

Pre-colonial and postcolonial identity formations in Namibia: an exploration of the origin of Nehale lyaMpingana's dualism

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Abstract

Nehale lyaMpingana is not only one of the best-known historical figures in Aandonga history, he is one of the most celebrated figures in the history of anti-colonialism in Namibia. Despite being such a well-known historical figure, there is still some confusion as to his identity. He is often referred to as a 'King' and/or 'Chief' on the one hand, and 'warrior' on the other. This confusion has prevailed not only amongst ordinary people but is also to be found in state institutions and academic historical writings. This article explores the origin of lyaMpingana's dual identity by looking at identity formation in pre-colonial and post-colonial Namibia. In precolonial and colonial Namibia Nehale lyaMpingana was simply known as a member of the Aakwanekamba family, the Ondonga royal family, and as a fearless warrior who fought against the colonial forces. In post-colonial Namibia, the state, and its principal officials such as the President, used their constitutional powers and relevant laws to bestow upon Nehale lyaMpingana the titles of 'King' or 'Chief'. The evidence, particularly from the Aandonga customs, shows that Nehale lyaMpingana was never a 'King' or 'Chief' of the Aandonga. The article further demonstrates the state's monopoly on national identity formation in post-independence Namibia, sometimes to the exclusion and suppression of indigenous communities' positions and customs.

Introduction

This article features three aspects of historical study: historical explanations, contemporary history and political history. Firstly, this study differs from those historical writings which simply focus on a particular historical event without any reference to the implications for or influences on the present. It places the historical figure, Nehale lyaMpingana, at the centre of the historical analysis with the aim of accounting for the various interpretations and identities associated with him. More specifically, the study traces the origin of his dual identity through two periods; pre-colonial and post-colonial Namibia. Because of this approach, this study is mainly concerned with historical explanations. As the historian William H. Walsh writing on the philosophy of history explains, historical explanations are “typically, a narrative of past actions arranged in such a way that we see not only what happened but also why.”¹ As such, it provides a

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¹ William H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*, London, Hutchinson, 1967: 23.

chronological orientation of the selected historical figure, from pre-colonial to post-colonial Namibia, ('what happened') and how this historical figure came to obtain dual identity (the 'why' question).

While history is often associated with events that are distant and from which historians are generally detached, John Tosh explains what is called contemporary history; a period within living memory whereby a historian is close to the events. Contemporary history is not only important in responding to society's expectations but also assists in the fulfilment of history's practical function as an important contribution to political issues which are contentious in the present. In the context of this study, the interpretation and identity of Nehale IyaMpingana in post-colonial Namibia represents an aspect of contemporary history. Although post-colonialism is often viewed in the context of political science, history, particularly in the academic studies of contemporary history, also looks at post colonialism as explained below:

Postcolonial history takes as its starting point the marginalization or dispossession of a large category of people in the past [...] the 500-year-long colonial project of the West is seen to have impoverished and humiliated those societies. Rescuing their history from the patronising stereotypes of Westerners is a pre-condition for their emancipation. But for postcolonial scholars a question-mark hangs over the academic discourse of history as the West has understood it, for historians were deeply implicated in the silencing of non-Western traditions [...] [Postcolonial historian] contention is that colonialism used its control over the resources of learning and culture to establish forms of knowledge that not only gave Europeans a distorted picture of colonial societies, but were internalised by the colonised themselves. Those distortions persist, inhibiting the development of ex-colonies to this day.²

Thirdly, this study, particularly when dealing with post-colonial identity formation, is also concerned with politics. This is not alien to the study of history for there exists, in the study of history, what is called 'political history'. Jacob P. Brits explains that

political history deals with the control and exercise of power and how power is distributed within a particular society or between societies. The rulers and key political figures and not the ordinary people are usually central. Political history can further be subdivided into constitutional, diplomatic and military history. Whereas Ranke and his followers confined themselves to pure politics, the modern trend in the writing of political history is to include economic and social influences on politics.³

It becomes evident in this study how political actors in post-colonial Namibia played an important role in shaping identity formation and interpretations of pre-colonial historical figures as Brits submitted above.

As intimated earlier, this study will provide a chronological account of the historiography of the historical figure being examined. In doing so, the study will firstly go through

² John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*, New York, Routledge, 2015: 239f.

³ Jacob P. Brits, *"Doing History": A Practical Guide to Improving your Study Skills*, Cape Town, Longman, 1993: 14.

identity formation literature locating the study within a greater body of knowledge on identity formation in pre and post-colonial societies. It then looks at identity formation in pre-colonial Namibia by specifically looking at Nehale LyaMpingana historiography and his role in anti-colonial struggles. Subsequently, the study goes to post-colonial identity formation in Namibia by analysing the state and its monopoly on identity formation during this period before looking at the role of Sam Nujoma, Namibia's first President, in projecting and cementing a particular identity for Nehale LyaMpingana. The study then concludes by answering the set research questions and offers additional findings.

All these discussions underline the point that the reconstruction of Nehale as a 'King' and revolutionary hero is a product of the liberation movement SWAPO's liberation narrative, in its quest to draw parallels between Nehale's deeds and its program of liberation struggle. While this reincarnation of Nehale started before Namibia's independence, it was after independence – when SWAPO assumed power - that Nehale's dual identity became more pronounced.

Given that this article enters somewhat 'unchartered territories' – the dual identity of Nehale lyaMpingana – it is important to outline the limitations/delimitations of this work. In dealing with Nehale's identity, the article is mainly concerned with 'what is' – the fact of the existence of dual identity – in an attempt to trace the origin of such dualism. Although the article contains what can be considered an explanation of 'why it is so' this must be understood as a mere extension of the description of 'what is' and its origin. As such, the article does not, for example, further explore the explanations as to why Nehale has been handled thus and not others. It departs from the point of the existence of a fact (dual identity), explains this identity and traces its origin. Aspects of why is left for further studies either by this author or others.

In tracing the origin of the dualism of Nehale lyaMpingana, six research questions are formulated; who was Nehale lyaMpingana in the Aandonga history? What title did the Aandonga give to Nehale lyaMpingana? What is the official title given to Nehale lyaMpingana by the post-independence state? Who gave this title and what were the key motivations? Through what state instruments was this title(s) given? What do these instances demonstrate about state and identity formation in Namibia?

The concept of identity is not a simple one even in the existing historical writings consulted for this study. As is characteristic of the social sciences wherein concepts are always contested, there exist various debates on exactly what this concept means. James D. Fearon supports this assertion arguing that

the meaning of "identity" as we currently use it is not well captured by dictionary definitions, which reflect older senses of the word. Our present idea of "identity" is a fairly recent social construct, and a rather complicated one at that. Even though everyone knows how to use the word properly in everyday

discourse, it proves quite difficult to give a short and adequate summary statement that captures the range of its present meanings.⁴

Be that as it may, there are definitions that are useful in the context of this study. One such definition is provided by Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith:

Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past – what used to be true of one, the present – what is true of one now, or the future - the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. Identities are orienting, they provide a meaning-making lens and focus one's attention on some but not other features of the immediate context.⁵

In this study the Oyserman et al. definition is useful for a number of reasons. The definition not only captures, in the context of the study, the conceptualization of identity in distant historical context but also covers identity in the subsequent periods and the circumstances under which identity is formed. Specifically, regarding Nehale lyaMpingana, this study looks at “what used to be true” or generally the common understanding of this historical figure in precolonial Namibia and “what is true of one [the historic figure] now”. Identity is a social construct and not a natural phenomenon. Roy F. Baumeister and Mark Muraven buttresses this point fittingly:

It is obvious that identities do not come into being in a vacuum. Nor do they emerge first and then merely seek out a suitable context for themselves. Thus, societies clearly play an important causal role in creating and shaping identity. Then again, it is also clear that identities are not merely created by society and foisted willy-nilly on helpless, hapless individuals. People clearly do exert considerable choice and influence on their identities. We propose that the relationship of identity to social context be understood in terms of adaptation. More precisely individual identity is an adaptation to a social context. The concept of adaptation is useful because it does not imply mere passive acquisition of identity by individuals, but it also does not overstate the scope of self-determination. History, culture, and the proximate structure of social relations create a context in which the individual identity must exist. People have individual wants and needs that must be satisfied within that context. Individuals actively choose, alter, and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in that context.⁶

There are various theories of identity across the social sciences. Particularly in social psychology and anthropology there is much debate on the changing perspectives on theories of identity. In her study on what she termed ‘storied identity’, Rosemary Rich

⁴ James D. Fearon, “What is identity as we now use the word?”, Stanford University, 3 November 1999, <<https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>> [accessed 2 November, 2017].

⁵ Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith, “Self, self-concept, and identity”, in: Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, (eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity*, New York, The Guilford Press, 2012: 69-104 (69).

⁶ Roy F. Baumeister and Mark Maraven, “Identity as adaptation to social, cultural, and historical context”, *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 1996: 405-416 (405).

discusses the various theories of identity and how it remains a contentious issue.⁷ This study does not delve into the theoretical debates on identity. It traces what various scholars have defined as identity to draw parallels to the subject of the study with a view to locate the study within the greater body of knowledge. This clarifies which definition of identity has been adopted for this study and the key reasons informing this selection. The literatures have also set the context of the outlook of identity as a social construct, a position adopted by this study.

The assertion that history illuminates the present, or assists in making sense of the present, is given practical effect by this study which looks at the dichotomy of pre-colonial and post-colonial identity of the selected historical figure. Eurocentric narratives and accounts on African history have necessitated a new look at pre-colonial African history so as to realign history and develop new or alternative historical explanations. This has given rise to the post-colonialism referred to earlier by John Tosh. Related or similar to postcolonial history is a theoretical framework called 'decoloniality' which seeks to repudiate the impacts, or remnants, of colonialism called 'coloniality'. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, one of the contemporary leading decolonial scholars in southern Africa, argues, like John Tosh, that European scholarship continue to misread and misinterpret African history and identities.⁸ Similarly, arguing against the marginalization of African livelihood in pre-colonial Africa, Thomas Kochalumchuvattil submits that

long before the coming of Europeans to the continent Africans possessed social and political philosophies as valid as those of their European counterparts. These systems revolved around a universal recognition of human worth which formed the spiritual foundation of African societies.⁹

The new identity accorded to Nehale lyaMpingana in post-colonial Namibia, resulting in the dual identity, has provoked the need for this study that now juxtaposes precolonial identity of the historical figure and the current identity.

The problem of researching pre-colonial Namibia has already been acknowledged by several scholars. Tilman Dederling, a historian who has conducted extensive research on Namibia, found that "pre-colonial Namibian history is one of the most underdeveloped areas of southern African historiography".¹⁰ There have been, however, several studies that illuminated pre-colonial knowledge of Namibia beyond the assertions of Dederling. Using studies by other historians, conducted in post-colonial Namibia, such as those by Brigitte Lau, Dag Henrichsen and Wolfram Hartmann amongst others, Christo Botha submits that:

⁷ Rosemary Rich, "Storied identities: identity formation and the life story", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15, 2014: 1-16.

⁸ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Zimbabwean Nation-State Project: A Historical Diagnosis of Identity and Power-Based conflicts in a Postcolonial state*, Discussion Paper 59, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2011.

⁹ Thomas Kochalumchuvattil, "The crisis of identity in Africa: a call for subjectivity", *Kritike*, 4 (1), 2010: 108-122 (109).

¹⁰ Tilman Dederling, "Problems of pre-colonial Namibian historiography", *South African Historical Journal*, 20 (1), 1988: 95-104 (95).

Recent research presents a far more nuanced picture of the pre-colonial era of present day Namibia than older historical works, which by and large stressed European agency (traders, hunters & missionaries) and internecine African warfare as seemingly permanent features of the history of 19th century Namibia. The view that Europeans, Germans in particular, somehow saved the warring African polities from themselves has been significantly adjusted [...] In recent studies African agency is vividly displayed, particularly in the way it demonstrates the acuity that informed local strategies aiming to achieve economic, political and social reconstruction and attempts at political hegemony. Europeans appear no longer as the heroic forebears of 'civilisation', but as rather insecure agents of foreign cultural, political and economic centres, very much dependent on constructing and maintaining relationships of trust and cooperation with African leaders on a basis of equality.¹¹

In 2014, about eight years after Botha expressed satisfaction with pre-colonial research on Namibia, archival scholar, Ellen Namhila, writing on colonial archives, found that knowledge gaps on pre-colonial Namibia continue to exist and called upon archival scholars to raise awareness that may lead to the production of an "academic discourse to help archivists in newly decolonised countries to competently support users whose inquiries currently cannot be answered by the inherited colonial archives collections."¹²

Similarly, this problem extends, although to a different context, even to the colonial period. As John T. Friedman observes, the problem "confronting the study of Namibian history concerns the quality and quantity of historiography generated during the colonial period."¹³ The historiography of Nehale IyaMpingana suffers the same fate as described by Dederling and Friedman. There are, however, writings on Nehale IyaMpingana. Historian Frieda-Nela Williams, in her study of the history of Owambo kingdoms, has provided a most comprehensive account of his life, from the time of his birth, the conflict with his brother, Aandonga King Kambonde kaMpingana, and his wars against the South African settlers and the Germans.¹⁴ An equally comprehensive account of Nehale IyaMpingana's historiography is provided by Hans D. Namuhuja who, in a chronological historiography of the Aandonga royal family, describes the family relations of Nehale IyaMpingana and the conflict with his brother King Kambonde kaMpingana. He further explains the cultural context of the conflict which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.¹⁵

¹¹ Christo Botha, "Internal colonisation and an oppressed minority? The dynamics of relations between Germans and Afrikaners against the background of constructing a colonial state in Namibia, 1884-1990", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 2, 2007: 7-50 (9).

¹² Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, "Content and use of colonial archives: an under-researched issue", *Archival Science*, 16 (2), 2016: 111-123 (111).

¹³ John T. Friedman, *Imagining The Post-apartheid State: An Ethnographic Account of Namibia*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2011: 31.

¹⁴ Frieda-Nela Williams, *Precolonial Communities of Southwestern Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms 1600-1920*, Windhoek, National Archives of Namibia, 1994.

¹⁵ Hans Daniel Namuhuja, *Ezimo Iyaawa yaNdonga*, Windhoek, Out of Africa, 1996.

Others studies on Aawambo history, which made reference to Nehale lyaMpingana, albeit in passing, includes that of historians Lovisa Namupala and Vilho Shigwedha who proceeded from where Williams left off by studying the history of the Aawambo kingdoms from the mid-1800s into post-independence Namibia. They provide useful insights that assist in understanding why the post-colonial state resolved to discriminately apportion a particular identity to Nehale lyaMpingana.¹⁶ In a study looking at the Ondonga King, Shikongo shaKalulu, historian Kim Groop, outlines how the post-independence state has recognised and revered Nehale lyaMpingana in a manner that is not comparable to other traditional figures in Ondonga history.¹⁷ Although Marion Wallace and John Kinahan provide a general overview of the wars involving Nehale lyaMpingana, mainly making use of colonial and archival records, there is no dedicated focus on his dualism in this rich text.¹⁸

Pre-colonial identity formation in Namibia

Nehale lyaMpingana historiography

Nehale lyaMpingana was born into the Aakwanekamba clan, the royal family of the Aandonga people. The Aandonga, part of the Aawambo tribe, are a Bantu group that settled in northern Namibia. Mpingana yaShimbu, Nehale lyaMpingana's father, was an influential figure in Ondonga politics.¹⁹ Following the death of King litana in 1884, a power struggle ensued with Mpingana yaShimbu determined to prevent Kambonde klitope, then considered the rightful heir, succeeding litana. Mpingana yaShimbu wanted his son Kambonde kaMpingana, the brother of Nehale lyaMpingana, to become king. Kambonde kaMpingana was eventually enthroned in 1884 and established his capital at Okaloko.²⁰ King Kambonde kaMpingana is described in various accounts as having been friendly to the missionaries and Europeans.²¹ A conflict followed soon after King Kambonde kaMpingana was enthroned. Frieda-Nela Williams describes it thus:

After his coronation the conflict of succession turned into an internal family problem between Mpingana, his wife Namupala the Great and their son Kambonde on one hand, and their son Nehale on the other. Nehale also wanted to become king, and refused to recognise Kambonde's legitimate rule. In an attempt to end the conflict, Mpingana and his wife decided to give Nehale his own ward, far from Kambonde's capital. Nehale was given Uutumbe near Oshamba seasonal river. He was given people to accompany him to his new

¹⁶ Lovisa T. Namupala and Vilho Shigwedha, *Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change: Perspectives from Northern Namibia*, Basel, Schlettwein, 2006.

¹⁷ Kim Groop, "Shikongo shaKalulu, Nakambale and shared memories: Olukonda historic mission station as a cultural memory and heritage site", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 21 (1), 2017: 65-88.

¹⁸ Marion Wallace with John Kinahan, *A History of Namibia. From the Beginning to 1990*, London, Hurst, 2011.

¹⁹ Namuhuja, *Ezimo*.

²⁰ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*.

²¹ Groop, "Shikongo shaKalulu".

ward and to help him erect his homestead. Nehale and his company left Ontananga, but upon their arrival near the seasonal river, Nehale ordered them to go to Oshitambi, and not to Uutumbe as his parents had proposed. When they reached Oshitambi, Nehale declared it as his kingdom, and the seasonal river as the border between him and Kambonde. Ondonga became divided into two kingdoms for the first time in the history of its existence. Nehale appropriated Oshitambi (eastern Ondonga) and founded his kingdom, with its capital at Onayena, in 1885. Kambonde's portion became known as Onamayongo (western Ondonga).²²

Ondonga remained divided between east and west for as long as the two brothers lived, with several conflicts between them which in some instances led to a loss of life. On 14 April 1908, Nehale IyaMpingana died and was not succeeded by anyone.²³ Following his death, Nehale IyaMpingana's territory of eastern Ondonga was returned to Ondonga under his brother's rule and Ondonga has never been divided again since. His brother, however, ruled over the reunited Ondonga for only one year and died in 1909.²⁴

Nehale IyaMpingana's anti-colonial struggles

In many historical writings, Nehale IyaMpingana is known more for his anti-colonial wars against Europeans and little for the power struggles in Ondonga politics. As historian Timoteus Mashuna notes:

The existing literatures by scholars on Namibian history affirms that missionaries and European settlers feared Chief Nehale the most, in comparison to King Kambonde kaMpingana who ruled as King of Ondonga at the time when Nehale was the Chief of Oshitambi (eastern Ondonga). Notwithstanding the circumstances under which Chief Nehale eventually appropriated Oshitambi and founded his kingdom, with its capital at Onayena in 1885, historical studies have it that Chief Nehale throughout his tenure as chief of Oshitambi never accepted alien settlers, be it missionaries or white settlers in general.²⁵

This anti-settler/missionaries/Europeans distinction between Nehale and his brother Kambonde was also observed by another historian Kim Groop: "while Nehale scared off the missionaries, Kambonde made good use of them. Largely as a result of this, Kambonde abstained from military actions whereas Nehale did the opposite".²⁶ Nehale IyaMpingana was involved in important anti-colonial struggles that earned him a reputation as one of the early anti-colonial warriors and forbearers. The first battle

²² Williams, *Precolonial Communities*: 145f.

²³ Jack Kenyon, "The wars of Nehale IyaMpingana", *The Namibian*, 22 July 2014, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=125909&page=archive-read>> [accessed 28 October, 2017].

²⁴ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*.

²⁵ Timotheus Mashuna, "Chief Nehale Lya Mpingana – the most feared anti-imperialist chief of Ondonga (1885-1908)", *New Era*, 16 March 2012, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201203161181.html>> [accessed 11 November, 2017].

²⁶ Groop, "Shikongo shaKalulu": 85.

followed a deal between his brother, King Kambonde, and one William Jordan which was concluded in 1885. As Williams explains,

the deal 'sold' an area of 2500 km² which included Grootfontein and the Otavi copper mines to Jordan, at the cost of 300 British pounds in cash, 25 guns, one 'salted' horse and one barrel of brandy. After its conclusion Jordan [...] wrote to England and requested protection of his new Republic, which he called Upingtonia after the then Prime Minister of the Cape. This not only angered most Aawambo, who could no longer fetch their copper ore freely from Otavi, but it also affected the turbulent situation prevailing in central Namibia [...] the deal increased the existing tensions between Kambonde and Nehale.²⁷

In one historical commentary, Nehale IyaMpingana's response is captured more profoundly:

Nehale did not excuse those in power just because they were his kind. He acted decisively without being blinded by kinship and blind loyalty. His brother, Kambonde kaMpingana, became king of Ondonga in 1884. Under king Kambonde's rule 50 000 hectares of the Aandonga land between Otavi and Grootfontein was sold to a South African explorer, William Worthington Jordan, for alcohol (cask of brandy) and one salted horse. With 500 white settlers on the land, Jordan went on to declare this Aandonga land, on 20 October 1885, as the Republic of Upingtonia. Nehale did not allow this just because his brother was King. The following year, Nehale led his warriors unto the so-called Republic of Upingtonia killing William Worthington Jordan and bringing an end to white settlement in that area.²⁸

Nehale IyaMpingana's second anti-colonial battle, a battle he concluded successfully, relates to the further expansion of the Germans into Ondonga territory with the agreement of King Kambonde kaMpingana.²⁹ Jack Kenyon argues that

the state of South West Africa was formed in 1887, and soon after, Fort Namutoni was built in the middle of their native lands. Although it was only built to control the movement of cattle from the southern to northern areas, the fort had heavy defenses of galvanised iron and un-burnt brick. It was considered an impregnable stronghold for Imperial Germany's Schutztruppe.³⁰

Williams again describes Nehale IyaMpingana's response to the German expansion:

Negotiations were under way on the possibility of Owamboland to become part of the German protectorate; in October 1898 Captain von Estorff informed the German governor in Windhoek that King Kambonde of Ondonga was in favour of the plan... By the time, anti-German sentiments were growing amongst most Kings and Chiefs, in the north as well as in the south... On hearing the news of the uprising Nehale send a message to his brother Kambonde to go and attack the German post at Okaukweyo and Namutoni. Kambonde, on the advise of Rautanen [a missionary who was influential in Ondonga royal politics], refused

²⁷ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*: 146f.

²⁸ Etondo IyaNehale, "Picking up the Spear of Warrior Nehale IyaMpingana", *Confidente*, 21 May 2015, <<http://www.confidente.com.na/2015/05/picking-up-the-spear-of-warrior-nehale-lyampingana/>>, [accessed 23 October, 2017].

²⁹ Gregor Dobler, *Traders and Trade in Colonial Ovamboland: Elite Formation and the Politics of Consumption under Indirect Rule and Apartheid, 1925-1990*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014.

³⁰ Kenyon, "Wars of Nehale".

to accept Nehale's proposal...Nehale sent his warriors under the command of his chief counsellor and war commander, Shivute the son of Ndjongolo. Shivute and his warriors stormed the Namutoni fort on 28 January 1904. Namutoni was levelled to the ground at the command of Nehale, so that the Germans could not come back again [...] Namutoni battle was one of the manifestations of anti-colonial resistance against German occupation.³¹

The liberation struggle under the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) exploited these successful battles in its rhetoric to mobilize the masses and its combatants in its fight against the apartheid regime. Sam Nujoma, as the then Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's military wing, frequently told the combatants of Nehale IyaMpingana's heroic deeds and said that they were following in his footsteps and others like him. Nujoma's heroic rhetoric was internalised by the combatants and generally permeated into the political consciousness of the PLAN rank and file.³² It was this consciousness and rhetoric that inspired PLAN and SWAPO in its war and mobilization efforts until Namibia finally obtained independence on 21 March 1990. The historical writings by Abednego Nghifikua are illustrative of how SWAPO was able to use pre-colonial and colonial heroism in the furtherance of its armed liberation struggle.³³ Matthew //Gowaseb, a SWAPO researcher and a then senior government technocrat makes similar findings:

The present generation of Namibians inherited the mantle of resistance from our forbearers. These brave people stood up against the might of imperial Germany to prevent Namibia's occupation by enemy forces. We remember with great admiration the names and memories of Chief Nikodemus Kahimemua, kaptein Hendrik Witbooi, Chief Samuel Maharero, Jacob Marenga, *King Nehale IyaMpingana*, King Mandume ya Ndemufayo and Chief Ipumbu ya Tshirongo.³⁴

Post-colonial identity formation in Namibia

The state and the monopoly of national identity formation

Although the colonial state had laws regulating identity formations and aspects of heroism, national symbols and many other aspects, such practices were not accepted by the indigenous communities. The colonial state lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the indigenous population and openly opposed any form of identity and symbolism that came from it. As such, identity formation and conceptualization during the colonial period remained a domain of the customary laws of each indigenous community. Given the colonial state's legitimacy deficit, there was no commonly agreed national identity. The assertion that there was no commonly accepted form of national identity relates only to identity formation by the colonial state. The indigenous community's rejection of

³¹ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*: 149f.

³² Peter Ekanjo, *The Jungle Fighter*, Windhoek, Ekanjo, 2011.

³³ Abednego L. Nghifikua, Magdalena Kambudu, Abisai Shejavali and Tabitha Daniel, *Slavery and Death are One and the Same: An Anthology of Poetry*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, 2001.

³⁴ Matthew Gowaseb, *Triumph of Courage: Profiles of Namibian Political Heroes and Heroines*, Windhoek, Legacy Publications, 2007 [my own emphasis].

the 'nationhood', as projected by the colonial state, created the basis of what would later become post-colonial national identity.³⁵ Colin Mahoney explains:

the formation of the Namibian nation was largely due to the years of colonization by Germany and, most importantly, South Africa and that the adoption of a strong 'us' versus 'them' mentality among the different ethnic groups that now make up the Namibian nation against their oppressors, was key to its formation. It will be seen that this mentality, more than anything else, is the reason why Namibia came together in its Independence struggle to form a national identity. However, it will be seen that other factors after Independence, mainly the Instrumentalist practices of the dominant SWAPO party has evolved and maintained the national identity into the 21st century.³⁶

After 21 March 1990, Namibia's Independence Day, the newly independent state did not face the legitimacy problems the colonial state had. It is for this reason that its efforts and programs of national identity were generally accepted by all including the indigenous communities. The constitution which was adopted at independence recognised customary laws and practices as long as they were not in contradiction with it. The constitutional dispensation meant that there are now new sources of identity formation in Namibia; the state (as per the constitution and relevant laws) and the indigenous communities (through customary law). Letta Amakali explains this constitutional arrangement:

The question of who to decide the validity of customary law has been answered by the lawmaker, the Parliament; it is the institution, which is primarily responsible with determining the validity of customary law. Article 66 (2) of the Namibian constitution expects from the lawmakers that they treat customary law as any other law when it comes to repealing or modifying. Article 66 (2) provides that 'subject to the terms of this constitution, any part of such common law or customary law may be repealed or modified by Act of Parliament, and the application thereof may be confined to particular parts of Namibia or to particular periods.'³⁷

Further to the above constitutional arrangements, in 1995, Parliament enacted the Traditional Authorities Act, 1995 (No. 17 of 1995) which was later replaced, in 2000, by the Traditional Authorities Act (Act 25 of 2000) to deal with practical aspects of customary laws and traditional leadership beyond the recognition of customary laws in the constitution.³⁸ Amongst the many aspects dealt with by this act were aspects of identity such as the use of traditional titles and the powers, duties and functions of the traditional leaders. More importantly, this act provided the state with the power to

³⁵ Erika von Wietersheim, *This Land is My Land. Motions and Emotions around Land Reform in Namibia*, Windhoek, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2008.

³⁶ Colin Mahoney, *An Introduction into the Formation of National Identity in Namibia*, Saint Joseph's University, 2012, <http://scholarship.sju.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=afristud_student_essays>, [accessed 30 October, 2017].

³⁷ Letta Amakali, "How traditional leaders settle the disputes", unpubl. LLB thesis, Windhoek, University of Namibia, 2010: 25.

³⁸ Cf. Christiaan Keulder, *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics*, Windhoek, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000.

recognise a given traditional authority.³⁹ This is not only an important aspect of this study as will become evident in subsequent sections, it buttresses the argument in this study that in postcolonial Namibia, the state obtained the monopoly of national identity formation.

Other legislative frameworks that deal with identity formation and the relationship between the state and traditional communities includes the National Monument Act (Act 35 of 1979) which was inherited from the apartheid state and provides for national identity in the forms of national symbols, national monuments and what could be considered as historical monuments. In 2004, this act was repealed with the National Heritage Act (No 27 of 2004) introduced to fulfil similar functions.⁴⁰ Apart from these acts, the President

has under Article 32 (3)(h) of the Namibian Constitution, the power to confer upon citizens, residents and friends of Namibia, such honours as he may consider appropriate and such honour may be bestowed upon such recipient during such recipient's lifetime or post humously.⁴¹

To facilitate the exercise of this power, the Conferment of National Honours Act (Act No 11 of 2015) was enacted and established a "National Honours Advisory Committee to advise the President of the Republic of Namibia when exercising his or her discretion to confer honours, and to provide for incidental matters".⁴²

Through the abovementioned instruments, the constitutional powers of the president, constitutional arrangements related to the relationship between the state and customary laws and the subsequent laws, the state has played a crucial role in contributing to the dual identity of Nehale lyaMpingana as will be seen below.

Sam Nujoma – the dominant actor in post-colonial identity formation

Sam Nujoma was a freedom fighter who served as founding president of Namibia's liberation movement SWAPO and as stated earlier, the Commander-in-Chief of its military wing, PLAN. As previously explained, during the liberation struggle he frequently used Nehale lyaMpingana's battle with the Germans in his anti-colonialism rhetoric to mobilise supporters for the fight against colonial occupation. He urged his combatants to continue fighting for they were completing the war started by their forefathers.

³⁹ Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, Traditional Authority Act (Act No 25 of 2000), 21 December 2000.

⁴⁰ Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, National Heritage Act (Act No 27 of 2004), 29 December 2004.

⁴¹ Omufyoona Mbangula Paulus, "Hypocrisy of heroism and state funerals", *New Era*, 05 January 2015, <<https://www.newera.com.na/2015/01/05/hypocrisy-heroism-state-funerals/>>, [accessed 09 November, 2017].

⁴² Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, Conferment of National Honours Act (Act No 11 of 2015), 15 July 2015.

Following the 1989 election, Sam Nujoma became the President of Namibia on 21 March 1990. He continued recognising the heroic deeds of Nehale IyaMpingana and others whom he considered pioneers of the struggle against colonialism. On 26 August 1990, a day which has since been celebrated as Heroes Day, President Nujoma stated that the fallen combatants of SWAPO's armed liberation struggle were the "true and worthy heirs to the proud tradition of resistance of our forefathers" – a tradition with which Nehale IyaMpingana is associated.⁴³ In his biography in 2001, he stated the following about Nehale IyaMpingana and the battle of Amutuni (Namutoni):

Chief [emphasis] Nehale Iya Mpingana of Ondonga sent reinforcements to the central region and battles took place, particularly in the districts of Outjo and Amutuni (currently known as Onamutoni) where many German troops were killed by Ondonga warriors. To the present day, a monument can be seen there, where names are inscribed of German soldiers who died at Onamutoni battle. The names of the dead Ondonga warriors remain unrecorded.⁴⁴

His praise of Nehale IyaMpingana, and grating use of the title 'Chief', was not confined to speeches and personal writings. On 20 August 2002, in a government gazette notice, President Nujoma, using the powers granted to him by the National Monuments Act (No 28 of 1969) declared "as a national monument the property known as the Heroes Acre situated on a certain section of Portion 294 of Windhoek Town and Townlands".⁴⁵ This property became known as the Heroes Acre where those declared national heroes were to be buried. At the inauguration of the Heroes Acre, on 26 August 2002, Nujoma formally declared Nehale IyaMpingana a national hero and had a symbolic tombstone erected there for him. He summarised the heroic deeds of Nehale IyaMpingana as follows:

In January 1904, Chief Nehale Iya Mpingana's forces attacked the German Imperial Force at Fort Namutoni and emerged victorious. His warriors captured horses, cattle, wagons and other war material. This is one of the many battles that Chief Nehale and his warriors fought against Afrikaner trekkers and German colonial forces in our people's resistance against colonialism and foreign invaders. He also destroyed the so-called Republic of Upingtonia that was established between Otavi and Grootfontein. Its founder, William Worthington Jordaan, was killed by Chief Nehale's forces in 1886, leaving the Boer trekkers without a leader. They dispersed afterwards to Angola and some returned to South Africa. To his revolutionary spirit and his visionary memory we humbly offer our honour and respect.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sam Nujoma, Statement at the 24th anniversary of the launch of the Armed Liberation Struggle in Namibia, August 26, 1990, Ongulumbashe.

⁴⁴ Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma. My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia*, London, Panaf, 2001: 11.

⁴⁵ Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, Notice No 144, Declaration of Heroes Acre as a National Monument, 23 August 2002.

⁴⁶ Sam Nujoma, Statement by His Excellency President Nujoma On The Occasion of The Official Inauguration of Heroes' Acre 26 August 2002, 26 August 2002, <<http://www.namibia-1on1.com/a-central/heroes-acre-2.html>>, [accessed 6 November, 2017].

With this speech, President Nujoma effectively did four key things; he formally granted Nehale lyaMpingana the title of 'Chief' of the Aandonga; he declared him a revolutionary and visionary; he declared him a national hero; and he chose a sides by recognising one of two warring historical figures and overlooking the other. As he was waging these battles, and as per Ondonga cultural practices, Nehale lyaMpingana was not a king or chief of the Aandonga as stated in the quote by Williams earlier. As Kim Groop observed "of the two kings, Nehale and Kambonde kaMpingana, Nehale is remembered at the Heroes Acre with his own memorial stone whereas Kambonde is not".⁴⁷

The formal declaration of Nehale lyaMpingana as a national hero and Chief of the Aandonga did not end at Heroes Acre or in President Nujoma's speeches. A year later, in 2003, the environment and tourism ministry followed the same trend naming the eastern gate into Etosha National Park as 'King Nehale Gate'. Two years later, in September 2005, the same ministry later registered and officially inaugurated a conservancy that is named after Nehale lyaMpingana, formally known as 'King Nehale Conservancy'.⁴⁸ Given the power, legitimacy and monopoly of the state in forming national identities, it is not surprising that many followed Sam Nujoma's path as described above. As Brits observed earlier, in political history, rulers and key political figures are central and not ordinary people. This path has led to confusion where sometimes the titles 'King' or 'Chief' and 'warrior' are used to describe Nehale lyaMpingana. Illustrative of the confusion, misrepresentation of history or perhaps 'political correctness', in a 2007 publication profiling Namibian heroes and historical figures, Matthew //Gowaseb, a senior official who worked under successive prime ministers and presidents, referred to Nehale lyaMpingana as both 'King' and 'Chief' on the same page.⁴⁹

While it is understandable, given the bureaucratic culture and norms, for state officials to follow the official state rhetoric, it becomes more concerning when historians follow the same path in their work despite their proximity to historical evidence in their historical writings, as Kim Groop did. Like state officials at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Groop referred to Nehale as a King. Gregor Dobler, a professor of social anthropology, despite having conducted extensive research into colonial Owamboland, also refers to Nehale lyaMpingana as 'King' in his work. While postcolonial historians may dismiss and excuse Kim Groop and Gregor Dobler as European scholars whose errors of commission and omission can be attributed to unfamiliarity with the Aandonga customs, it is important to note that they are not the only ones. Namibian historian, Timotheus Mashuna, as quoted earlier, also referred to Nehale lyaMpingana as 'Chief'.

As Williams has explained, Nehale lyaMpingana refused to recognise the kingship of his brother, King Kambonde kaMpingana. To solve this conflict, his parents decided to find

⁴⁷ Groop, "Shikongo shaKalulu": 85.

⁴⁸ King Nehale Conservancy, *Living with Wildlife: The Story of King Nehale Conservancy*, Windhoek, NACSO, 2012, <<http://www.nacso.org.na/sites/default/files/Brochure%20King%20Nehale%20FPis.pdf>>, [accessed 27 April 2018].

⁴⁹ Gowaseb, *Triumph of Courage*: 35.

him a place, not to establish a kingdom, but to build a homestead with dedicated people to assist him in this exercise. When he arrived at the designated area, he decided to move in a different direction and chose to demarcate an area for himself. Whether he, or his followers, called his demarcated areas a kingdom is irrelevant for one does not become king by a mere personal declaration and decrees. In terms of Ondonga customs, for one to be a king one must be crowned as such. Unlike his brother Kambonde, there was no coronation of Nehale IyaMpingana, or if there was one, in accordance with the Aandonga traditional customs. Kings of Ondonga are succeeded when they die. When Nehale IyaMpingana died, in April 1908, he was not succeeded by another king. The area he ruled simply reverted back to the rest of Ondonga that was under the kingship of Kambonde kaMpingana. The Ondonga traditions also prescribe a particular way in which the Aandonga kings are to be buried.⁵⁰ Nehale IyaMpingana's grave, in Oneyena, which this researcher has seen, does not suggest that he was a king when compared to the graves of the Aandonga kings buried at Olukonda. Martti Eirola, who researched the Kingdom of Ondonga under German colonialism, describes how Kings of Ondonga are buried:

the ruler's death caused a government crisis, and a state of emergency was proclaimed over the whole country. The King was immediately buried in his cattle kraal, and if he was circumcised, an *ompampa* monument, a cone made of wooden poles, was erected on the grave, indicating that the place was taboo. Next day the whole community gathered together for the funeral festival. After a mourning period of about a week, the heir took possession of the deceased's estate and wives, most of the latter being then distributed to distinguished counsellors.⁵¹

That the process described above did not ensue following Nehale IyaMpingana's death in April 1908 is further indication that there was, indeed, something different about the identity of Nehale IyaMpingana. Simply put, he was not King of Ondonga!

The phrase or title of 'Chief' is also largely alien in Aawambo history in general and in the Ondonga history in particular. There is no historical record of a 'Chief' in Ondonga. As Christiaan Keulder notes

the Owambo peoples of north-central Namibia consist of seven related communities: the Ondonga, Uukwanyama, Ongandjera, Uukwambi, Ombalantu, Uukwaluudhi and Uukolonkadhi [...] All of these except the Uukolonkadhi were politically organised into kingdoms [...] the King was selected from the royal clan, and during his reign he was assisted by a number of Councillors. These were appointed by him, not strictly from the clan structures, but from his age group. The highest authority (after the King) was the King's Council. The Council consisted of six senior Councillors appointed by the King after consultation with the elder [...] The original chieftainships existed in the areas to the south of the infamous Police Zone, and in the Kavango and Caprivi Strip [...] A similar structure is found among the Herero communities, with one exception: the

⁵⁰ Namuhuja, *Ezimo*.

⁵¹ Martti Eirola, *The Ovambofahrt: The Ovamboland Reservation in the Making*, Helsinki, Historical Association of Northern Finland, 1992: 47.

Herero have a "Paramount Chief" [...] A second type of chieftainship is found among the Nama of southern Namibia.⁵²

Although state power has been uncontested in the formation of national identity, there have been attempts by Aandonga writers to correct and reject the identity given by the state to Nehale lyaMpingana. On the 25 November 2011, S. Eino wrote a daring letter of refutation:

I was offended by the uninformed argument [...] advanced as follows: 'even more pertinently, the bravery of King Nehale of the Ndonga-speaking people, who immediately attacked the Namutoni fort on 28 January 1904 and fought relentlessly against the Germans until his death in April 1908, also deserves to be accorded hero status'. I strongly feel offended as an Oshindonga-speaking person when Kozonguizi and Aluteni took it upon themselves to call the brave Nehale lya Mpingana as 'King' Nehale of the Ndonga-speaking people. I take it as a historical distortion. To suggest that Nehale lya Mpingana was a designated and legitimate Ondonga King is traditional, cultural and historical arrogance. This needs to be told clearly that Aandonga never had a king called Nehale lya Mpingana. We had King Kambonde ka Mpingana. Regrettably, influential politicians in this country have taken it upon themselves to name the gate into the Etosha National Park 'King Nehale lya Mpingana'. Whose 'King' or what type of 'King' was he? We only recognized Nehale as one of the great warriors but not as a 'King'. Ondonga history is not a lion's history, which is told by any hunter.⁵³

This rebuttal is not only illustrative of the power of the state in identity formation but also speaks to what Baumeister and Muraven earlier referred to as the power of individuals to shape identity. Indeed, as Brits noted, in public history rulers and key political figures (such as Sam Nujoma) and not ordinary people (such as S. Eino above) are central. As a national symbol, Sam Nujoma played a leading role in the identity of Nehale lyaMpingana in post-independence Namibia. Nujoma's actions and preferences can be understood and must be looked at in the context of a freedom fighter whose youth and adult-life has been dedicated to the fight against colonialism to gain the freedom and independence of the Namibian people. This life of liberation struggle has created a binary perspective on identity; the oppressor and the oppressed, white regime and the freedom fighters; protagonists and the antagonists. Nehale lyaMpingana's historic deeds, particularly his fight against the colonial powers, spoke to and resonated with the revolutionary ethos of the liberation struggle which he spent more than 40 years waging. Anything historically that identified with the colonisers is not to be seen in a positive light and elevated to prominence in postcolonial Namibia. Because King Kambonde kaMpingana was seen as a collaborator with the white colonial regime while his brother Nehale lyaMpingana fought against the colonisers, Nujoma, during his presidency, chose to cast Nehale lyaMpingana in a positive light, including according him the title of 'Chief', and deliberately overlooked his brother. Whereas the Aandonga simply saw and identified Nehale lyaMpingana as a member of the Aandonga royal family

⁵² Keulder, *State, Society and Democracy*: 155-157.

⁵³ S. Eino, "Nehale was not King", *The Namibian*, 25 November 2011, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=88646&page=archive-read>>, [accessed 10 November, 2017].

and a great Warrior, the state, through its key officials and institutions, added the titles and identities of 'Chief', or 'King' and others such as 'revolutionary' and national hero.

Further challenges to Nehale lyaMpingana's 'kingship' protagonists

If the above discussion does not convince in its submission that Nehale lyaMpingana was not a king and his 'kingship' is a creation of a post-colonial state-led narrative through heroism and liberation rhetoric, perhaps further evidence is warranted. The first aspect of this relates to the challenges with translation. Petrus Mbenzi, a scholar of Oshiwambo culture, is instructive in the challenges faced by the translation and meanings. He cautions that

It is important to take into account the language and culture of the people when dealing with translation and to make sure that the message is intelligible enough to the target readers or listeners. The possible effective method to do an adequate translation is not how the message is said in the source language, but how the message is to be said in the target language.⁵⁴

The word 'King' in the Oshiwambo language and culture does not necessarily equate to, nor is it synonymous with 'omukwaniilwa'. In popular narratives, the word king has been translated to be equivalent to 'omukwaniilwa'. In a most comprehensive Oshindonga-English dictionary, Toivo Tirronen translates the word 'omukwaniilwa' to mean 'king'.⁵⁵ In the Aandonga culture, the term 'omukwaniilwa' is applicable to all members of the royal family. If a member of the royal family encounters a stranger whose orientation has been influenced by these dictionary definitions, and introduces him/herself as an 'omukwaniilwa', this may lead to confusion for the stranger may interpret this as referring to a 'king'. When referring to the head of the kingdom, the Aandonga do not simply use the term 'king' i.e. 'omukwaniilwa'. The correct title used is either 'Omukwaniilwa gwoshilongo shaNdonga', 'nkeyama', 'mwene gwiita', or other terms that are more comprehensive and mean more than a mere 'omukwaniilwa'. To translate these meanings into English would be a challenge. Mbenzi again explains this challenge:

translating a foreign text into one's mother tongue is a complicated task, and this may be attributed to cultural differences between the source language and the target language [...] At the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactic substitute in the target language for a source language item.⁵⁶

It would appear that those who hold the view that Nehale lyaMpingana was a king may have been misled by these translations and the untranslatability. Where this has been the case, it should be pointed out that the titles of 'omukwaniilwa gwoshilongo shandonga', 'nkeyama mwene gwiita' or 'osimu' were not and would not be applicable to Nehale lyaMpingana. In authoritative literature by the Aandonga scholars, such as Hans

⁵⁴ Petrus Mbenzi, *The Political Rhetoric of Bishop Kleopas Dumeni in the Pre-Independence Era in Namibia*, PhD dissertation, Windhoek, University of Namibia / Saarbrücken, Scholars' Press, 2014: 380.

⁵⁵ Toivo Tirronen, *Ndonga-English Dictionary*, Oniipa, ELOC Printing Press, 1986: 165.

⁵⁶ Mbenzi, *Political Rhetoric*: 381.

Namuhuja, Nehale lyaMpingana is not listed amongst the Kings of Ondonga, indeed he has been conspicuously and purposely excluded.⁵⁷

As intimated earlier, Nehale lyaMpingana was not installed as or crowned king as defined by Aandonga cultural norms. Marta Salokoski has conducted a comprehensive study of the rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, specifically looking at how kings are made and how kingship changes. She explains that the installation of a king in Ondonga is a process and not an event. This process involves and is not limited to

(1) the insignia of office or objects that served as power-laden symbols and were given to him to keep ; (2) his marriage to a new head wife to be his match in the symbolic representation of the fertility of the country ; (3) the king candidate's successful performance of tasks related to "finding" and "seeing" in a miraculous way, which manifested his budding spiritual powers and his linkage to important sources of such power ; (4) the infusion of power from the diviner into the king and ; (5) the performance of other transgressive acts that augmented his ruling power.⁵⁸

While there is a general understanding and acceptance that Kamonde kaMpingana was installed as king, as per the Aandonga customs stated above and beyond, there is no evidence to suggest that Nehale lyaMpingana was subjected to this process.

Conclusion

This study, which explored the origin of the dual identity of the historical figure Nehale lyaMpingana by looking at pre-colonial and post-colonial identity formation in Namibia, is unique in historical writings. The approach adopted of bringing together three aspects of historical explanations, contemporary history and political history, made it unique in comparison to orthodox historical writings which simply look at historical events to provide a historical narrative or account. The study not only provided an insight into the past, it also assisted in what John Tosh called the 'practical responsibilities of history' that is to assist in illuminating present political issues.

The study posed the following six questions; who was Nehale lyaMpingana in the Aandonga history? What title did the Aandonga give to Nehale lyaMpingana? What is the official title given to Nehale lyaMpingana by the post-independence state? Who gave this title and what were the key motivations? Through what state instruments was this title given and what do these instances demonstrate about state and identity formation in Namibia?

Nehale lyaMpingana was a member of the Aakwanekamba clan, the royal family of the Aandonga people. A child of Namupala and Mpingana yaShimbu, he was a brother of King Kamonde kaMpingana who served as King of Ondonga from 1884 to 1909.

⁵⁷ Hans Daniel Namuhuja, *Fillemon Elifasm*, Windhoek, Gamsberg MacMillan, 1983.

⁵⁸ Marta Salokoski, *How Kings are Made – How Kingship Change*, PhD Dissertation, Helsinki, Helsinki University Press, 2006: 186.

Following the coronation of King Kambonde kaMpingana in 1884, Nehale's refusal to recognise his brother's kingship led to conflict between them, with Nehale also wanting to be a king. His parents organised land for him to build his homestead far away from his brother's palace. However, he moved towards eastern Ondonga and demarcated an area for himself which he governed. He is known for his heroic battles with the South African settlers and the Germans who were permitted to come to Ondonga by his brother King Kambonde kaMpingana.

To the Aandonga in general, and according to the Aandonga customary practices in particular, Nehale was a mere member of the royal family, brother to King Kambonde and a fearless warrior who demarcated eastern Ondonga for his own rule. He fought two important battles in Ondonga against the colonial establishments. The post-independence state accorded Nehale lyaMpingana the official title of National Hero while key state officials, particularly President Nujoma, officially referred to him as 'Chief' of the Aandonga. State institutions officially refer to him as King of Aandonga. There are also some historians who, in their historical writings, refer to Nehale lyaMpingana as 'King' or 'Chief'.

It appears that the anti-colonial and anti-imperial ideology of President Nujoma and the SWAPO regime accounts for the titles and identity given to Nehale lyaMpingana by the post-independence state. The identity of Nehale lyaMpingana was not a mere product of the rhetoric and the liberation mantra. The state has made use of the constitution and various laws to cement the identity it gave to Nehale lyaMpingana.

This case not only demonstrates that the state has the monopoly of identity formation in post-independence Namibia but also shows how the identity and history of indigenous communities can be suppressed by the might of a modern state that has little regard for the alternative versions and identities of the affected communities. Whichever version one chooses to accept, there has been no evidence produced to suggest that Nehale lyaMpingana was indeed a king or 'Chief' of the Aandonga. An argument may be made that there may have been Aandonga who accepted and followed him as their King/Chief, but the fact that these perceptions are not based on Ondonga customary practices such as the coronation of a King would make this unlikely. That Nehale was not succeeded, as is standard procedure with Kings, and with the territory he had confiscated returning to the rest of Ondonga after his death in 1908, the credibility of the claims that he was a king or chief of the Aandonga is eroded further.

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