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From the Arrival of First Finnish Missionaries in Owambo to Collaborative History-Writing¹

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The question of Finns' complicity in colonialism has surfaced in public debates, academic texts and social media with increasing frequency in recent years. Two edited volumes – *Finnish Colonial Encounters* and *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America* – as well as a special issue of the journal *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* have addressed this contentious topic since 2020.² A further edited collection has been devoted to colonialism in the Finnish borderlands.³ As part of this emerging scholarly field and amidst increased popular interest in Finnish colonial entanglements, this edited collection focuses on the colonial and anti-colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations from the late nineteenth century until Namibian independence in 1990. The area constituting present-day Namibia, and especially Owambo, has played a central role in the Finnish imaginary and understanding of all matters African since the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) started its work there in 1870. Furthermore, it can be argued that although Finland never held any overseas colonies, the area that presently constitutes Namibia, and especially the Owambo region in the north, may have had a similar status vis-à-vis Finland in the past as colonies to colonising powers in the area of knowledge formation. At the very least, the possible colonial – as well as anti-colonial – aspects of this relationship merit further examination. This edited collection focuses on Finnish-Namibian relations between 1870–1990, and, with the aid of different case studies, sheds light on the linkages, resemblances and differences of this long bond between the two countries in terms of a colonial dynamic.

When the first Finnish missionaries arrived in Owambo in 1870, the area was ruled by local kings, some of whom – King Shikongo of Ondonga, King Shipandeka of Oukwanyama and King Nuujoma of Uukwambi⁴ – had invited European missionaries to their respective realms. The German missionary Hugo Hahn, who worked among

1. The editors wish to thank the Finnish Cultural Foundation for supporting this book project.
2. Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä (eds.) 2021; Andersson and Lahti (eds.) 2022; Kullaa and Lahti (eds.) 2020.
3. Kullaa, Lahti and Lakomäki (eds.) 2022.
4. There is variation in the spelling of some Owambo names for places, individuals and kingdoms. This is due to many reasons: words are pronounced and spelt diversely in various Oshiwambo dialects and not all dialects have a written standard. At times Finnish missionaries also created their own versions based on how they heard a word. Therefore, early texts on Owambo often contained different forms of the same word and this has also had an impact on modern scholarly works in which different spellings of names are used. This volume also includes examples of such variation.

the Herero people further to the east and to whom the Aawambo⁵ kings had made their request during his travels in the area, informed the FMS of this invitation,⁶ as he felt that the Rhenish Missionary Society, which he himself represented, would be kept busy by the growing needs of the work among the Herero people.⁷ The FMS, founded in 1859, had originally planned to start missionary work among Finno-Ugric peoples in Siberia and elsewhere in the Russian Empire, but as these plans had to be abandoned, it welcomed the invitation sent by the Rhenish colleagues and sent a group of seven missionaries to Owambo. In the early twentieth century, the FMS also began its work in other parts of the world, especially in China. Among the first Finnish missionaries in Owambo was one Martti Rautanen,⁸ who was to stay in the area until his death in 1926. Rautanen made a name for himself not only as a missionary but also as a translator and the creator of written language for Oshindonga, an Oshiwambo dialect.⁹

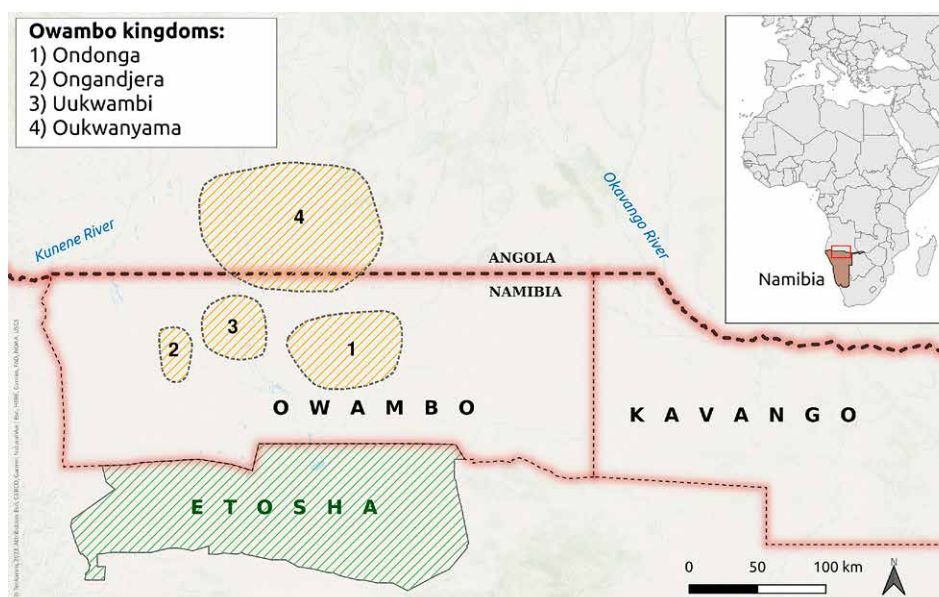


Figure 1. This indicative map shows the location of the Owambo region in present-day northern Namibia and the four Owambo kingdoms in which the Finnish missionaries started their work in the 1870s. Their work in Kavango began in the 1920s. Map: © Henrikki Tenkanen, 2023. Attribution: Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue | Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS.

5. We use the word Aawambo, which refers to an ethnic group who live in the Owambo region. Due to the colonial connotations of the name Ovamboland, we use the form Owambo, unless referring to the bantustan of Ovamboland that the South African government established as a 'homeland' for the Aawambo as part of its apartheid policy. Authors of the anthology sometimes also refer to Namibia and Finland even when discussing a period of time when they were not yet independent countries.
6. The predecessor of present-day FELM, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.
7. Paunu 1908, 79–80, 107, 112; Peltola 1958, 28–31; Miettinen 2005, 87–88.
8. Throughout this volume we use the Finnish form of his name Martti, even though his name has also been spelled as Martin especially in Swedish sources.
9. Peltola 1958, 31–32; Miettinen 2005, 88; Löytty 2006, 38.

Finnish missionaries began their work in four Owambo kingdoms – Ondonga, Oukwanyama, Uukwambi and Ongandjera – in 1870, but by 1872 they had already been expelled from all but Ondonga. The kings had had high hopes of benefitting from the presence of Western missionaries and thus strengthening their position in comparison to neighbouring communities. The reality proved otherwise, and suspicions grew on both sides that quickly led to problems and conflict. Moreover, in Ondonga, where the missionaries were able to establish relatively stable relations with the local ruling families, occasional conflicts occurred and restricted the spread of Christianity. The first Aawambo people were baptised in Ondonga only in 1883, and the number of baptised people remained modest until the 1920s, when conversion on a larger scale began to take place. This was also connected to the territorial expansion of Finnish missionary activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to re-establishing its activities at mission stations that it had abandoned, the FMS now began its work among several other communities.¹⁰ The FMS introduced its first pastoral courses in the early 1920s, and as the number of ordinations and local pastors began to increase, the Finns fostered indigenous leadership. The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church, established in 1925, was first led by missionaries but gradually they stepped aside and assumed more of an assisting role.¹¹

For a long time, Finnish missionaries were the only large group of Europeans that resided in the Owambo region. In 1884, Germany declared the area that forms present-day Namibia as its colonial possession, calling it South West Africa, but the grip of the German colonial administration in Owambo was weak or even non-existent. Finnish missionaries acted as middlemen between German colonial officers and the Aawambo.¹² South African troops took over the land in 1915, during World War I. In 1920, after Germany was forced to relinquish its colonies as a condition of the Treaty of Versailles, South Africa began to undertake the administration of South West Africa under a mandate granted by the League of Nations. South Africa continued to rule the region, even in the face of resistance by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) from 1966 until Namibian independence in 1990. A notable figure in securing independence for Namibia at this time was the Finn Martti Ahtisaari, who had an influential role as the UN Special Representative heading the UN Transition Assistance Group.¹³

At the time of the first contact of Finnish missionaries with the Aawambo, the latter formed independent kingdoms, whilst Finland was still an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire and Finns were increasingly agitating against imperial control from St. Petersburg. The establishment of the FMS can be viewed as one manifestation of the wider Finnish desire to become a civilised and civilising European people in their own right. As Ulla Vuorela argues, the willingness to be accepted by and belong to the white, European centres led to Finns accepting hegemonic discourses and becoming complicit in European colonial ideas. This was at odds with late nineteenth-century European racial theories that posited that

10. Miettinen 2005, 89–90. See also Peltola 1958.

11. Buys and Nambala 2003, 162–163.

12. Peltola 1958, 85–88; McKittrick 2002, 17.

13. Soiri and Peltola 1999.

Finns were ethnically Mongols.¹⁴ Central to these ideas was the ‘coloniality of power,’ which was constructed on the European idea of race and racial hierarchy with white Europeans at the top.¹⁵ Finns rarely recognised this complicity.¹⁶

When Finland gained independence in 1917, South West Africa had been a colony for more than three decades. In newly-independent Finland, a four-member delegation led by Professor Gustaf Komppa approached Undersecretary K. G. Idman at the Finnish Foreign Ministry in 1918 and requested that the ministry should begin to work towards acquiring Owambo as a colony for Finland. Nothing came of this plan, but the fact remains that some people in Finland actually gave serious consideration to this colonial enterprise.¹⁷ Finland never came into possession of any overseas colonies and this, combined with the history of having been subsumed into the Russian Empire in 1809, contributed to the Finnish self-understanding of their own colonial innocence. However, the broadening definitions of colonialism, whereby it is not only seen as the conquest, settlement, continued rule and economic exploitation of an overseas area by a (European) state, but also includes more cultural components, has prompted historians to examine the relationship of Finns to colonialism. This scholarship has attracted a great deal of attention but has also been met with criticism.

The potentially colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian history have only been briefly discussed in the edited collections mentioned above, as their focus has been on other regions and issues rather than Finnish missionaries abroad.¹⁸ This edited collection continues to probe questions of colonialism in relation to the shared Finnish-Namibian history: Did the Finnish presence in (present-day) Namibia include colonial or anti-colonial aspects at some point? How did the peoples living in the area that constitutes modern-day Namibia respond to the presence, influence and activities of Finns? Did the Finnish missionaries’ formulation and dissemination of knowledge concerning Owambo include colonial aspects, and, if so, what were these aspects? What kind of roles did Finland and individual Finns play in the Namibian struggle for independence?

The Finnish presence in Namibia began as missionary activity in Owambo, and the legacy of this Christian presence is still strongly evident in the area. As this edited collection examines the potential coloniality of Finnish-Namibian historical relations, the colonial connections of the root cause of the Finnish presence in Owambo need to be scrutinised. Were Christian missionaries, including missionaries from countries without colonies, complicit in colonialism in areas colonised by European powers? This question will be discussed in relation to Finns in Owambo in some of the chapters that follow, but a brief general discussion of the topic is in order prior to this.

In discussing the question of whether missionaries were colonisers, Danish historian Karen Vallgård has noted that, in the context of colonial India, there is a continuum of scholarly views. At one end, there are researchers who have focused on

14. Vuorela 2009, 20.

15. Quijano 2000, 533.

16. Vuorela 2009, 20.

17. Peltola 1958, 182; Löytty 2006, 14.

18. Napandulwe Shiweda’s chapter on the Finnish missionaries’ photography of the Aawambo is an exception. See Shiweda 2021.

more traditional mission history, that is, the missionaries' theological views, beliefs and official policies. These researchers often do not see missionaries as complicit in colonialism to any great extent nor do they necessarily discuss colonialism in connection with missionaries. At the other end of the continuum, there are mainly 'postcolonial researchers who are interested in the cultural and social labour of the missionaries' and in examining the many ways colonial power was exerted.¹⁹ Vallgård notes that the latter kind of researchers usually view colonialism in broader terms, as 'a cultural, epistemological and even psychological – as well as economic and military – endeavour,' whereas the former type of scholars see colonialism in narrower and more traditional terms.²⁰ She asserts that denying or downplaying missionaries' colonial complicity means overlooking 'the subtle aspects of colonialism,' that is, the cultural and epistemological aspects that supported the conquest, rule and exploitation of overseas areas and peoples.²¹

However, the European cultural labour that supported colonial rule in overseas areas could and did take place also in Europe, and missionaries were no strangers to this labour. Especially before the twentieth century, mission discourse had elements of and contributed to what we have elsewhere called 'cultural colonialism.'²² Writing about the missionary work of Norwegians among the Zulu people in South Africa, Hanna Mellemsether argues straightforwardly that (Norwegian) mission discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of wider European colonial discourse and categorises mission journals as colonial texts. She also points out that the influence of the descriptions of Africa contained within mission journals at the time was particularly great. This stemmed from the fact that Norway possessed no colonies and therefore it was missionaries rather than colonists, explorers or scientists that produced most of the colonial discourse in Norway. The readers of these magazines rarely read texts that complemented or contradicted the narratives laid out in the journals.²³ Mellemsether argues that, although the mission discourse is distinguished by its ideological base from other forms of colonial discourse at the time, it is not separate from them: 'The mission discourse, the missionaries, their texts and their practices occur in a colonial reality and thus within a colonial discourse.'²⁴

In Finland, awareness of Owambo and Africa grew gradually over the course of several decades. The FMS diligently distributed information about Owambo and the progress of the missionary work there to the supporters of the cause. Touring around the country and speaking about the missionary work in parishes, schools, garrisons and on the radio was almost obligatory for missionaries after they returned to Finland. It can be and has been argued that the various materials, including mission journals, educational materials, novels, photographs, maps, graphs and displays of African objects produced and circulated by the Finnish Missionary Society to distribute information about Owambo and the progress of their missionary work

19. Vallgård 2016, 868–869.

20. Vallgård 2016, 870.

21. Vallgård 2016, 870.

22. Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä 2021.

23. Mellemsether 2001, 185.

24. Mellemsether 2001, 191.

to the supporters of the cause were partly and to various degrees influenced by and contributed to colonial discourse.²⁵

This does not mean that the presence of Finnish missionaries in what is today Namibia should be labelled as wholly and uniformly colonial without any exceptions or changes over time. Instead, a nuanced examination of sources is called for. The Finnish literary scholar Olli Löytty has advised caution when examining Finnish missionary texts for colonial traces. One of the central questions Löytty posed in his dissertation on the representation of Owambo in Finnish missionary literature concerned the applicability of a postcolonial framework and theories to Finnish missionary texts on Owambo. He emphasised that one needs to be cautious with this approach because the postcolonial theoretical framework developed for postcolonial discourse analysis entails assumptions about the quality of the discourses under examination that may not be suited to analysis of Finnish texts.²⁶ Löytty pointed out that the Owambo of Finnish missionary literature is an ambivalent place, full of contradictions. The Eurocentrism and othering discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century become significantly less pronounced towards the latter half of the twentieth century when Owambo was more familiar to Finns and times and discourses had changed. Furthermore, Finnish missionaries did not form a unified bloc in terms of their ideas, views and discourses about the Aawambo. Indeed, their writings contained significant differences.²⁷

In this edited collection, we acknowledge that there is a need to be cautious when labelling Finnish missionaries as colonially complicit and in applying the postcolonial theoretical framework to the history of Finns in Namibia. Yet, we follow in the footsteps of Karen Vallgård and other researchers who argue that European missions in Africa and Asia often involved at least ‘subtle aspects of colonialism.’ This book has been informed by a broader, cultural definition of colonialism and the concept of *colonialism without colonies*, developed by Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk and Patricia Purtschert in the Swiss context.²⁸ They note the following, which we view as particularly relevant to the present edited volume:

By pointing to the epistemological dimensions of colonialism, postcolonial studies has shown how the justification, the embodiment and the perpetuation of colonialism have been structured and supported by specific European systems of knowledge which have had a long-lasting effect, and not just on European societies.²⁹

Finns have arguably acted in a colonial manner at least in the area of knowledge production on Africa/ns – much like the Swiss, another small European nation, which has held no colonies or a population of slave-descent.³⁰ Finnish missionaries brought about transformations in Aawambo culture as they introduced Western

25. Löytty 2006; Koivunen 2011; Harju 2018; Merivirta 2019; Shiweda 2021; Skurnik 2021.

26. Löytty 2006, 285.

27. Löytty 2006, 165–167, 214, 279–283.

28. Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert 2016.

29. Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi 2015, 8.

30. For the Swiss missionaries and colonial knowledge formation in Southern Africa, see Harries 2007. For Swiss colonialism without colonies, see Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi 2015 and Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné (eds.) 2015.

modes of education, medicine, material culture and social practices, particularly Evangelical Lutheranism and literary languages. The work in Owambo set in motion complex epistemological processes that subsequently influenced the formation of both Finnish and Namibian conceptions of the world and of each other. Due to the imbalance in power positions throughout much of the common history of the two nations, Namibian voices and agency have often been subsumed by Finnish voices and narratives. The aim of this edited collection is to combine different perspectives, by including writers not only from Finland, but also from Namibia and South Africa as the latter form a central colonial context for shared Finnish-Namibian history.

While Finnish missionary activity in Owambo was central to the shared history of Finns and Namibian peoples for decades, the latter half of the twentieth century was mainly characterised by other kinds of shared history in connection to colonialism, as cultural colonialism gradually faded and the Namibian struggle for independence from South Africa grew in strength. A number of Finnish missionaries and other actors engaged in solidarity work in support of the struggle for Namibian independence. As mentioned above, Martti Ahtisaari held an official UN role in the process. While three of the collection's four sections focus on the interaction between Finnish missionaries and the Aawambo and the San people, the fourth section consists of articles examining this phase of the shared history of Namibia and Finland.

* * *

Studies on the historical relationship between Finns and Namibians have previously been written in both countries. In Finland, research began in the early twentieth century and was conducted by theologians and church historians. In 1908–1909, Uno Paunu, a missionary and later the director of the FMS, published a description of the beginning of Finnish mission work in Owambo. The first overall history of the African work of the FMS, *Suomen Lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia*, was published in 1958 by the missionary and missiologist Matti Peltola.³¹ In her unpublished licentiate thesis (1989), Tuula Varis examined what she called pastoral power and power relations within missionary work through the occupational practices of the Finnish missionaries in Owambo. The material of her thesis consisted of the correspondence between the missionaries and the FMS directors in Finland, reports, diaries, textbooks and other writings by the missionaries.³² In the 1980s, with the aid of significant funding from the Research Council of Finland, historians were able to deepen earlier scholarship by focusing on questions of cultural and societal change that took place in the Owambo region from the latter part of the nineteenth century. This wave of research resulted in publications that were central in charting the main political and economic developments that took place in the area. For instance, Harri Siiskonen (1990) examined the patterns of trade and socio-economic change in Owambo between 1850–1906 in his doctoral dissertation and Martti Eirola (1992) focused on the beginning of the German colonial rule in Owambo between 1884–1910 and local responses to it in his doctoral thesis. These studies were based on diverse archival

31. For studies on the history of the FMS, see Kemppainen 1998; Kena 2000.

32. Varis 1989.

material, especially the extensive collection of the Finnish Missionary Society, but also German missionary and administrative primary sources.

The research of Frieda-Nela Williams and Patricia Hayes has played a pioneering role in the use of oral tradition to write histories of Owambo. Williams employed oral tradition in her *Precolonial Communities of Southwestern Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms 1600–1920* (1991), noting that the sources for precolonial African history are mainly oral. Williams also made use of the material in the Emil Liljeblad Collection. This unique ethnographic material includes written folklore narratives of over one hundred Oshiwambo speakers, which were gathered in the early 1930s by Liljeblad. He was a former missionary who returned to Owambo after receiving a grant from the Finnish Academy of Science.³³ The Liljeblad Collection was also an invaluable source for Maija Hiltunen (née Tuupainen), who examined marriage customs among the Ondonga people in her doctoral dissertation³⁴ and used the collection to undertake research for her monographs *Witchcraft and Sorcery in Ovambo* (1986) and *Good Magic in Ovambo* (1993). Patricia Hayes utilised both archival records and oral interviews conducted in Owambo in 1989–1990 for her doctoral dissertation entitled *A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c. 1880–1935* (1992). The second volume of her dissertation includes valuable reflections on the methods of using oral sources for historical research as well as transcripts of select interviews.

The history of Christianity in Owambo and the changes in traditional belief systems have also garnered interest among subsequent generations of scholars. In her book *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (2002), Meredith McKittrick examined the trajectories of Christianisation and change before colonialism and during the colonial period. G. L. Buys and Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala wrote a history of the church in Namibia (2003), whereas Kari Miettinen examined the motivations for and social consequences of conversion in colonial Ovamboland (2005). Lovisa Tegelela Nampala explored the effect Christianity has had on the Aawambo culture/s (2006) and Märta Salokoski (2006) focused on rituals concerning Aawambo kingship and ritual change. Vilho Shigwedha (2006) examined the changes in Aawambo fashion brought about by Christianity and colonialism. Many of these scholars combined archival research with oral history interviews that they conducted themselves, thereby highlighting local perspectives.

The Namibian struggle for independence was studied in Finland by Iina Soiri, whose MA thesis was published under the title *The Radical Motherhood: Namibian Women's Independence Struggle* (1996). Together with Pekka Peltola, she also examined how and why Finland supported the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa (1999). Chris Saunders has investigated the transition from apartheid to democracy in Namibia and South Africa (2016). Christian Williams has studied SWAPO's exile camps and the experiences of Namibians who lived in exile during Southern Africa's anti-colonial struggles (2015).

33. On the character of the collection, see Salokoski 2006, 51–54. The original narratives and their Finnish translations are stored at the Finnish National Library, but copies can also be found at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek.

34. Tuupainen 1970.

In recent decades, a number of studies have also been written on the growing awareness of Owambo and Africa more generally in Finland and the impact of missionary publications and other material on Finnish self-understanding and worldviews. As mentioned, Olli Löytty (2006) studied the representation of Owambo in Finnish missionary literature and Teuvo Raiskio has examined the San people (1997). Studies have also drawn on other materials and themes. Leila Koivunen (2011) and Kaisa Harju (2018) have examined the history of collecting Owambo artefacts among Finnish missionaries and the practices of putting them on display in Finland. Raita Merivirta (2019) has written about the ways that Finnish youth novels conveyed information about Owambo to young readers in Finland. Johanna Skurnik (2021) has investigated missionary maps circulated by the FMS and Essi Huuhka has written about the discussions of Finnish missionaries to provide the Aawambo with Western clothing (2019).

As discussed above, oral history material has played a pivotal role in examining Finnish-Namibian relations. In recent years, memory and remembering have also become important topics of research. Kim Groop, for instance, has studied the ways Finnish mission work is remembered in Aawambo culture (2017, 2018) and Ellen Ndeshi Namhila has explored colonial gaps in the post-colonial National Archive of Namibia and the possibility of finding material on certain persons and topics (2015).

* * *

The present book has its roots in two recently edited collections: *Intertwined Histories: 150 Years of Finnish-Namibian Relations* (2019) and *Finnish Colonial Encounters: From Anti-Imperialism to Cultural Colonialism and Complicity* (2021).³⁵ A partnership agreement between the University of Turku (Finland) and the University of Namibia brought historians from Turku and Windhoek together in 2018. The following year, to celebrate the 150 years of Finnish-Namibian relations, researchers from Finland and Namibia compiled a popular festschrift entitled *Intertwined Histories*, which analysed existing historical knowledge on the topic from both perspectives. The collaboration between the Universities of Turku and Namibia has borne fruit and helped us realise the great potential of working together in approaching, conceptualising, examining and (re)writing our intertwined history. It has also made us better understand the local circumstances in Finland and Owambo that resulted in a special relationship between two culturally and geographically distinct people.

Editing *Intertwined Histories* evinced that novel scholarship on Finnish-Namibian relations – informed by current debates on the coloniality of knowledge and decolonisation – is greatly needed to produce historical knowledge that answers the call to decolonise existing modes of scholarly knowledge production. Soon after, when the editors of this volume circulated the call for papers for *Finnish Colonial Encounters*, we solicited and received some chapter proposals from Namibia and South Africa, addressing questions related to the shared history of Finns and Namibians. This stressed the need to examine Finnish-Namibian history collaboratively and from the perspective of its possible colonial aspects. Without denying the importance of earlier studies in laying a firm grounding for our understanding of Finnish-Namibian

35. Kaartinen, Koivunen and Shiweda (eds.) 2019; Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä (eds.) 2021.

historical interactions, it is useful to ask what can be achieved by connecting two different perspectives and sets of sources more closely together. How can we combine different cultural knowledge and language skills in order to conduct research collaboratively? While we may not yet have all the answers to these questions, we have worked towards these goals in this edited collection.

Examining colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations does not, however, mean that all the chapters in this collection see Finnish missionaries as complicit in colonialism. Rather, many of the texts discuss how colonial ideas or practices, as well as resistance to these, may or may not have been factors in Finnish-Namibian encounters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both Finns and Namibians expressed a range of views on and reactions to their mutual interactions and cultural exchanges, and these views are explored in this collection. Furthermore, the volume also discusses Finnish and Namibian resistance to South African colonial rule.

Universal history was told in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the perspective of Western civilisation, which gained the 'epistemic privilege of narrating its own local history and projecting it onto universal history.'³⁶ In the twenty-first century, Walter D. Mignolo notes, there have been strong and diverse tendencies to write local histories disattached from Western universalist models:

Nevertheless, non-Western local histories (and knowledges) cannot be constituted without entanglements with Western local history. Border thinking becomes, then, the necessary epistemology to delink and decolonize knowledge and, in the process, to build decolonial local histories.³⁷

Border thinking refers here to knowledge and actions that aim to eliminate coloniality.³⁸ The current volume acknowledges that the work of Finnish missionaries as well as South African rule in South West Africa influenced the formation of Namibian conceptions of the world and that this work was informed by European hegemonic discourses. In order to produce decolonising histories, this collection has been written as a collaborative effort of scholars from Namibia, Finland and South Africa. The authors and editors convened workshops, commented on each other's papers, became more closely cognisant of the history and circumstances of the other authors and the sensitivity of some of the topics in the past and in the present. The collaborative working mode also made it possible to share sources and other material, knowledge, ideas and language skills. It also laid the ground for further collaborative research and lasting friendships. The project of examining the colonial aspects of Finnish-Namibian relations and of decolonising Namibian history is in no way completed by this single volume, but it is our hope that it marks the beginning of a long and beautiful collaborative process.

The anthology is based on diverse source materials. The authors have made extensive use of archival material related to the activities of the FMS, found in Finnish and Namibian archives. Administrative documents, missionary correspondence and diaries have been particularly useful in our research. A great variety of FMS

36. Mignolo 2012, ix.

37. Mignolo 2012, x.

38. Mignolo 2012, xviii.

periodicals, children's and youth novels, missionary memoirs and other publications produced by the FMS, as well as non-religious newspapers and magazines, have been examined. In addition to textual material, the authors have analysed photographs, maps and other visual materials and investigated traditional artefacts and handicrafts. Several chapters are based on already existing ethnographic or oral history material, and numerous new interviews have also been conducted to gather information on different aspects of traditional cultures in Namibia. In researching the fight for freedom and international efforts to promote the independence of Namibia the authors have used letters, personal archives and autobiographical works of those who were involved, as well as Finnish government records.

In geographical terms, the focus of the anthology is on both Finland and the Owambo region, which extended beyond the border of modern-day Angola. The Ondonga Kingdom is more frequently discussed than other Owambo kingdoms, because the presence and influence of the Finns was felt strongest in this area. Examples are also cited from the Kavango region further to the east, where Finnish mission began in a later phase.

Structure and Content of the Book

This edited collection is divided into four sections each of which approaches the common theme of colonial aspects in Finnish-Namibian relations between 1870–1990 from a different angle. The first section focuses on various forms of interaction, collaboration and confrontation encountered by the Finnish missionaries active in Owambo. The first chapter, written by Kim Groop and Anneli Ndapandula Haufiku, investigates the Oshiwambo name for Saturday, *Olyomakaya*, which translates as tobacco day. The name derives from the practice of Finnish missionaries to distribute tobacco on Saturdays and encourage the recipients to come to church the following day. Groop and Haufiku explore the practice of distributing tobacco, but also how tobacco use and *Olyomakaya* is remembered in contemporary Aawambo culture. In her chapter, Meameno Aileen Shiweda analyses the role of Finnish missionaries in teacher training education in northern Namibia between 1920–1970. A special emphasis is on the education of local girls and women and the new social positions and challenges they encountered. Shiweda explores the accounts of three pioneering women, focusing mainly on their educational and professional journeys. Some Finnish missionaries initially resisted women undertaking teacher training. However, those eventually trained as teachers would inspire other women to follow in their pioneering footsteps.

In his chapter, Martti Eirola examines an incident in 1886 when Martti Rautanen, a Finnish missionary, and Dr Hans Schinz, a Swiss explorer and botanist, broke off three pieces from the sacred power stone of the Kingdom of Ondonga, thereby violating the law of the kingdom. Two fragments of the stone ended up in the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of Finland. The Ondonga fragments were cut off in a colonial context from their sacred mother stone and the information it contained. Eirola describes how the stone incident happened and analyses what it meant locally and for the interaction between Finns and the Ondonga people. Lastly, he discusses the repatriation project that was completed in April 2023.

In the last chapter of the section, Harri Siiskonen examines the dreams and reality of the Finnish mission work among the hunter-gatherer San groups in North-Central Namibia between the 1950s and 1970s. The chapter discusses how the reality encountered by missionaries working among the mobile Sans corresponded with a documentary film that was produced in 1967 by the FMS to be shown in Finland. The strategy of sedentarising San groups did not proceed as expected, and missionaries learned from setbacks that understanding the worldview of nomadic hunter-gatherers was necessary.

In the second section, the focus is turned to Finland and the ways that knowledge on Owambo that had been collected and formulated by missionaries was disseminated to a wider Finnish audience. As a result of this new information, Finns came to know more about Owambo and Africa in general and many felt that it was necessary to support the Christian work being carried out in this faraway region.

In her chapter, Leila Koivunen examines the construction of the public story of an Aawambo girl among the Finnish mission community. Nanguroshi, a foster child of a Finnish missionary family, was brought to Finland in 1875. She was subsequently baptised and renamed Eva Maria, and sent back to Africa in 1879. The chapter focuses on mechanisms by which it was hoped that promotional efforts, closely related to Western colonial worldviews, would generate donations and support for mission work. Nanguroshi's story tells us about the need to direct attention to named African individuals as representatives of their people and the effects of mission work.

Essi Huuhka's chapter examines the famine in Owambo in 1908–1909 and the ways in which it was reported in the FMS periodical in order to raise awareness and funds among Finnish mission friends. While international humanitarian campaigns, aiming to alleviate distress on the African continent, were already common in the Anglo-American world, the FMS's fundraising effort was the first of its kind in Finland. Donations were small, but indicate that famine relief in Owambo was seen as a worthy cause by FMS supporters.

In their chapter, Raita Merivirta and Johanna Skurnik explore how Owambo and the Aawambo were represented in the FMS's missionary magazines for children in the first decades of the twentieth century. The authors analyse how the magazines familiarised their child readers with Owambo space and geography and how ideas of blackness and 'heathenism' were associated with Africa and the Aawambo in particular. The chapter also examines the Q&A column of a Finnish-language magazine to learn how the child readers processed the given information and what kind of questions they wanted answered.

The third section of the collection focuses on forms of cultural change and resistance that the interaction between the Aawambo and Finnish missionaries gave rise to. The first chapter, written by Napandulwe Shiweda and Lovisa Tegelela Nampala, examines the factors that led to the survival of some of the Aawambo healing traditions and practices despite the influence of Finnish missionaries and the conversion of the Aawambo people to Christianity. The authors demonstrate how a number of Aawambo traditional cultural and social norms that missionaries rejected persisted and eventually became assimilated into what is seen today as traditional healing practices and part of the new social order.

In the last two chapters of this section, the focus is turned to changes in cultural adornments and clothing. Maria A. N. Caley discusses the traditional *yihih* headdress

of Vakwangali women of the Kavago West Region from the perspective of cultural identity formation both in the past and in the present. *Yihiho* is a unique headdress embedded with cultural value which was eradicated with conversion to Christianity through 'cultural colonialism.' Caley employs a practice-based research methodology where in-depth knowledge regarding the traditional headdress is first extracted from oral history narratives and a textile print is then designed and presented to the Vakwangali community at the Ukwangali Cultural Festival.

In her chapter, Loini Iizyenda concentrates on traditional metal bead (*uuputu*) artefacts and documents different insights and experiences regarding their cultural usage and production, and the misconceptions of the missionaries regarding traditional ornaments. Iizyenda uses oral history descriptions about *uuputu* artefacts and their production to show how advanced the Aawambo people were in technological and cultural terms prior to their encounters with Finnish missionaries.

The fourth and last section of the edited volume concentrates on the Finnish-Namibian interactions at the time of the fight for independence. The section begins with Christian A. Williams' chapter on the Nordic-Namibian solidarity work of Salatiel Ailonga, a Namibian refugee pastor, and Anita Ailonga, his Finnish missionary wife, just prior to and during their exile in Finland from 1976. Williams examines letters received, written and circulated by the Ailongas aimed at selectively publicising the detention of Namibians in Zambia and Tanzania during the SWAPO crisis of 1976. The letters contributed to protecting and freeing detained Namibians and to articulating an alternative to SWAPO's exclusive nationalist discourse.

In his chapter, Chris Saunders examines the memoir of Sam Nujoma, the first President of Namibia, and studies his account of Martti Ahtisaari in the process that led to the independence of Namibia in 1990. Nujoma, who was the leader of Namibia's liberation movement SWAPO from the mid-1970s, had a complicated relationship with Ahtisaari. The chapter reflects on why the two men brought different perspectives to bear on the way in which Namibia's decolonisation process unfolded.

The last chapter of this section and the book is by Jerkko Holmi and analyses the Finnish stance towards Namibia through foreign policy statements and documents published by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1985. The Namibian campaign for independence was a major subject in international discourse in the 1980s and also an important foreign policy issue in Finland. The Finnish stance was influenced by the long history of Finnish-Namibian relations, international decolonisation consensus and the acceleration of calls for Namibian independence.

An extensive bibliography *Oshigwana Hashi Lesha. A Bibliography of 150 Years of Writing on Namibia*, compiled by Professor Joel Kuortti, will be published in the Doria Repository in conjunction with this edited collection. The bibliography contains a wide range of entries for scholarly works and other writings on the historical relation between Finland and Namibia, making it an invaluable tool for students and scholars.

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