

Christianity and naming in Owamboland

• MINNA SAARELMA-PAUKKALA

“*Edhina ekogidho*” is an Oshiwambo saying which means that names are links. Personal names indeed connect people to their history in many ways. The names of Namibians are like an African quilt with many colourful pieces of textile: African names, Biblical names, European names.

Uusiku And Other Old Names

Personal names had an important role in traditional Owambo culture, as the name was seen as an essential part of the person. When children were born, they were first given temporary names, which often referred to the time of the birth, e.g. Uusiku ‘night’, or Nandjala ‘hunger’. The real name was given a few weeks later by the father. The child was typically named after a friend, a neighbour, or a relative of the father.

The relationship between people sharing the same name was especially close. It was believed that sharing the same name also meant sharing the same personality. To be asked to become a namesake for a newborn child was the greatest honour that one could experience in the Owambo community.

Sometimes names also reflected the feelings of the father: Ndahafa ‘I am glad’, Ndatila ‘I am afraid’. Names could also tell about the future duties of the child. A girl could be named Taatsu, for example, which refers to grinding corn.

Biblical And European Names

The adoption of Christianity, and the practice of giving new names at baptism, led to a rapid change in the Owambo naming system. In 1883, the first six Owambo men were baptised at Omulonga by the Lutheran missionary Tobias Reijonen from Finland. Their names – Moses, Elias, Abraham, Jakob, Tobias and Johannes – were all taken from the Bible, and one of the converts was Reijonen’s namesake.

The first baptisms in the Ndonga royal family took place in 1901, when two nephews of the king, Kuedhi and Nehale, were baptised. Kuedhi became Albin – after the Finnish missionary Albin Savola, and Nehale Martin – after Martti (Martin) Rautanen.

The first baptism of an Owambo king took place in 1912, when the King of Ondonga, Kambonde kaNgula, was baptised on his deathbed by missionary Juho Wehanen. The king wanted to adopt the name Eino Johannes – the name of Wehanen’s son.

The number of Lutherans grew rapidly in Owamboland: from 900 in 1900 to 23 000 in 1930. This also meant that Biblical and European names spread rapidly. Foreign names were not always adopted as such: the name Wilhelm became Vilihema, and Ester Esitela.

New Life, New Name

In the early 20th century, most converts adopted foreign names when they embraced Christianity. A new ‘Christian’ name was seen as a symbol of a new life and of abandoning traditional beliefs. At first, Owambo Christians were ridiculed because of their strange names, but soon this changed, and the new names became fashionable. They also served as symbols of expected social progress in the colonial society.

The popularity of Biblical and European names has most often been explained by the Owambo namesake custom. A large number of Owambos have been named after European missionaries or others who were named in their honour. As a result, many European names have been passed on in the society for many generations. A good example is Selma, the most popular women’s name among Lutheran Owambos. The original Selma was Dr Selma Rainio from Finland, who founded the



Photo: The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission archives.

Ondonga King Kambonde kaNgula was baptised on his deathbed in 1912. He chose the name Eino Johannes, which was the name of missionary Juho Wehanen’s newborn son.

Ondanjokwe Lutheran Hospital in 1911. It is noteworthy that many European names were adopted because of a friendship – and not because the Owambos were forced or pressed to adopt them.

Missionaries Promoting Indigenous Names

There was also resistance to the use of foreign names in the early 20th century. As a result, in 1905 two Finnish missionaries, Emil Liljeblad and Heikki Saari, decided to give African names to their daughters, which at that time was unheard of. Liljeblad named his daughter Aune Mtaleni Nahenda, meaning ‘look at Aune with mercy’. By doing this, he wanted to show that Owambo people need not despise their beautiful indigenous names. Saari named his daughter Kerttu Nekulilo ‘redemption’. These African names caused astonishment both among the missionaries and the local people.

Missionary Walde Kivinen wrote in 1937 that he had encouraged Owambos to adopt African names, because “otherwise all men here will soon be called Paulus, Petrus and Johannes”.

In 1937, the conference of the Finnish missionaries discussed African baptismal names. Heikki Saari defended the use of African names and argued that they could play a part in creating an Owambo people with a national spirit. The Finnish Mission also published a calendar, ‘Ondjalulamasiku Jomumvo 1938’, which included Oshiwambo names (e.g. Uukongo and Nambili), and thus served as a name-guide for Lutheran Owambos.

Revival Of African Names

However, it was not until the 1960s that African names were increasingly adopted in Lutheran congregations. They emerged together with the struggle for independence. People in the North wanted to show with their names that they were Africans, and especially Namibians. African names appeared in parish registers when people started to give their children more than one name at baptism. Typically, the first given name was Biblical or European, and the other name African, as in Selma Magano ‘gift’.

After Namibian independence in 1990, many Owambos gave their children African names only, as an expression of their Namibian identity. African names are also frequently used in everyday life. A good example is Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, who was earlier known as Herman Toivo ya Toivo. His surname includes the Finnish male name Toivo ‘hope’. As English is the official language in Namibia, English names have also become popular.

The namesake custom is still strong in Owambo culture, and many people today carry names that were originally adopted from Europeans who once lived in the country. Indeed, the names of the Owambos reveal a lot about their history. They tell that these people are Namibians, and Christians, and that they have many European friends.

– Dr Minna Saarelma-Paukkala is director of the Almanac Office at Helsinki University, Finland. Her dissertation ‘*Edhina ekogidho – Names as Links*’ (2003) analyses the personal naming system of the Owambos in Namibia. She can be contacted at minna.saarelma@helsinki.fi.



A 1995 NamPost commemoration of Owamboland Finnish missionaries Martti Rautanen, Albin Savola, Karl Weikkolin and Dr Selma Rainio.

Sometimes it's really hard to see it

Learn more about depression at the

I.See.U Event

28 September 2016

Windhoek Golf and Country Club | 07h30 - 17h00

Dealing with depression, like all mental health issues, requires compassion and understanding.

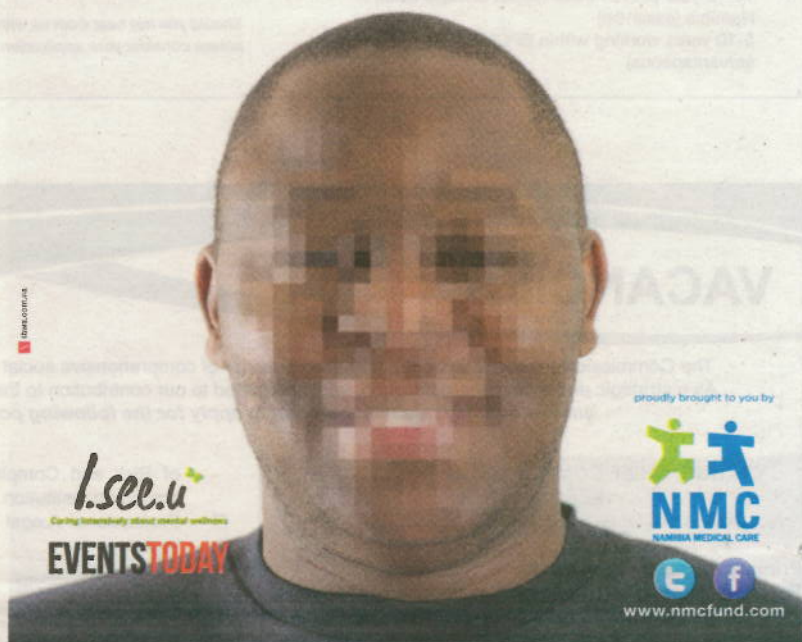
Join us for a day of medical and human insight with health professionals leading discussions on working and living with depression, understanding adult suicide growing up with depression, and tackling teen suicide. There will also be a number of wellness exhibitions to explore. All proceeds go to the Autism Association.

TICKETS & ENTRANCE

Limited Tickets available for the I.See.U Event. Get yours today!

Morning: N\$100 | Afternoon: N\$50 | Full day: N\$130 | Exhibitors: N\$250
Exhibition area entrance is FREE.

Tickets available online at www.eventstoday.com.na or at the Biltong Shop in Maerua Mall, and at Warehouse Theatre on Tal street. For more information contact us via email: admin@nmcfund.com or tel: 061 233 575.



LOCAL TENDER BOARD

MUNICIPALITY OF HENTIES BAY

TENDER INVITATION

TENDER N° LTBHM 003/2016

FORMULATION OF AN EXECUTABLE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PLAN FOR THE MUNICIPALITY OF HENTIES BAY

Reputable and experienced consulting companies/individuals with a good track record and previously engaged in consultancy of Local Economic Development Strategy formulation and compilation are herewith invited to tender/express interest in respect of consultancy services to formulate and compile the Local Economic Development Strategy Plan for the Municipality of Henties Bay. This is a project funded by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development.

SCOPE OF WORK

The successful Tenderer shall provide Council with a well devised and executable Local Economic Development Strategy Plan to stimulate the local economic environment, which document shall include but not limited to:

- Policy framework formulation;
- Needs analysis with a comprehensive SWOT analyses; and
- Executional work plan for the next five years.

CLOSING DATE : 23 September 2016 at 11H00
TENDER DOCUMENTS : Available from the Cashier's Office, Municipal Offices
LEVY : N\$ 250.00 (Non- refundable)
CONTACT PERSON : Ms. Bianca M Nguaike/Mr Topper Kuhn
: Tel: (064) 502000

DELIVERY ADDRESS : The Chairperson or The Chairperson
Local Tender Board for the Local Tender Board for the
Municipality of Henties Bay Municipality of Henties Bay
P. O. Box 61 C/o Nickey Iyambo Ave &
HENTIES BAY Jakkalsputz Road

CONDITIONS OF TENDER:

Companies should state and submit the following together with the tender document:

1. Company profile;
2. Proof of:
 - (i) Certificate of Good Standing from Social Security Commission;
 - (ii) Certificate of Good Standing from the Ministry of Finance: Directorate Inland Revenue for tax purposes;
 - (iii) Registration at the Registrar of Companies.
3. Past experience with similar projects
4. A preliminary work programme
5. A financial proposal, which should include all cost and VAT

Tenders/Expression of Interest in sealed envelopes clearly marked “FORMULATION OF AN EXECUTABLE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PLAN FOR THE MUNICIPALITY OF HENTIES BAY” must be placed in the tender box at the abovementioned street address, alternatively by ordinary mail or courier service to the mentioned delivery address. Documents delivered by courier services should be delivered a day before the closing date.

Council shall not be obliged to accept the highest or lowest tender or any tender for that matter.

NO FAXES OR ELECTRONIC MAIL WILL BE ACCEPTED

REINHARDT STEVENS OCHS
CHAIRPERSON OF THE LOCAL TENDER BOARD