

# 4 *Revolutionary Songs as a Response to Colonialism in Namibia*

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## **Introduction**

Traditional songs in Africa were often used as a weapon against indiscipline in a society (Finnegan, 1970). Transgressors were ridiculed and shamed through singing when boys and girls met for social dancing in an open space (which usually took place in the evening) and vulgar language was hurled against the offender. Misdemeanours and the shameful acts of certain people were also criticized through action songs. On these occasions, the names of 'alleged' offenders were mentioned as well as the offences they had committed. These songs were also performed when people did teamwork for threshing, weeding and so forth.

During the struggle for independence, the same strategy was applied. Ruth Finnegan (1970, p. 273) argues that it would be a mistake to assume too easily that there is necessarily a complete break in continuity between traditional political poetry and that of modern politics. Songs were used to sensitise the oppressed to their plight and to expose the iniquities of the old regime. The proponents and protagonists of the apartheid system were criticised and Namibians were encouraged to resist oppressive laws. To boost their morale and demonstrate their indefatigable quest for emancipation from the yoke of colonialism, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighters composed various revolutionary songs.

With the attainment of independence, the popularity of these songs has dwindled. They are sung on rare occasions and it is feared that some songs may vanish with time if they are not properly recorded and documented to ensure their survival. As a result the historical events inherent in these songs may drift into obscurity. This chapter investigates the functions of revolutionary songs in the Namibian independence struggle and identifies their most important themes. The main aims of the chapter are to highlight the historical value of the songs and gauge their significance during the colonial era.

## **Theoretical Framework**

There are other scholars who have investigated the role of songs in dismantling the shackles of colonialism in Africa. Finnegan (1970) investigates the role of songs in several African countries such as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South Africa and Kenya and examines the content and form of such songs. She illustrates how these songs were performed to sensitise the oppressed to their plight. She also reveals the strategies