and the idea of national unification became larger.55

**Decolonisation** sounds simple; it is as a matter of fact just to make colonies independent, to give them back their freedom. Unfortunately, in most cases this hasn’t been easy and most colonies have been struggling to achieve independence. As Frantz Fanon is describing it, to succeed with a decolonisation, the whole society and social structured need to be changed, it is a programme of “complete disorder”.56

**Tribe**, is a term that indicates a group of people who are bound together by kinship and are associated with a specific region. They have a social unity associated with relatives and the members of the tribe have the sense of political autonomy.57

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56 Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth – A negro psychoanalyst’s study of the problems of racism & colonialism in the world today* (New York 1966), p. 29
**Ethnic group** is a group of individuals who either see themselves, or are seen by others to share specific characteristics. This could be racial attributes as well as culture, language, politics, etc.\(^{58}\) The word “ethnicity” derives from the ancient Greece and referred to a group of people who lived in the same place.\(^{59}\) The official recognition of ethnic groups during the apartheid regime is still looked at as dividing and harmful, but in the independent Namibia it is claimed to be pre-colonial.\(^{60}\)

**Previous research**

There has, as far as I have found, not been any research done on inequalities between different ethnic groups in Namibia, but there has been a review done on poverty and inequalities in Namibia which is based on a survey from 2003/2004 that has been a useful source of information. Likewise have the evaluation on affirmative action made by LaRRI as well as the summarised guide of the same made by J.W.F Rooyen helped me a lot as has the review of Namibia’s Black Economic Empowerment by the Public Policy Research. There is also a baseline report on youth migration given out by the University of Namibia and pamphlet about the poverty impact assessment of the various land reform programmes published by the government that makes it easier to try to complete the picture of inequalities in the country. No full analysis of the class structure in the country has been done, as far as I have found, but Chris Tapscott has written some pieces on the topic as well as Lucy Edwards-Jauch, who talks about changes in family structures in regards to class.

Apart from this, I have been reading Colin Leys and John S. Saul’s book on the liberation struggle, Frantz Fanons study of the problems of racism and colonialism and Bade Onimode’s book about political economy of the African crisis, to reach an understanding of the impact of the history and the political development. J.S Malan’s book Peoples of Namibia has been invaluable in the purpose of serving information about the different cultures and regions in the country. Last by not least, Neil Parsons’ book on the history of Southern Africa has given a good overview of Namibia’s history. I will connect previous research to my empirical material in the analysis the get a more comprehensive picture of the situation in Namibia today.

**Analysis**

Since my question of issue is very broad, it was hard to know where to start with the analysis. After dividing the empirical material into themes, it became clear that to answer why the inequalities in Namibia are so big it is necessary to look into the history of the country, which I

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\(^{60}\) J.S Malan, *Peoples of Namibia* (Pretoria 2004), p. 8-9
presumed it would be. Even if I decided to not look into the white/black situation, the apartheid regime is something that has been a frequently recurring topic in my interviews. Therefore it seemed logical to start with the historical impact and go onwards in a chronological order.

Since SWAPO started during the colonial time and has shaped, and reshaped its politics ever since, the history has also had a huge impact on the political situation. The political development and the socialist dream is the second theme that I have been building up the analysis around. After that I am going into class differences in Namibia, a theme that received various kinds of reactions, and the question if it is even relevant to do a class analysis of the Namibian society emerged.

Last but not least, the analysis is built up around the theme of inequalities today. When discussing inequalities from an ethnical point of view, the opinions were divided, some pointed at culture, some at corruption while others thought that it was not that simple. Reasons for unemployment were explained by a lot of things, for example a change in the way of living and education – or lack of this, came up a lot.

Before I’ll present my analysis I will give you, as I promised earlier, a closer presentation to the persons taking part in my interviews:

**Rupert** is 50 years old, he is born in Germany. He was active in the anti-apartheid movement, and moved to Namibia after the liberation and is today married to an Owambo woman and lives in Windhoek.

**Stefhan** is 55 years old, also born in Germany. He was in the solidarity movement and worked with the liberation movement in South Africa where he met his black, South African wife. Today, Stefan is working within the labour movement and is based in Windhoek.

**Ndeyapo** is 45 years old, born in Ondangwa. She is today working for the government and lives with her family in Katutura, Windhoek.

**Samuel** is 22 years old; he was born in Windhoek but grew up in Grootfontein. Samuel is of Owambo origin and he is studying at the University of Namibia.

**Beauty** is 19 years old and was born in Gobabis, where she lived until she was 3 years old. After that she moved to Windhoek. She has a two year old daughter and has been unemployed for the last years. Her mother was Damara and her father Herero.

**Peya** is 28 years old and has been living his whole life in Katutura, Windhoek. He is of Damara origin and is today running his own tourism business.
Leon is 29 years old. He is from the Caprivi region but moved to Windhoek a couple of years ago to work for an organisation which is working to improve the situation for San people.

Richard is 75 years old and he is born in South Africa but has been categorised as a Rehoboth Baster and is married to a Coloured Namibian. He used to be active within SWAPO and spent some time in exile, before settling down in Windhoek in 1978.

**Historical divisions**

Before the Germans came to today’s Namibia, it was a region filled with various tribes and kingdoms. It was through the Berlin Conference in 1884 that the colony of German South West Africa got its borders drawn out, on inaccurate maps. Already before that, the region had been affected by colonialism and it was already in 1872 that Rehoboth became occupied by Basters, later renamed “Rehoboth basters”, a coloured, Afrikaan speaking group who originates from the Cape Province in South Africa. 61 Regarding Richard, who has been categorised a Rehoboth Baster himself, the 1870’s was also when Rehoboth gained semi-autonomy:

> The Rehoboth Council, which was semi-autonomous, in other words, going back to an agreement between the Rehoboth Council and the German authority, or the German colonial office, way back in 1870, the Rehobothers, also known as Bastards, were given certain, were given the right to resign in Rehoboth area, and were given certain rights.

Most people that I have spoken to are actually referring to this group of people as “Rehoboth Bastards”, like Richard does, even all the people who belong to this group. None of the literature that I have been getting ahold of is using this term, so it is hard to say what is correct. Rupert is giving his explanation to why this might be as well as why they got their own territory in Rehoboth, and says that it has an impact today:

> The coloured ones are actually the ones who should not be there. Because there was a mixed marriage act in South Africa, forbidding any type of interracial marriage. /…/ That’s the story, and they call them “Bastards”. I mean, normally it would be an insult if I called you a bastard. So then, there is a group of people who said “Ok, if you wanna call us bastards, then that is our identity – We are the bastards”, and then they made a bastard nation. And they were creating some problems with the South Africans, many of those Bastards are more racist then whites, even, towards the blacks, because they must make a clear cut line. And then, the whites didn’t want those trouble makers in their country so they promised them land around Rehoboth in Namibia. /…/ And after independence, it was a major issue, because they said “Ok, now we are all free and free means, this is our national borders around Rehoboth”. Which is ridiculous, but they said “We are not going to have those blacks governing us”. Who do they think they are?

I haven’t found this reason, or any reason for that matter given about why the Basters were occupying Rehoboth. So I don’t know if this was exactly how it was. Interestingly enough, I have

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met a Rehoboth Baster who said just that, that black people can’t govern a country because of various reasons and that he would like to see a white government in Namibia. J.S Malan adds on by saying that Basters are patriotic people with a typical western culture. I am not trying to point out that all Rehoboth Basters are racist, but this is an early proof of what ethnical segregation in a country can lead to. The interesting thing, if Rupert’s story is true, is that it’s not the white people they dislike. Anyway, the point is that to them, the ethnic group belonging seems a lot more worthy than the Namibian nationality does.

In 1915 the German forces were defeated by South African forces, which also conquered the independent Owambo state. This was the time when the imperialism changed and the Western capitalism and commercial farming started growing in Africa. It was under the rule of South Africa that the division of Namibia, or South West Africa, was divided in to homelands. Richard came to the country in 1963, and had lived in South Africa before that. In South Africa the Tomlinson Commission in 1959 separated the country in eight different Bantustans under the “Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. Richard is describing the division of Namibia like this:

Ethnic groups were determined way back in, I think in 1964. Or earlier, round about -63. By what was the Odendaal commission, where they had said, there are 11 ethnic groups in Namibia. And each ethnic group should be responsible for base, for activities such as health, education, agricultural…/…/ Because even in South Africa they had what they call Bantustans, or, homelands for every tribal or ethnic group. And in Namibia they had come up with, eh, they tried to apply this principal of administration as well. Now, it was obvious from, Namibia’s population at that time was maybe about 1,2 million, and they had also said, we are 11 ethnic groups. /…/ It was an artificial creation by the South African government where they used their own criteria to define what was meant by an ethnic group./…/ The coloured ethnic group were, was essentially composed of people who didn't fall into one of the other ten ethnic groups. And so, it was just a blanket term used to incorporate people we would have referred to as “others”, you know, all the leftovers were put in the coloured ethnic group. That is implications that which are relevant, even we, effect people even today.

He mentions how bizarre it is that all of the white population was categorized as one ethnic group, even though they were speaking English, German, Afrikaans and Portuguese, but no difference was made between them. It is also bizarre that all the different groups were supposed to have their own educational system, their own health system, etc. when for example the Tswana group was as little as around 0.7% of the population. It wasn’t just the country that was divided into homelands, Rupert and Peya is describing the situation in Windhoek, which, since it is the capital obviously had a mixture of people living there. Rupert tells me the story of the force move to Katutura:

62 J.S Malan, Peoples of Namibia (Pretoria 2004) p. 139
64 Ibid. p.223
65 Ibid. p. 294
First you must know the 1958-59, the massacre of the Old Location, that was kind of the starting point for people to understand that apartheid was not something that you could convince. To stop those things, you know, it was, we call it the small Shopville, Shopville massacre was the turning point also in South Africa, but with a couple of hundred people massacred. But ours, there were 11 people killed and some got injured and a demonstration which was against the forced removal from the Old Location, which was close to that cemetery there, to Katutura. Katutura means “the place where we do not want to be”. And they were forced to go there. All the blacks.

This forced move of people is something that is commonly discussed in everyday life. You can still see the fence on each side of the highway, which was put up to keep black people out of town. Someone in Katutura told me that it does mean “the place where we do not want to live” in Oshihirero and that it was built behind the hill, where it is located, so that people in town shouldn’t have to see it. Peya, who is born and raised in Katutura, told me about the divisions of the suburb:

Basically, with the apartheid, what happened was that the different tribes were separated and segregated into different areas. So you would have a Wambo location, Nama location, Herero location… and a Damara location.

So, it wasn’t just out in the country that people lived in different areas, it was also in Windhoek, or in the outskirts of Windhoek. Beauty told me that this was so that people wouldn’t come together, something that Rupert is also pointing at:

Apartheid was teaching them at school about each other, the worst things because the whites were always a small minority, and as soon as all the others were uniting they would push them away like nothing.

It is obvious that those diving factors during the apartheid are still playing a role in today’s society, because those locations are still prominent in Katutura. For example, one of the afterschool programs that I have been teaching at, just have children who are Damara speaking. You can also still find letters on some of the houses, like an O in the Owambo location and H in the Herero location. Despite this, there are coming up mixed areas, like Peya mentions:

In the area that I live, ehm, was actually the mixed, the first mixed race sort of suburb in Katutura. That’s why it’s called Wa-Na-He-Da, which is, Wanaheda stands for Wambo, Nama, Herero, Damara.

It is also worth mentioning that the informal settlements, Babylon, Havana, and Hakahana north of Katutura are mixed areas. In an inequality perspective, it is also important to point out that there are no differences in the standards of the houses in the different locations. There is, on the other hand, a difference between the houses in Katutura and Khomasdal – which is the old Coloured area. You can see that just from the outside of the houses, but there is another major difference that Peya was telling me about:
The first houses in Katutura never had any obliusion facilities, where’s the houses in Khomasdal had you know, water facilities inside the house for provisions for toilets and showers.

Worth noticing about Windhoek during the apartheid is that there was a legislation saying that Africans could just stay in urban areas if they were born there or had lived and worked there for ten years, which meant that urbanisation was completely constrained. Apart from the separation in living areas and homelands, in a historical perspective, employment opportunities for all black people was made difficult. Ndeyapo told me about how they had to work on contracts if they did get work, and how they needed to stay on that contract for six or twelve months without coming home. A woman I met in a taxi was also telling me about the problems with education, and how the only thing black people were allowed to study was to become teachers and nurses. Both of those factors has made an impact that played a role after independence, since there was a lack of working experience as well as a lack of education, even though some people, who could pay for it managed to go abroad to study. I have for example met a woman who went to Cape Town to study as well as Ndeyapo, who went to Zambia to study at university. I have shown that those dividing factors during the last hundred years in some ways have shaped today’s society, and I will go further into that later. Richard is summarizing why the history is important:

Even though Namibia has been independent since 1990, ehm, in practice, people still behave, you see, as if, well, they still, to a large extent, still accept that the classification, their classification into different tribal groupings. So it still has a very deep divisive influence or effect in Namibia.

This seems to be very true, and people are proud of belonging to the tribe they are from in many cases. One thing about ethnicity and divisions and whether to use the term tribe or ethnic group that I have found is that when it comes to talking about inequalities or ethnicity, people strongly oppose to the term ethnic groups, as well as looking at differences between groups because it is the apartheid division. When talking about other things, for example on lectures when discussing prostitutes, the presenters where referring to ethnic groups and in which part of Windhoek prostitutes from certain groups were working. The same thing was done in church, when they talked about statistics of how many percentages that had joined or left the church from different ethnic groups. The problem today with using the terms ethnic groups, is that people are getting more and more mixed, so it would in many cases be hard to define which group they belong to – which was already the case when the South Africans tried to do it.

**The political development & the socialist dream**

Shortly after the resettling of black people to Katutura, South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) was formed in Cape Town.\(^{67}\) SWAPO started off as OPO, the Owambo People’s Organisation but regarding Rupert, changed its name in 1966. He is of the understanding that SWAPO became a multi-tribal-black Namibian organisation. A lot of people still fully regard SWAPO as an Owambo party, even though a few posts within the party are taken by people from other ethnic groups. This was something that came up to discussion during a dinner party that I went to, where the general opinion seemed to be that one could make it to a minister post if you were not Owambo, but never become a president.

SWAPO started off saying that in order to make Namibia independent what was needed was an armed struggle. It was in particular the SWAPO members living in exile which carried out the Namibian nationalism and recruited people for the SWAPO military guerilla.\(^{68}\) Richard was doing this and had to leave Namibia because of his political engagement, but left SWAPO after coming back from exile because he didn’t agree on the necessity to continue with the armed struggle. The armed struggle goes well with the early socialist rhetoric that SWAPO had, but as Richard was putting it:

> SWAPO found it very useful to carry on the armed struggle. Not in order to defeat South Africa militarily, but largely as a kind of what I describe as an eclectic maneuver. You see, the armed struggle in SWAPO wore certain status, which has persisted to this day. And they continued with the armed struggle, not for shall I say, military reasons, but because it was, because elections for an independent Namibia were, the elections were on the horizon, and they used it as a kind of armed propaganda. You know, vote for SWAPO, we are the only group which is now sacrificing lives of its people and have soldiers, you know, sacrificed for the independence. And that message did resonated very strongly.

This was after the resolution 435 was signed by South Africa, which meant that Namibia was going to become independent, at some point. Listening to this, it didn’t seem like SWAPO was actually looking to do a socialist revolution, but tried to gain popularity. Peya is agreeing in that the armed struggle illusion was beneficial for SWAPO:

> The mass uneducated believe that the country was liberated and it was won from the colonial power, being South Africa. When it was actually handed over. But what they created was basically, the government then created a society of black elite. You know, black politicians.

The same thing was discussed at a lecture at UNAM, where the students were agreeing on that people are connecting the liberation and the liberation struggle with SWAPO. Those facts, in combination with the fact that Namibia now has been independent for 21 years and still has

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massive inequalities, arise the question about what happened to the socialism. People seem to have different opinions on this. Interestingly enough, even if Peya is saying that the government created the black elite, he is later on saying:

I think our government is really trying. I think there are a lot of things that you have to consider, it’s easy to just point out the faults, you know, as it is with any society or any government. But we need to look at the fact that development takes a lot of time.

He doesn’t really say that they are socialists through this statement, but it seems like he has faith in the government. To say that development takes time is true, but I’m very doubtful that it would take 21 years to create nothing but a few policies that I will present later. Leon is a bit more skeptical about SWAPO’s socialism:

One thing that you might understand, you know, there are concepts used when you are doing manifests and presenting and so forth, but the truth is, you know, it’s better said than done. You see, one would come in and say yeah, you know it was looking at the fact of, of, responding to the needs of people, starting programs from the ground and taking them up, but that’s not the case. /…/ But now, if you look at the concept of socialism, is it true that running things from a central government, does it respond with socialism? Cause that is just like, you know, a lion in a sheep skin where’s you are hiding with the concept.

Rupert is not just skeptical, he denies that SWAPO was ever a socialist party:

One ambassador wrote this, this Wikipedia documents that were revealed, that I don’t think that Sam Nujoma would identify a socialist idea if he would meet one on the street. Which I’m afraid is correct, but he is called a socialist because that makes sense. SWAPO was never a socialist movement. It is actually conservative, very conservative political party.

Even Richard, who was involved in SWAPO in an early stage says that socialism was never really on the board:

Before independence, when SWAPO was carrying on the armed struggle, they received most of the support either from the Soviet Union and of course from the MPLA government in Angola and in, from Cuba. And to a slightly less extent, even from people’s republic of China. They were never socialist. They only used this kind of socialist rhetoric in their writings and in their speeches. In, because, as you know, up to 1989, we still had the Cold war with the West on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. And they found that it suited the ability, suited them in terms of fundraising, in terms of access to international bodies and in terms of their own propaganda, inside Namibia to push the armed struggle. /…/ But once they took over the government in 1990 they dropped all that socialist rhetoric and acted in a typical, in a, I would say, typically in a way that differed very remarkably from any kind of socialism principal. The socialism itself was just very superficial and was never taken seriously by the SWAPO leadership. Or by the membership. There were of course certain individuals who I would say were genuine socialists, but they were very few. /…/ Now, socialism, the socialist path was already negated way back in 1981. The group of five came out with certain principals that they negotiated with the, ja, largely with SWAPO, a set of principals
where they said, should Namibia become independent, the independent Namibia must follow the, following principals of government. The first one, which was the respect for private property. /…/
Which made redistribution of assets after independence impossible.

Stefhan seem to have a bit of a stronger believe in that there was a socialist thought originally in SWAPO, but is also agreeing in that this is nowadays gone with the wind, which is also why he left the party:

Inside the country, where we had clearly a group of determent and dedicated socialists. It was not fashionable at all, it was very risky. With the exile leadership, I'm not so sure. Eh, because I also don't know them personally, so, my direct contacts are more the internal leadership, there were clearly people that were socialists, over time, they also changed tune. They kind of thought, we must come to terms now with the new realities and become more social-democratic oriented rather than structural reformative changes. That happened to virtually all of them. That I know from the 1980's. Then, in, with the exile leadership, there was a lot of support from the former East Europeans, the Soviet Union in particular, and there was suspicions that SWAPO in the 1976 program was maybe inspired by, I mean, the good books of supporting socialist countries, rather than complete dedication to socialism. /…/ Two things happened, one was when SWAPO came from exile and the co-incidence with the end of the Cold war, and Soviet Union collapsing. They very quickly jumped on that band wagon of saying “well, socialism is gone” and the former prime minister said, 21 years ago already, very clearly at a student's meeting in Katutura “Socialism is over, we must now come to terms with capitalism and the new world order”.

Even Samuel, who was barely born by the time of independence is opposing the fact that SWAPO are socialists:

Cause, I don't know, ok, the thing was, it was never realized, it didn't become a socialist country, I mean, it's, I mean, SWAPO, the party that was fighting for liberation, was a communist party, and the people assumed that once we become independent, we are going to become a communist country, but we didn't become a communist country, it's still capitalist very much here. It's more of a mixed economy, like some companies are owned by the government and the private sector. But it is still a lot of capitalism. A lot of it here. Soo, there isn't that thing that everything belongs to the state and it belongs to everyone. Mhmhm.

One thing that is made clear through those statements is, that SWAPO today is not a socialist party. Even though some people still believe they are, and keeping their hope up for a change, it is obvious that socialism is one thing that is never going to happen in Namibia. It doesn't seem like was the original plan, but anyhow, it has in that case followed the same pattern as Bade Onimode is describing about African Socialism. That it doesn’t work, because the majority of people are not aware of the politics and that the focus in the liberation struggles was not class struggle. This is also something that was discussed at a lecture in UNAM, that what they called “Western” ideologies is never going to work in Africa. They even put it as far as saying that Africa is not ready for democracy. The focus for SWAPO was rather on decolonialisation then the class struggle that the Marxist socialism is built up on. Even if SWAPO did, in their 1976
programme say that they wanted to unify all Namibian people, especially the working class, the peasantry and the intellectuals to create a classless society.\textsuperscript{69} This seems to be, after listening to my informants, just a rhetorical way of talking or maybe a role play to get support from other socialist countries. As Frantz Fanon is putting it, when decolonising a country, social reforms are usually slow, but it might also be that during the colonial time, the party who gets in power might not tell the full aim with getting in power.\textsuperscript{70} A class struggle in Namibia would anyhow be complicated in a lot of ways, that I will go further into when discussing class differences.

The question is, since the socialist dream is gone, what are SWAPO today? Rupert suggested conservative, Stefhan said neo-liberal. Other people that I have met have said that they don’t do any kind of politics, apart from the politics of getting richer themselves. That is another problem that is lively discussed, even in newspapers and on radio – that corruption is a widespread problem in Namibia. There is also an anti-corruption commission, which in itself is a proof that corruption is an issue. Namibia is today, without doubt, a capitalist country that has been widely influenced by the Western world and the consumption society, which also has an impact on even out inequalities. This is something Beauty confirms by saying:

Here in Namibia, money plays the role. If you don’t have money, you can’t even finish school.

If you can’t finish school, you get a different role in the society, and it makes it even harder for you to get employment. Regardless of what SWAPO are today, at least they have, since independence, at least implemented some policies and planned reformations to even out inequalities in the country. One of them being affirmative action and another one being different land reform programs. I will discuss how those are working as well as a bit more about the consumption society when talking about inequalities today.

\textbf{Class differences}

To do a class analysis of the Namibian society is very complex. This is because of a variety of reasons. Chris Tapscott mentions that within economy there are classes that are further fragmented by politics, culture but first and foremost by ethnic differentiation.\textsuperscript{71} But mainly, it is difficult because a class structure is based on a capitalist society, and so far even if Namibian politics is based on capitalism, not everyone in Namibia is included in that sort of society. It has been an agricultural country for a long time, and when the apartheid stopped people from moving in to cities the population who relied on subsistence agriculture grew, which created class


\textsuperscript{70} Frantz Fanon, The wretched of the earth – A negro psychoanalyst’s study of the problems of racism & colonialism in the world today (New York 1966), p. 94-95

identities of its own. As Tapscott says, peasant farmers in a lot of countries are showing very little class consciousness, which, as I pointed at earlier was one of the problems in creating a socialist country. This is something that Rupert, one of my informants, is pointing out:

I mean, class structure is a terminology that you can only use in a capitalist society, and of course, many people don’t have a clue. About what class is all about.

Richard is addressing another problem when it comes to class analysis in Namibia:

It’s obvious that people don’t classify classes, that people don’t use the word class in the same way, and that causes a lot of confusion. Because for example, in South Africa, they talk about the black middle class, and also known as the black diamonds, and when they talk about class in that way, they define it purely by monthly income. /…/ If you go back to the kind of old model, the Marxist division of classes into the capitalist class, the working class or the proletarians, the unemployed working class, the lumpen proletarians, that concept has nothing to do with what the person earns per month.

To make my research on class a bit less confusing, I would like to clarify that I started off trying to use the Marxist system, which simply doesn’t work to apply on the Namibian society, for the variety of reasons that I’ve been mentioning. What I then tried to do was to understand how one is defining class in Namibia. Richard speaks about how they define the middle class I South Africa by monthly income, this is now something that is being done in Namibia as well, with the Namibian, one of the biggest newspapers in the country publishing articles about the middle class and defining them by someone who earns more than N$ 7000 a month. The reason why they have been writing about classes in Namibia is because of the discussion that there are so big gaps between people, coming back to inequalities. Whoever you speak to, they always talk about this gap, which made me wonder about this middle class, is there a middle class in Namibia today? Stefhan says that there is:

The working class is, strictly in Namibia, cause, if we take it to the traditional, industrial working class, that would be the migrant workers and their descendants and a few permanent ones. That settled in towns, like the fishing industry, the mining industry…some in the public sector now, but that is unusual, then you have a huge group of insecure workers. /…/ Now, historically, they should all have been the working class, if an industrialization would have taken place in Namibia. But because it didn't take off, ehm, it's bigger than in most African countries, but it's still a fairly small group.

Beauty is agreeing that there is a working class, a working class that should have been bigger:

Most of the people, they are working class, they are working class, but, then again, most of them are now the low class doing nothing, unemployed, just at home.

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73 Ibid. p. 159
This again, shows that the middle class isn’t that big, because people who can work and would have been the middle class in a less unequal country, have been forced down to a lower class. Leon made an interesting statement:

There is very big gaps between the rich and the poor, so, haha, there are very few people who you would find in the middle. It's either, you are poor, or, or rich or poor! That's how I would describe it. Very, very few people you would find in the middle. And if you find people in the middle, sometimes you can’t find them so much here in Windhoek. They are almost always outside Windhoek.

This takes it back to the problematic about placing self-sustainable farmers in a class category. If you don’t earn money, but you have a good life with the grains that you need and the cattle that you need, where would you be placed then? Ndeyapo told me about how you would regard someone upper class in the rural area:

There are also some who are richer than others, maybe you have got more cattle than I, or maybe you have more mahango then I. And yeah, so you’d be regarded as a higher class in that category. /…/ You can produce enough for you and your family. /…/ You are high society in that setup, in the village setup, but if you come here for example, you are just like anyone else.

Statements like this indicate how difficult a class analysis of the Namibian society would be, because it is so many factors that are playing a role. It is also important to point out that there is no clear cut line between the classes, because of the family structures in Namibia. As I mentioned before, there has been a rising black elite class, but this elite class is not coming from nowhere. They have relatives who are still living in the rural areas, and as Lucy Edwards says, due to cultural norms, the wealthy relatives are expected to pay remittances with their extended family. All those factors are together making a class analysis extremely difficult, something that both Richard and Stefhan are pointing out, and questioning if it is even an important thing to do. Stefhan, by saying:

I have not yet been looking at a clear comprehensive analysis of classes in Namibia, because it is so tricky. You tend to fall into foreign concepts and theoretical paradigms that are maybe really not missing, erhm, they are really missing social reality on the ground.

Richard is on the same track, saying:

No one has ever, no Namibian or other researcher has made an analysis because of the sort of dominating influence in Namibian society of ethnic, ethnic divisions and ethnic structures. And if you are going to talk about the existence of classes, it makes for a very difficult analysis. /…/ It has very little practical value. You unite the working class along a national and international line, yeah, and when you look at Namibia, the worker, you, firstly you don’t have a working class consciousness because it’s been totally corrupted by ethnic consciousness or tribal consciousness.

One thing that can be said from trying to look at class differences and the view of class in Namibia is that the setup of classes have changed slightly since independence, but also that the class society was never really introduced with capitalism because the focus has rather been on ethnicity. This is also something that Tapscott is mentioning when talking about class, that it has not been possible to determine a class formation in Namibia because of various social indicators, but he does say that since independence a class stratification has started to transcend the ethnic boundaries.\footnote{Chris Tapscott: War, Peace and Social Classes in Colin Leys & John S. Saul, Namibia’s Liberation Struggle – The Two-Edged Sword (London 1995), p. 162}

\textbf{Inequalities today}

There are no doubts that there are inequalities in Namibia today, when 5\% owns, controls and benefit from most of the countries resources.\footnote{Leake S. Hangala: A Businessman’s Perspective on Black Economic Empowerment in Institute for Public Policy Research, 2 BEE or Not 2 BEE? An Eclectic Review of Namibia’s Black Economic Empowerment Landscape (Windhoek 2007), p. 7} Or putting it in a different way, the richest 10\% of the population has consumption levels that are 50 times higher than the poorest 10\%.\footnote{Central Bureau of Statistics, National Planning Commission, A Review of Poverty and Inequality in Namibia (Windhoek 2008), p. xi} When looking at the review of inequalities and poverty in Namibia, this shows that 27.6\% of the households are considered poor and another 13.8\% are falling under the category of severely poor.\footnote{Ibid. p. x} One of my main aims with this research has been to look at if there are any differences between the tribal groups, or along the line of the ethnical division that was made during apartheid. As I mentioned earlier, most people that I have met has been very positive about this research, because it is like Stefhan said:

SWAPO, politically, because of an in principal commitment to one Namibia, one nation, abolished ethnic classification with independence. But, of course, you don’t abolish inequalities along ethnic lines with it.

Richard is of the same understanding:

In practice, with independence, we had formed a, we had all agreed that, accepted the slogan One Namibia, one nation, and we had all publicly said that we stood for nation building. When it came to actually building the nation, what happened was that the ethnic grouping, as defined by South Africa and which I have said earlier were artificial, did play a role in how people mobilized amongst themselves…

Both of those comments somehow indicates that there are inequalities along ethnic lines, but Rupert was of a different opinion and the only one opposing my research:
White and black is out, it's an outdated category, eh, but I would advise you not to do it on a tribal basis, because, that will mislead you, that will bring you on the wrong track. You can find a lot of substantial empiric evidence, if you so want, but the conclusions you can possible come up with then and the kind of research you can do is then to say "ok, 78.3% of the ruling class is Ovambo speaking and 13.35% are Hereros and the rest and so on" Ok. I can give you those results without you having to do the research. But in terms of being relevant to Namibian conditions, eh, the tribal issue is a ghost issue, it's a fictional issue.

I appreciate this comment, because it was one of my first interviews and it really made me aware on how to do the research. I was never planning to look into how big percentage of different classes that are from different ethnic groups, but rather to look at the possibilities for people coming from different tribes. With this statement, there are two things that I find interesting, and that is, first of all, that Rupert himself is married to an Ovambo woman, which by many is regarded to benefit from this division, and secondly, that he is later on talking about differences along tribal lines. Another interesting point of view is, that there has actually not been any research that would give me those results that Rupert are talking about, at least not that I have found – and also, that no one that I have met who works with statistics and research know about. J.S Malan, is arguing in the end of his book that ethnicity in Namibia is a fact and a force to count with, and says that it is wrong to think that people should detach from their traditions in line with the globalisation but rather work for acceptance and harmony between the different groups. So, if looking in to inequalities between ethnic groups, are there any and in that case, what are they? As I mentioned, a lot of people are of the understanding that the Ovambos are the most privileged group, especially in the sense of opportunities to get employment or at least higher positions. Even Samuel, who is Ovambo himself says that in order to get a job, apparently you should be Oshiwambo speaking, but also gives a reason why this is:

Yeah, well, I mean when you apply for a job, it's not gonna say you should be Ovambo, it's only that they are the majority, and, I think, this thing, there is also this thing of like people want to work with people who they get, I mean, people they, they, they, easily communicate with, although, that's very much their disadvantage, because other people might have skills that they need.

He also mentions another group, the Rehoboth Basters, and says it is good to be in case you want employment:

Ah, yeah... I think I would be lying if I said it's not true. I mean, one thing, eh, like jobs here, where you can get jobs like working in the banks, working in the shops, like, a clothing shop, especially, the shops that sells expensive clothing, if you have time and then you just walk, and look, you see that most people are the Bastards. The coloured people. Cause, like, the employers prefer them.

79 J.S Malan, Peoples of Namibia (Pretoria 2004) p. 145-146
When actually walking around in town, this seem to be a statement that is true, but nothing that I have heard anything further about. It is also difficult to get anything out of the inequality report about the standards of living for Basters, since they speak Afrikaans and live in the same region as Windhoek is placed – and household languages and areas are the basis for that research.

Going back to Ovambo people, Peya don’t necessarily think it is easier for someone who is Ovambo to get employed, but in order to get a senior position the preferential would be to be Oshiwambo speaking:

I don't know if it is easier, but for example, if there is two, two people competing for the same job, you know, and it's in the government for example, you know, the preferential would be the Oshiwambo speaking. You know. I had, I have an uncle who is in the police and his been, he is sort of an inspector, for about 15 years. And four individuals that started training under him, have so passed him. You know, in rank. Just because they are Oshiwambo speaking. But he is Damara speaking, so, there is very limited opportunity to progress in your carrier.

This is something that Beauty says as well, she is in the same line as both Peya and Samuel, but is also pointing out that connections are important, and to be able to receive a position within the government it is better to be Ovambo:

Like you know, it's like, if my sister is working, maybe in a café, then she will talk me into it, talk with her boss, and I'll be working there. Then I will come with my friend, I'll talk my friend in and she will come and work there. Then it's just like that, most of the jobs here are mostly given to the Ovambo people. Because the president himself is Ovambo! But there are also a lot of Namas and Damaras working, but the thing is, we don't do, if we go to places of the government for example, or ministry of defense, most of the people there, I can say 99% of them are Ovambo people.

Richard was also talking about the advantage of being Ovambo:

SWAPO, they are favouring the Ovambos, that is very clear. There are many examples of that. If you look at all the people in the civil service and the directors in general, in the civil service and all prominent positions, in the army, and in the police force. I'll find that even though Ovambos are 52% of the population, all the key posts, about 90% of the key posts and of all the diplomats, who are in embassies in foreign countries, are Ovambo. What is more, let me give you some examples here, you would find that people in the army and in the police force and in the civil service, if they are not from, if they are not Oshiwambo, they may be very competent in their work and may have been working now for 20 years, but they do not get any promotion. When we are talking about senior administrative positions, yeah, it's not only more difficult, it is in practice virtually impossible that yeah, people with many years of experience and even competent people, they just don't get promoted if they are not Oshiwambo.

Even Rupert, who is against this research, says that, regarding getting employment:

It's better if you are black and Ovambo. And a SWAPO member.
The only two out of my respondents who are disagreeing with this fact are Ndeyapo and to some extent, Stefhan. Ndeyapo, who, keep in mind, are Owambo and works for the government, said:

No, like in the government, the ministers you find that there is a lot of mix of people, some are from the north, some are from the south, different regions, there’s nothing like, even in private companies it’s mixed up.

Stefhan is saying that there is more jobs for Oshiwambo speakers, but points out that there are also a lot more Oshiwambo speakers than anything else:

It’s equally difficult for everyone, there are more jobs for Oshiwambo speakers, but there are also more applicants for those few jobs. It’s very easy to make that accusation, it’s an Owambo government, and of course there are a few examples, like the first group of ambassadors were all Oshiwambo speakers. And then of course the question is raised, oh, are we now moving in that…you go to some ministries and you find now, just that one language group is represented there. A few years ago, in the 90’s, I think -97 or so, the then Prime minister Hage Geingob was also the opposition party that came with that story, there are ethnic discrimination in the public service, all going to the Oshiwambos. Then he released statistics for once he said now, I give it to you by ethnicity, to disprove that point, the actually Oshiwambo speakers at that point, by -97, got less appointments and promotions in the civil service than their share of the population. But the public perception was, they, it’s all going that direction and that’s where I’m personally very careful to jump on that bandwagon.

I haven’t seen this statistics myself, and it is very old statistics. This is very interesting and something that would be worth researching again, a research that should be done by someone who is not from the government. The overall perspective is still, as I have indicated, that at least the higher positions are going to Owambo people. Stefhan’s other point, that there might be more jobs for Owambos, but that they are also a lot higher percentage of the population( 49.8% in 1995) is something that is really worth keeping in mind, because when looking at the review of poverty and inequalities of Namibia, it shows that a lot of Oshiwambo speaking people are still poor. It actually has a 50.5% share of all the poor in the country, by this not saying that they are the poorest. The poorest group regarding this review are the Khoi-San speakers, another group that got mentioned a lot during my interviews, the San, together with the Himbas, as being marginalised. This is one of the problems with not doing the review on tribal basis, but on language spoken in households, that Himbas and Hereros are both speaking Otjiherero, which means that it doesn’t show that Himbas are that poor. San, or bushmen as they used to be called, are as I mentioned earlier, originally hunter-gatherers and got moved to the Kalahari desert during the apartheid. It is hard to find San people in

80 J.S Malan, Peoples of Namibia (Pretoria 2004), p. 4
82 J.S Malan, Peoples of Namibia (Pretoria 2004,) p. 89
83 Ibid. p. 102
Windhoek, but there are a few. Leon, who is working for this organisation who are trying to improve the situation for San people are saying:

They are not really disadvantaged, government, if you understand, the way how they operate, it’s, you know, the hierarchy is too long. And the need of the people cannot wait that hierarchy. For example, to approve establishing a school, a resettlement farm for the San people, it would take you some 4-5 years./…/San people have suffered severely since independence, not since independence, even before independence, but, now, let’s not talk about that, because we never had powers to change things…after independence, it was really trouble, but San are only getting land now, like 2011, after 21 years of independence! So, I’m not trying to say government is not supporting or is not in favour, they are, but the root has taken, to assist those communities, too long.

This somehow says, that what everybody needs is land and education, which is good, and in a globalised, capitalist world necessary, but might not be what everybody wants. Ndeyapo told me about when the deputy minister came up with the idea to integrate San people in wage work:

I remember, two years ago, our deputy minister, she came up with the initiative to integrate them in the work system, and then she got quite a lot of them like in the office of the prime minister, cause I remember, two of them were under my supervision, but then they just disappeared back! For them, staying in Windhoek, it’s like, I mean, think like the walled houses in the urban area, that’s not their tradition.

When going out to cities like Gobabis for example, you do find San people working in shops and at guest farms a lot more. At some guest farms you can even give donations, so that the San people working there can send their children to school. This is good, but in a way even more stigmatizing, what about the other ethnic groups children? It somehow indicates that the San people cannot take care of themselves, even if they are working. In this area people are also talking about how the San people have been forced to go into wage work, because they are not allowed to hunt any more – which basically means that they have to give up their traditions for the capitalist society. Peya told me about his view of the importance of culture for San and Himbas:

I think it’s that thing about culture. They got different cultural values and ehm, that’s why you don’t see them doing regular work. I think with the Himbas, they wanna stay true to their identity, as the Himba people, and that’s why most of them, the majority of them are still living in villages and so forth. /…/ I think it’s a cultural thing, Where’s Damaras, and a lot of Damaras and Oshiwambos take the natural progress in life, to go to university, you go and get a job and you slowly progress from there.

Beauty gave me a good reason to why they might not want to come in to Windhoek:

You know, the thing is, mostly, the San people and the Himbas, they are treated like they are not people, they are like outside, even if they come into town, all here, we know who, San, likes wearing
Both of those comments has an undertone that Himbas and San people are different, that people in, especially Windhoek, might not really see them as people, and that they are not doing a natural development, a development that is enforced by colonialisation and globalisation. When travelling around in the country, you see Himbas who are trying to make money, by looking like they always have done and posing at photos for tourists, which is actually quite bizarre. The Western world introduces capitalism and wage work, and the Himbas are getting the wage and become a part of the capitalist society by not being westernized – but this is also what keeps them outside the society they are living in. Peya’s statement is also indicating that going to university is a natural development of oneself, but this is unfortunately not a reality for everyone. As I quoted from my interview with Beauty, if you don’t have money, you can’t even go to school. And school is something that has shown to be very important in order to get a job, Beauty said:

Even if you have a grade 12, it’s easier to get a job. Education is very important.

This is something all of my informants were agreeing on, but they were also pointing out that just because you have been to university, it doesn’t mean that you will get employed. Going to university is one of the reason why the urbanisation is so big, as well as trying to get employment. Regarding a baseline report made on youth migration, youths are leaving the rural areas because the schooling is better in urban areas, and they aspire to get a better life in the cities, where more jobs are to be found.\(^84\) This is also something that affects inequalities in the country. The informal settlements are the fastest growing areas of Windhoek, with Havanna having around 180 0000 inhabitants, making it one of the main urban areas in Southern Africa. This has also been changing the poverty in rural areas, where in 1992-93, it was 69% poverty and in 2004 this number had decreased to 49%\.\(^85\) Peya told me that the informal settlements in Katutura, being Havana, Hakahana and Babylon are growing with 10% per annum, compared to the rest of Windhoek being 6%. There was someone holding a speech on the radio saying that today 2/3 of the total population lives in informal settlements, but unfortunately I didn’t catch up who it was and where this statistics came from. Interesting is, that even people who are living in iron shacks have new cellphones and are well dressed. Apparently, what all of my informants as well as other people have been telling me, is that whatever money you get, you buy things that you can show off. You don’t have to take guests to your house, but everybody will see you, your phone and your car. This shows that Namibia is really a consumption society, and it is a shame that people are prioritizing in this way, because if they were spending money on investments rather than a car, it could help them to get out of poverty. Going back to urbanisation, one thing to remember

\(^85\) Lecture: *Advanced Sociology of Namibian Society*, Volker Winterfeldt, UNAM, 2011-03-22
when looking at inequalities along ethnic lines is the differences of the former homelands of the groups. Steffhan is mentioning this, that if you are coming from a rural town in the south, without access to land, it makes absolute sense to come to the city. When travelling around the country, it is easy to see what kind of opportunities there is to make money, if it’s a possibility to farm and what sort of materials they have to work with. In the inequality report, the Kavango region is by far the poorest region in the country, with 56.5% being poor, and out of that 36.7% are accounted as severely poor.\(^86\) Interestingly enough, this is an area with extremely good wood, used for building materials as well as wood carvings. It is also an area where you can grow things and there is communal land. When speaking to people who were working there, they said that the reason for the poverty in the region was simply caused by people’s laziness. This is interesting, because of a statement that Beauty made that is also pointing at this:

Namibia is equal. It’s fair. But, the thing is, most of the black children, like us, we don’t give much attention to school. We are teenagers, we like going out, drinking alcohol…

With this, I’m not trying to say that everybody who is unemployed is lazy, but in some cases it seems like they are not trying to do very much to change the situation. It is a common opinion that many Zimbabweans are getting service jobs, because they are more service minded – and these are jobs that could have gone to Namibians themselves.

Last but not least, I am going to try to answer what the government is doing about inequalities. As I mentioned earlier, there are governmental policies implemented, one of the most important one being Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action is originally an American concept which has its roots in the Civil Rights Movements and the idea is to make it easier people from minority groups to get employment and education to change inequalities based on race.\(^87\) This does not mean that people should be employed for work they are not suitable for, but a mean to even out societies whereby discrimination has led to disadvantage for certain groups.\(^88\) Affirmative Action was properly implemented in Namibia in 1998. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that are not really working with the policy, and to have any real effect, it needs to be improved and clarified. There have been some changes in the inequality in employment since Affirmative Action was implemented, but there is a risk of stigmatizing people who are getting employed under the act in case the majority doesn’t properly know what it stands for. There was an evaluation made by the research company; LaRRI (Labour Resource and Research Institute)


\(^{88}\) Ibid. p. 11-12
made in 2005, where they conclude that affirmative action is not a way to raise the socio-economic levels of the country, but a way of shifting the inequalities from being based on race and gender to the basis of class. This means, that in the Namibian context, affirmative action is implemented to even out inequalities created during the colonial time. The question is: who is previously disadvantaged in Namibia today? And for how long will people be previously disadvantaged? Former president Sam Nujoma was having a speech on the radio talking about the San people as previously disadvantaged in comparison to others. Many people are also arguing that affirmative action is just being used when it comes to Owambos, for example when discussing this very policy at a lecture.

The question about access to land is also an important issue when it comes to inequalities, and the government has implemented a National Land Policy which is supposed to reduce poverty and undo imbalances created by the past, but there is still a long way to go and the inequalities regarding land are still huge.

**Conclusion and suggested further research**

One thing that is made clear through this research is that history has definitely shaped today’s society in Namibia. There were tribes in the region before the colonisation, but it was through that and the Berlin conference that the country got the borders drawn out, which naturally has had an impact in Namibia, as well as in most other African countries. The colonisation also created new groups, such as the Rehoboth Basters and the Coloureds. The apartheid regimes with its dividing factors are still playing an important role in making the ethnic belonging even more prominent. The homeland division and the fact that they stopped all black people from moving into cities have had a demographic impact, as well as the force move of people to Katutura and the different locations within it. The fact that black people didn’t have the opportunity to get higher education in case they couldn’t afford to go abroad to study has had an impact on the new formations of classes. Nowadays many people from different ethnic groups are studying at university, but this still doesn’t guarantee a job and the groups were few people are going to university and are staying true to their traditional way of living are being seen as outsiders who doesn’t progress.

It seems like the leading party, SWAPO, never really planned to do a socialist revolution, but just used this rhetoric in terms of gaining popularity and to get financial support from communist countries. They are still today more popular than they probably otherwise would have been

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89 LaRRI, *Namibia’s Affirmative Action in Employment – An Assessment* (Windhoek 2005), p. 8
because of the armed struggle, since people connect them with the liberation. It came very handy for SWAPO that the end of the Cold war and the fall of the Soviet Union came at the same time as independence, since this made it easy for them to leave their old politics behind them. It would anyhow have been difficult to do such a revolution because of the lack of class consciousness in Namibia. To do a class analysis of the country, especially a Marxist class analysis seems almost impossible, since it is so many other factors that are playing a role and since not everyone is included in the capitalist society. If anyone managed to do such an analysis, it still wouldn’t be very useful, apart from an academic point of view.

Regarding inequalities along ethnic lines, a proper survey would need to be done and the results should be presented to everyone, printed in newspapers and spoken about on radio, so that it could reach the majority of people in the country. In general, it seems like people are of the opinion that Ovambo people have a greater opportunity to get employment, at least at senior positions. Looking at the statistics of language spoken in households, a large group of the Oshiwambo speaking population is still living in poverty. This indicates that inequalities within the group might have been growing bigger, because there is no doubt that a large part of the new black elite is Owambos, especially many of the politicians. I know that there is an anti-corruption commission, but it would be interesting to do a proper research on how widespread corruption is in Namibia. Even if the new black elite are paying remittances to their relatives, it is still a large number of Ovambo people who are not getting anything out from this.

The Kavango region is the poorest region and I’m not sure why this is. That would be another interesting research, is it true that people are lazy, or are they actually trying, and in that case, what has been going wrong?

As a group, the San people are the poorest and together with the Himbas, the most marginalised. The reason for the marginalisation and the stigma that other groups have been putting on them seems to first and foremost be because they have chosen to not be a part of the globalization process to a very large extent, and to not become a part of the consumption society – even if they are slowly sliding into it. As I mentioned before, a research on those groups alone and to hear their opinions on their situation would be very useful.

Other research that would be interesting is to look at inequalities between gender and the women’s situation and inequalities in regard to age, as well as a research on why the apartheid is still somehow alive and what need to be done to get to an end to this.
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