

‘One Namibia, one (heterosexual) nation’: Presidential discourses on homosexuality

Anthony Brown

Abstract

This article is concerned with narratives on homosexuality by the three presidents of Namibia and the implications it had for minority sexual identities. Namibia's first president publicly produced and maintained a repulsive image of homosexuality that influenced how non-heteronormative sexualities are framed and sustained by the broader society. His sentiments constructed Namibia to be a homophobic country. The second president in his two terms did not express any homophobic sentiments which led to more tolerance towards sexual diversity in Namibia. The third and current president pledged to build an inclusive Namibia with a sense social cohesion for all. It enabled numerous platforms for interactive dialogue towards a safe and enabling environment for various stakeholders to engage with the sexual diversity discourse. These shifting narratives between the three presidents symbolize the changing atmosphere towards an equal and inclusive citizenry for people with homosexual identities in Namibia. There however exist a need to establish relationship between civil society and state to foster a stronger transformational legal framework that could foster normalized social atmosphere for Namibians with diverse sexual orientations.

Keywords:

Homosexuality, Heterosexuality; Political homophobia, Silence

Introduction

Namibia has long before the recent widespread controversial debates and anti-homosexual reactions on minority sexualities in Africa spoke against homosexuality.¹ For more than two decades influential elite figures within the Namibian political, religious and social schema constructed², produced and maintained a repulsive image

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¹ Van Klinken, Adriaan S. "Gay rights, the devil and the end times: public religion and the enchantment of the homosexuality debate in Zambia", *Religion*, 43 (4), 2013: 519-540.

² LaFont, Suzanne. *Beliefs and attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and traditions amongst Namibian youth*. Gender Research & Advocacy Project, Legal Assistance Centre, 2010; Lorway, Robert, "Dispelling "heterosexual African AIDS" in Namibia: Same-sex sexuality in the township of Katutura", *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 8 (5), 2006: 435-449; Lorway, Robert, "Defiant desire in Namibia: Female sexual-gender transgression and the making of political being", *American Ethnologist*, 35 (1), 2008: 20-33.; Awondo, Patrick, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid. "Homophobic Africa? Toward a more nuanced view." *African Studies Review* 55, 2012: 145-168; Currier, Ashley. "Political homophobia in postcolonial Namibia", *Gender & Society*, 24 (1), 2010: 110-129; Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath of decolonization: Gender and sexual dissidence in postindependence Namibia." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 37, (2), 2012: 441-467; Ireland, Patrick R., "A macro-level analysis of the scope, causes, and consequences of homophobia in Africa." *African Studies Review*, 56 (2), 2013: 47-66.

of homosexuality that influenced how non-conforming sexualities are framed and sustained by the broader society. Social perceptions about homosexuality in Namibia are now marred with vigorous repression, policing of national identity imbued in compulsory heterosexual institution and the prohibition of '*perverted*' attractions. This is regardless of Article 10 (1) in the Namibian constitution that provides that all people shall be equal before the law and (2) no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, religion, ethnic origin, creed, social and economic status (Act No 21 of 1980). Situmbeko explains that this provision that all persons are equal before the law translates into equal treatment for all people in general. Although homosexuality in Namibia is not illegal, political leaders protected the colonial legislation on Sodomy which criminalizes ³ consensual same-sex sexual relations between men.⁴ "The law on sodomy was a British colonial import to Africa, imposed without any consultation with the local populace. The law, which was repealed in Britain back in 1967, was a relic of Victorian times, when sexual intercourse was viewed as being only for procreation – which does not correspond to the modern reality of sexual relationships".⁵ Same-sex relationships between women are not criminalized. Preserving the Sodomy law created an understanding that homosexuality is delegitimized.⁶ The subsequent dissonant socio-political and religious 'truths' about homosexuality served as homophobic capital to condemn minority sexual identities in Namibia.⁷ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identities in Namibia are rendered inferior to hegemonic heterosexual identities and have been subjected to various forms of violence and discrimination.⁸ ²

³ Situmbeko, Gloria, *Sexual Orientation as a Right: The Namibian Constitution in Perspective with Specific Emphasis on the Interpretation of Article 10*, Diss. University of Namibia, 2008.

⁴ Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), *Namibian Law and LGBT Issues*. Legal Assistance Centre, 2015.

⁵ The Namibian, "Sodomy in Namibia and Botswana", *Namibian*, July 4, 2019.

⁶ Hubbard, Dianne, "Ideas of equality, gender, sexuality and the law", in Suzanne LaFont and Dianne Hubbard (eds.), *Unravelling Taboos*, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2007, 86-88.

⁷ Horn, Nico. "Religion and human rights in Namibia", *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 8 (2), 2008: 409-431.

⁸ Lorway, "Defiant".

The challenge is that the constitution does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.⁹ Political homophobia has created (homo) sexuality to be a moral concern by couching homosexuality as a threat to what is traditionally Namibian.¹⁰ Reported discrimination experienced by individuals with diverse sexual identities such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT) are ignored and their concerns and challenges are reduced as a non-priority by the Namibian government.¹¹

Ever since, Namibians with minority sexual identities have resisted the continued repressive remarks by the prominent figures and explicitly embraced and expressed their lifestyles in public through beauty pageants, same-sex marriage celebrations (although not acknowledged), sexual diversity prides and diverse sexuality activism.¹² Unlike many other African countries with homosexual censorship and punishment for homosexual lifestyles¹³, the current president Hage Geingob was of the view that there has been no persecution on these activities by any state organ.¹⁴ This is despite the political homosexual subjugation that rendered non-heterosexual identities with inhumanity.¹⁵ This paper draws on the homosexual narratives by the three presidents of Namibia and how it impacts perceptions and reactions to people with diverse sexual identities. It asks whether the narrative shift in political leadership facilitates a pathway towards a more inclusive sexual diverse citizenry.³

⁹ The Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Namibia: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression*, London, Independent Advisory Group on Country Information, 2018.

¹⁰ Francis, Dennis A. and Anthony Brown, "'To correct, to punish and to praise'. Learner Representative Council leaders' experiences and expressions of non-heterosexuality in Namibian schools", *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21 (12), 2017: 1276-1293.

¹¹ Lorway, "Dispelling"; Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report*; Ntinda, Asser, "Dr Hage Geingob unimpressed by gay activist"; Shapwanale, Ndapewoshali, "Nam digs in on sodomy law", *The Namibian*, Augustus 30, 2016

¹² Littauer, Dan, "Mr Gay Namibia proudly marries his husband from Botswana", *Gay Star News*, April 15, 2013; Miyanicwe, Clemans, "Every day is a honey for Mr Gay Namibia and his life partner", *The Namibian*, April 17, 2013; Shearlaw, M., "We're Namibia's first gay married couple: any questions for us?", *The Guardian*, May 19, 2014; Shivute, Oswald, "LGBTI workshop ends at Ongwendiva", *The Namibian*, July 10, 2014.

¹³ Awondo, Patrick, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid. "Homophobic Africa?"; Currier, Ashley. "Political homophobia"; Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath"; Ireland, Patrick R., "A macro-level analysis".

¹⁴ Ntinda, Asser, "Dr Hage Geingob".

¹⁵ Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report*

This article brief also ask the question whether Namibia as an African country is shifting from aggressive politically induced homophobia to greater tolerance and gradual embrace of diverse sexual identities. Understanding the construction and responses of the homosexual discourse by these three leaders in Namibia might provide insights and opportunities to reconstruct and transform the sexual diverse citizenry in Namibia.

‘One Namibia, One (heterosexual) Nation!’ – The emergence of political homosexual dissonance in Namibia

Namibia, the last colony in Africa gained its independence in 1990 through a bitter struggle against injustice and violations of basic human rights from the Apartheid South African government. Sam Nujoma, commonly referred to as the ‘Father of the Nation’ was the first president of Namibia and served for fifteen years.¹⁶ As the president of the ruling South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) party with its revolutionist liberation struggle credentials, Nujoma rhetorically promoted the equality for all Namibians.¹⁷ In 1990, the new democratic Namibia in its constitution ensured to all citizens the right to liberty, dignity and freedom from any cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, equality and freedom from discrimination, privacy, family and the fundamental freedoms of speech and expression, assembly and association.¹⁸ After 30 years as the leader of the SWAPO party, the Sam Nujoma presidential era embarked on a process of post-colonial nation-building.¹⁹ With his powerful political currency, Nujoma instantly assumed guardianship and gatekeeper role to a collective Namibian identity. Namibia’s population at independence was approximately 1.5 million people and Nujoma emphasized on a procreative heterosexuality as a means of nation building.²⁰ Nujoma’s attempt to rebuild a divided and oppressed nation soon

¹⁶ Melber, Henning (a). "From Nujoma to Geingob: 25 years of presidential democracy", *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 18, 2015: 49-65.

¹⁷ Akuupa, Michael Uusiku, and Godwin Kornes, "From ‘One Namibia, one Nation’ towards ‘Unity in Diversity’? Shifting representations of culture and nationhood in Namibian Independence Day celebrations, 1990–2010", *Anthropology Southern Africa* 36 (1-2), 2013: 34-46.

¹⁸ Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), *Namibian Law and LGBT Issues*.

¹⁹ Akawa, Martha, *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle*, Vol. 13, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014.

²⁰ Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath".

spiraled into the control and regulation (normative) sexualities. In 1996 Nujoma wedged on political homophobia when he publicly announced that Namibia does not acknowledge and protect the rights of homosexual people.²¹ Weis and Bosia explain that political homophobia is purposeful, especially when practiced by state actors; as embedded in the scapegoating of an “other” that drives processes of state building and retrenchment; as the product of transnational influence peddling and alliances; and as integrated into questions of collective identity and the complicated legacies of colonialism.²² The Rainbow Project, a civil society organisation that advocated for the rights and wellbeing of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people argued that the homophobic rhetoric was a way to deflect major discussions of corruption and poverty at the time.²³ In 1996 Nujoma decreed that “all necessary steps must be taken to combat all [factors] that are influencing us and our children in a negative way. Homosexuals must be condemned and rejected in our society”.²⁴ 4

²¹ 21. Horn, Nico. "Religion and human rights in Namibia", *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 8 (2), 2008: 409-431.

22. Weiss, Meredith L. and Bosia, Michael J. (eds.) *Political Homophobia in Comparative perspective, Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2013.

23. Dentlinger, Lindsay, “Justice minister scorns”.

24. Gunzel, Erhard. “Nujoma blast gays”. *Windhoek Advertiser*, December 12, 1996.

25. Reddy, Vasu, "Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa", *Agenda*, 16 (50), 2001: 83-87.

26. Akuupa, Michael Uusiku, and Godwin Kornes, "From ‘One Namibia’"; Akawa, Martha, *The gender politics*

27. Government of the Republic of Namibia, *The Constitution of Namibia*, Windhoek, GRN, 1990.

28. Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath".

21. Horn, Nico. "Religion and human rights in Namibia", *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 8 (2), 2008: 409-431.

22. Weiss, Meredith L. and Bosia, Michael J. (eds.) *Political Homophobia in Comparative perspective, Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2013.

23. Dentlinger, Lindsay, “Justice minister scorns”.

24. Gunzel, Erhard. “Nujoma blast gays”. *Windhoek Advertiser*, December 12, 1996.

Nujoma also proclaimed that Namibians “made sacrifices for the liberation of this country, and [we] are not going to allow individuals with alien practices such as homosexuality to destroy the social fabric of our society”.²⁵ The popular SWAPO liberation chants ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ and ‘Unity in Diversity’ in a post-colonial Namibia suddenly did not befit the notion of national reconciliation and political pluralism.²⁶ This is regardless of Article 10(1) in the Namibian constitution which provides that “all people shall be equal before the law and (2) no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of 145 section 8 of (Act No 21 of 1980) sex, race, colour, religion, ethnic origin, creed, social and economic status”.²⁷ Nujoma accentuated his national identity discourse of compulsory and privileged heteronormativity through natural and biological reproduction constructions when he asked “if all pupils in [our schools] in Namibia become homosexuals, where will the next generation come from?”.²⁸ By ‘equating sexual identities with sexual acts’ homosexuality became unaccepted and unacknowledged in Nujoma’s agenda of nation building.²⁹ He maintained that homosexuality contaminates what is perceived normal and 2001 called for the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of gays and lesbians.³⁰ It has become obvious in Namibia that the ‘problem’ of homosexuality has been captured by this Namibian apex of power in his position as president and status of liberation leader. Nujoma’s inflammatory statements on homosexuality created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity³¹ and widespread intimidation towards homosexuals.³² Ironically this ‘new’ Namibian morality was in conflict with human

25. Reddy, Vasu, "Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa", *Agenda*, 16 (50), 2001: 83-87.

26. Akuupa, Michael Uusiku, and Godwin Kornes, "From ‘One Namibia’"; Akawa, Martha, *The gender politics*

27. Government of the Republic of Namibia, *The Constitution of Namibia*, Windhoek, GRN, 1990.

28. Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath".

29. Sears, James T. "Educators, homosexuality, and homosexual students: Are personal feelings related to professional beliefs?.", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22 (3-4), 1992: 29-80.

30. Lorway, "Dispelling".

31. Ibid

32. Currier, Ashley. "The aftermath".

rights discourse³³, the very reason of Nujoma's liberation struggle. His public hostility towards homosexuality became institutional and systemic as influential significant others followed suit. Widespread negative social attitudes towards diverse sexual identities broke out in villages and towns and were marked with physical violence and rape.³⁴ Another example of the impact of Nujoma's homophobic sentiments was when the Supreme Court in Namibia rejected the permanent residency application of a lesbian German national who lived with a long-time Namibian partner. Part of the reasons in the judgement was that the Namibian president, at the time Nujoma, did not approve of same-sex life styles which were perceived as a threat the values of the Namibian people.³⁵ The judge argued that government benches who represented the Namibian electoral did not oppose the president's homophobic statements and in turn supports the anti-homosexual views. In a recent study with Learner Representative Councils (LRCs) in Namibian schools, young leaders drew on Nujoma's disapproval of homosexuality as a justification for their repression against peers with non-heterosexual identities.³⁶ It is evident that Nujoma's views systemically shaped the Namibia's construction of sexual diversity. The formation of social power to establish and shift homophobia in the case of Namibia clearly lies in the intersections of heteronormativity and political power.³⁷ The first pro-homosexual legislation that prohibited labour law discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation signed in 1992³⁸ was removed in 2004 during the Nujoma presidential era.³⁹

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³³ Lorway, "Dispelling".

³⁵ Horn, Nico. "Religion".

³⁶ Francis, Dennis A. and Anthony Brown, "To correct".

³⁷ Currier, Ashley. "Political homophobia".

38. Hubbard, Dianne, "Ideas of equality, gender".

³⁹ Dentlinger, Lindsay, "Justice minister scorns homosexuality as 'criminal'", *The Namibian*, May 7, 2004.

It was not surprising that at the time prominent leaders in the ruling SWAPO party with the likes of Hadino Hishongwa, Helmut Angula, Minister of Finance; Minister of Home Affairs Jerry Ekandjo, among others joined the crusade of Nujoma's popular mythologies tainting homosexuality as social disease, unAfrican, a Western incitement to corrupt African nations and some even called for the elimination of homosexual people from the surface of Namibia.⁴⁰ Helmut Angula as the Minister of Finance at the time lambasted "homosexuality is an unnatural behavioural disorder which is alien to the African culture".⁴¹ These political homophobic statements and threats from these leaders produced uncertainty and anxiety. Minister Jerry Ekandjo as "*in charge of the police . . . commandeered 700 newly recruited police officers to 'eliminate' gay men and lesbians 'from the face of Namibia'*".⁴² He initially threatened to criminalise homosexuality.⁴³ The Minister of Women Affairs withdrew her support for the Manifesto which had broadened the definition of women's rights to include lesbian rights.⁴⁴ A leading LGBT organisation, The Rainbow Project decided to halt their public campaign towards the decriminalisation of the Sodomy Law amidst state leadership produced homophobia.⁴⁵ The homophobic revolt in other African countries such as Uganda, Nigeria, The Gambia and Egypt manifested through explicit anti-homosexual legislation and state-driven harassment, violence, torture and executions.⁴⁶ ⁶

Although Namibia has not aggressively followed through with its political threats to criminalize sexual diversity as many of the above African countries, comments made during this era elicited pockets of state funded violence against people with non-heterosexual identities. For example the Special Field Force in Namibia claimed that

⁴⁶ The Namibian, "No Gay Day for Minister Angula." *The Namibian*, November 10, 1995: 6.

⁴² Amupadhi, Tangeni, "Eliminate Homosexuals, Says Minister." *Mail and Guardian*, October 6, 2000.

⁴³ Weidlich, Brigitte, "Ekandjo Compares Homosexuality with Satanism", *Windhoek Observer*, November 14, 1998.

⁴⁴ Rothschild, Cynthia, *Written Out: How Sexuality Is Used to Attack Women's Organizing*. New York, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2005.

⁴⁵ Currier, Ashley. "Political homophobia".

⁴⁶ Teunis, Niels, "Same-sex sexuality"; Ireland, Patrick R., "A macro-level analysis"; Van Klinken, Adriaan S. "Gay rights"; Weiss, Meredith L. and Bosia, Michael J. (eds.) *Political Homophobia*; Yanzi, Stella, "Rhetorical analysis".

they received an order to rip earrings from men as if was not part of the Oshiwambo culture.⁴⁷

I am of the view that bandwagon statements from other SWAPO political leaders in Namibia in solidarity with Nujoma's homophobic utterances fuelled a social hatred for people for diverse sexual identities in Namibia.

Nujoma's personal dissonance around homosexuality was coupled with his strongest ally, Robert Mugabe, the president from Zimbabwe who in 1995 barred a display by the Gays and Lesbians activist group at an international book fair organized in Harare around the theme "human rights".⁴⁸ As a popular believe in Africa that homosexuality is a Western influence⁴⁹, the fear of prevalent colonial values in a 'sovereign' Namibia could have increase Nujoma's homophobia. Homosexuality as a catalyst was used to garner support for Mugabe's reactions to the so called 'Western influence' which well suited Nujoma's ideology of nation building and national identity. This solidarity between Namibia and Zimbabwe was more evident when the Namibian constitutional court rejected the permanent residency application. The Supreme Court in Namibia referred to the Zimbabwean jurisprudence in the Banana case which stated the word 'sex' only means male/female⁵⁰ and subsequently concluded that the Namibian constitution does not protect same-sex relationships. The widely and deeply held support for SWAPO and Nujoma as its leader evidently endorsed his sentiments. The homophobic narratives have constructed an immediate everyday hostile environment for homosexual people in Namibia. People with diverse sexual identities had to relive the violent colonial oppressive history of Namibia. It is regrettable that under the leadership of Nujoma that the 'father of the nation' abandoned some of his children.⁷

⁴⁷ Hamata, Max, "SFF Launch Earring 'Purge.'" *The Namibian*, May 2, 2001.

⁴⁸ Melber, Henning (b), "In the footsteps of Robert Gabriel Mugabe: Namibian solidarity with Mugabe's populism – bogus anti-imperialism in practice", in Sabelo, J. Ndlovu-Gatheni, (ed.), *Mugabeism? History, Politics and Power in Zimbabwe*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, 107 -120.

⁴⁹ Ireland, Patrick R., "A macro-level analysis"

⁵⁰ Horn, Nico. "Religion".

“Those are not issues we are talking about.” - Pohamba’s silence and Geingob’s silencing of the homosexual discourse.

Hifikepunye Pohamba in 2005 was sworn in as Namibia’s second president and served till 2015. His road to the top position in the state was not without controversy. Nujoma who served a constitutionally amended three term presidency after uncertainty of stepping down, in 2004 handpicked Pohamba as his successor.⁵¹ It raised concerns that Pohamba would concede to the influence and interference of Nujoma who still held the presidency position of the ruling SWAPO party. What would this development mean for sexual minority groups, particularly the decade long attack on homosexual identities? Surprisingly Pohamba exhibited a more authentic father of the nation figure through his forge for national cohesion and reconciliation.⁵² Also known as the ‘man of the people’, Pohamba was unwilling to enter in conflict and reached out to other parts of the Namibian community.⁵³ The aggressive homosexual bigotry became silent with pockets of homophobic slurs. Was Pohamba’s silence an olive branch to the homosexual citizens of Namibia? De Palma and Atkinson explain that the ‘calling’ on silence hopes for the discourse to disappear.⁵⁴ Similarly Ferfolja claims that silence can also be used to resist and disrupt.⁵⁵ Was it Pohamba’s hopes to prohibit, disrupt and silence the aggression towards homosexuality? ⁸

⁵¹ Melber, Henning (a). "From Nujoma to Geingob".

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ DePalma, Renée, and Elizabeth Atkinson. "The sound of silence: Talking about sexual orientation and schooling." *Sex Education*, 6 (4), 2006: 333-349.

⁵⁵ Ferfolja, Tania. "Australian lesbian teachers-a reflection of homophobic harassment of high school teachers in New South Wales government schools", *Gender and Education*, 10 (4), 199: 401-415.

⁵⁶ Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report*

On the one hand one could argue that the challenge with the silence to political homophobia during the Pohamba regime is that the harmful discourse by the Nujoma regime remained uninterrupted and unchallenged. On the contrary a study on Human Rights in Namibia conducted by the Ombudsman's office in 2013 showed that Namibians during the Pohamba era supported the equal rights of different sexualities.⁵⁶ Compared to an earlier survey conducted during the Nujoma era between 2007 and 2008 that shows more negative attitude to homosexuality⁵⁷, the Pohamba era certainly shows more public tolerance towards homosexuality.⁵⁸ The silence however did not completely remove the human rights violations towards homosexual people⁵⁸ which I believe emanates from the homophobic residues of the Nujoma regime. Although Namibians might gradually debunk political homophobia, more overt efforts remain to ensure the reduction of social homophobia that would challenge hegemonic sexualities.

Hage Geingob another leader in the SWAPO party became Namibia's third and current president in March 2015 with 87% of the electoral vote.⁵⁹ Although early days in his presidency, Geingob's first homosexual remarks surfaced at his pre-inaugural briefing to the media address. When asked about his view on the rights of homosexual people in Namibia, Geingob responded that "those are not the issues we are talking about, those are luxuries".⁶⁰ He further claimed that homosexual people are not harassed in Namibia and insisted that such violations should be reported to the police. Geingob made his comments on homosexuality in Namibia despite the findings on human rights violations towards homosexual people.⁶¹ It is ironic but not ultimately surprising that Geingob with traceable experience in human rights as co-author of the progressive Namibian Constitution and scholar of democracy and human rights would deny the rights of homosexuals in Namibia.

⁵⁷ LaFont, Suzanne, "Decolonising sexuality"

⁵⁸ Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report*.

⁵⁹ Melber, Henning (a). "From Nujoma to Geingob".

⁶⁰ Ntinda, Asser, "Dr Hage Geingob".

⁶¹ Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report*

Geingob in 2015 shared at an African summit that he regards Robert Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe who strongly hates homosexual people as his hero.⁶² It was concerning that Geingob's support to Mugabe appears more like a continuation of the Nujoma solidarity pledge made two decades ago. More so Nujoma now serves on Geingob's Presidential.⁶³ Do these developments explain the *loud* silencing and refusal of Geingob, a human rights activist to express a different positioning on homosexuality? Does Geingob's silencing of homosexuality symbolise another decade of prodigal citizenry for same-sex identities in Namibia? Morrell explains that the culture of silence increase stigmatisation and denial.⁶⁴ Geingob's regard for human rights to homosexual Namibians leaves a grim chance to the repeal the Sodomy law which aids an atmosphere of marginalisation, exclusion and punishment.⁶⁵ Will Namibia relive the homophobic rhetoric from the Nujoma era or will Geingob uphold the Pohamba silence? In his presidential inaugural address Geingob pledged:

*I take this oath pledged on behalf of all Namibians and promise to serve all Namibians without exception. No Namibian must feel left out. [...] All of us must play our part in the success of this beautiful house we call Namibia. We need to renew it from time to time by undergoing renovations and extensions. [...] Let us stand together in building this new Namibian house in which no Namibian will feel left out.*⁶⁶

Thus far the Geingob era has delivered the most promising times for the Namibians who identify with diverse sexual identities. Prominent leaders have spoken out against human rights abuses towards LGBT identities. The Ombudsman of Namibia Advocate John Walters has called on Namibians to accept the human rights of diverse sexual identities.⁶⁷ 10

⁶² Melber, Henning (a). "From Nujoma to Geingob".

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Morrell, Robert, "Silence, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in South African schools", *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 30 (1), 2003: 41-62.

⁶⁵ Hubbard, Dianne, "Ideas of equality, gender".

⁶⁶ Melber, Henning (a). "From Nujoma to Geingob".

⁶⁷ Kisting, Denver. "Lets gays be – Walters", *The Namibian*, August 23, 2016.

He emphasised that he has “been appointed to protect people's human rights, despite people's choices. If people of the same sex would like to get married, it is their choice, whether the country, the community, churches and government acknowledge that”.

Neighbouring Botswana on 11 June, 2019 through a High Court Judgement decriminalised the Sodomy Law.⁶⁸ At an interactive human rights dialogue organised by the Chairperson of the National Council to promote the inclusion for all Namibians, the first Lady of Namibia, boldly challenged Namibia to follow the example of Botswana. Madam Geingos argued it is illogic to keep the Sodomy Law within the legal frameworks of Namibia if it serves no purpose and advance humanity.⁶⁹ Time will reveal if homosexual people will truly form part of the inhabitants of this new Namibian house. Will Namibians with same-sex identities continue to live in the *kambasho* (a temporary shelter) from the main house or will Geingob extend his Namibian house to make room for his prodigal homosexual children? Civil society will have to remind and keep the head of the house responsible for his promise. People with diverse sexual identities in Namibia never asked for luxuries but simply want to be treated equally like everyone else in the house. The provision that all persons are equal before the law should translate into equal treatment for all people in general.⁷⁰ If Geingob is sincere to his oath than homosexual people will for the first time experience the benefits of a ‘One Namibia, one (inclusive) Nation’.

Conclusion

The enforced regulation of sexuality in Namibia by its first president with his negative and harmful sentiments about homosexuality created socio-hostility towards people with same-sex identities. It also tainted the country as homophobic although state agents hardly reacted to the threats made by politicians. The second and third presidents respectively resorted to silence and silencing on topic of homosexuality. Silence is a complicated construct that on the one side undermines basic human rights while it could also articulate oppositional views.^{71 11}

⁶⁸ Kisting, Denver. “Lets gays be – Walters”, *The Namibian*, August 23, 2016.

⁶⁹ Beukes, Jemima, “Sodomy law's days numbered – Geingos” *Namibian Sun*, June 14, 2019.

⁷⁰ Situmbeko, Gloria, *Sexual Orientation*.

⁷¹ Ferfolja, Tania. "Australian lesbian teachers.

The Pohamba era was marked with silence that yielded towards more tolerance towards same-sex identities. The silence however perpetuated the aggressive political homophobic remnants from the Nujoma Era which aided human rights violations towards diverse sexual identities. The third president, Geingob in his oath promised to build a new Namibian house where all are equal nevertheless his disregard for equal rights for homosexual people the day before. The presidential era of Pohamba and Geingob shows signs of erosion of the aggressive Nujoma era that was marked by homosexual dissonance. It will require from Geingob to openly pronounce his inclusion of diverse sexual identities to his new Namibian house in order to disrupt the previous homophobic narratives. Civil society should rub shoulders with state during this relaxed atmosphere and more intensely discuss the repeal of the Sodomy law that could change social attitude.

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