

Coming to Terms in Namibia

– More than heroic narratives

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Abstract

The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO of Namibia) had a unique status among anti-colonial movements. Fighting South Africa's illegal occupation of South West Africa/Namibia, dubbed by the United Nations as a "trust betrayed," it resorted to armed struggle in the 1960s. SWAPO was subsequently recognized as "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" by a United Nations General Assembly resolution since the mid-1970s.

The political culture in post-colonial Namibia is much characterized by the dominance of SWAPO as a former liberation movement and its official history. This paper summarizes the relevance of the armed struggle for the heroic narrative. It contrasts the glorification with some of the 'hidden histories' and trajectories related to some less documented realities of the armed struggle and its consequences which do not have much visibility in the official historiography. It thereby finally seeks to present a more nuanced picture by giving voice to some protagonists of a post-colonial political culture not considered as mainstream.

Keywords: Namibia, SWAPO, liberation movement, patriotic history, heroic narratives

Introduction

Each decolonization process can claim a degree of uniqueness, based on historically genuine features of the particular society and its social forces. One should therefore abstain from premature generalizations. There are certain common features, however, shared between the liberation movements of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), SWAPO and the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC). They all in the process of decolonization obtained a decisive degree of political power and placed their 'party machinery' into the

center of emerging governance. The emphasis on free elections and an agreed constitutional framework for a controlled transition in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa suggests similarities in terms of shaping the post-colonial environment. Their cases represent examples of liberation movements turning into parties to occupy political power. These parties have managed to consolidate their dominant position and expand control over the state apparatus.¹ In all cases their legitimacy is based on being the – more or less democratically elected – representative of the majority of the people.

This paper analyses the post-colonial nation building under SWAPO as a process of social engineering which was based on a liberation gospel of a patriotic history, a narrative consolidating political power and control based on an exclusivist perspective. It shows how the anti-colonial struggle mentality was translated into a hegemonic discourse in post-colonial nation building and traces the counter-narratives emerging since then.²

Patriotic History for a Nation in Formation

The violent heritage,³ from a dialectic point of view, shaped mentalities and ideologies of both, colonizers and colonized, as aptly characterized by Frantz Fanon.⁴ Social interaction in the colonial period had visible spillover effects on the socio-cultural and political identities and mental dispositions of the Namibian people also after the end of foreign rule. It is necessary to break these taboos and to end the construction of heroic narratives.⁵ These efforts, painful as they might be, reflect the growing realization that the armed liberation

¹ See the comparative study by Roger Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa* (Woodbridge: James Currey and Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2013). For the parallels but as much the differences in the patriotic history trajectories of Zimbabwe and Namibia see Reinhart Kössler, “Images of History and the Nation: Namibia and Zimbabwe Compared,” *South African Historical Journal* 62.1 (2010): 29-53.

² It draws to some extent on chapter 2 of Henning Melber, *Understanding Namibia: The Trials of Independence* (London: Hurst and Auckland Park: Jacana, 2014 and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and parts of my chapter “The Shifting Grounds of Emancipation: From the Anti-colonial Struggle to a Critique of Post-colonial Society,” in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed. Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2017): 17–38.

³ David Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage* (London: Rex Collings and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986).

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

⁵ Graham Harrison, “Bringing Political Struggle Back In: African Politics, Power and Resistance,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 28.89 (2001): 390.

struggles were not a suitable breeding ground for the establishment of democratic systems of government after the attainment of independence. In this sense, the new societies governed by a former liberation movement retained essential elements of the old system and entrenched conflicts. Thus, aspects of colonialism are mirrored in the struggle for its dissolution and subsequently are also evident in the structures and concepts of governance in post-colonial times. The newly established systems of power and political outlook, despite being different from the old oppressive hierarchy, also perpetuate the binary view of the previous colonial discourse.⁶

A new political elite operating from the commanding heights of the state induced a dominant public discourse. It introduced and cultivated selective narratives and memories related to the war(s) of liberation to establish an exclusive post-colonial legitimacy under the sole authority of one particular agency of social forces. The mythology plays an essential role in this fabrication. Just like ZANU-PF's excessive reference to the *chimurenga*, SWAPO has "since independence sought to ground the nation's identity as well as its own political legitimacy in the liberation war."⁷

The evidence presented documents the impact of histories of war and violence in Namibia's post-colonial ideological environment which shapes and affects memories and their institutionalization in symbols, rituals, and day-to-day practices related to present day political culture and hegemony.⁸ By doing so, the significance of revolt and resistance in the history of Namibia and its utilization for legitimizing the currently dominant patterns of rule are provisionally explored. This follows the understanding that the

critique of power in contemporary Africa calls for a theoretically informed anthropology of memory and the making of political subjectivities. The need is to rethink our understanding of the force of memory, its official and unofficial forms, its moves between the personal and the social in postcolonial transformation.⁹

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁷ Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor & Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, Harare: Weaver Press, Cape Town: David Philip and Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000): 254.

⁸ See also the article by Chris Saunders in this issue.

⁹ Richard Werbner, "Beyond Oblivion: Confronting Memory Crisis," in *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, ed. Richard Werbner (London and New York: Zed, 1998): 2.

Martyrdom was created during the ‘struggle days’ and beyond around every case of violence exercised by the occupation army and police, those committed on nationals in exile as well as at the home front, in police cells and in the townships. This contributed as a mobilizing factor to the consolidation of resistance under the banner of SWAPO. The glorification of resistance and the sacrifices made on the battlefield were articulated in numerous (and often crude) praise poems, published in the various pamphlets and brochures of SWAPO.¹⁰ Frantz Fanon’s classification of this mode of expression is a characterization of the midwife function also assumed by the armed struggle in the creation of a Namibian national consciousness. For him, this literature of combat “calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons.”¹¹

It is perhaps questionable from today’s perspective whether these were indeed “boundless horizons,” although they were certainly new. But the socio-psychological impact of the armed struggle on the formation and consolidation of an emerging identity of a Namibian nation in combat for its independence is an obvious message from the documentary evidence; this had a lasting impact on the deep-rooted mind set of Namibia’s post-colonial society. It is also reflected in the ‘national anthem’ of SWAPO, the words of which follow the tune of *Nkosi Sikele Afrika*:

Honour to the heroes of Namibia
Glory to their blood and bravery
We give our love and loyalty
For their blood sustains us
To fight till victory!¹²

In the first hour of the Republic of Namibia, Sam Nujoma as the new Head of State (who exercised power for three terms until March 2005) – also President of SWAPO since its

¹⁰ See for this particular culture of resistance and its (self-)critical assessments *It Is No More A Cry: Namibian Poetry in Exile and Essays on Literature in Resistance and Nation Building*, ed. Henning Melber (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2004).

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967): 193.

¹² Verse 3 of the SWAPO National Anthem, quoted from SWAPO Foreign Mission in Zimbabwe, *SWAPO News and Views*, Special Issue, 1/2 (Harare, March/April 1989): 52. Any resemblance to the first lines of Namibia’s national anthem is of course *not* purely coincidental!

foundation in 1960 and elected to be in office until 2007 – did not fail to remember the price of liberation paid by so many. He closed his inaugural speech with the following words:

Master of Ceremony, Sir, in accepting the sacred responsibility which the Namibian people have placed on me, as the first President of the Republic of Namibia, I would like to bow and pay homage to our fallen heroes and heroines, whose names Namibia's present and future generations will sing in songs of praise and whose martyrdom they will intone.¹³

The new national anthem performed on this occasion for the first time officially, begins with the following words:

Namibia, land of the brave,
freedom fight we have won,
glory to the bravery,
whose blood watered our freedom.

Revisiting the Literature of Combat

The emerging new Namibian identity born in the liberation struggle also gave birth to a new written Namibian culture. The products were initially mostly biographically inspired prose and poetry of a combat literature, often with members of the international solidarity movement providing support, and created and printed abroad. Recorded, transcribed and, finally, edited life-histories of Namibians involved in the struggle for liberation were the first attempts at expressing genuine Namibian aspirations in the field of literature. The historical merit of activists of the Liberation Support Movement (LSM) based in Canada and the United States of America initially stimulated and encouraged such literature. The LSM had a long tradition of recording and publishing life histories of members of liberation movements, such as the Kenyan Mau Mau, the Angolan MPLA, the Zimbabwean ZAPU and the South African ANC, within a series entitled *Life Histories from the Revolution*. Members of the

¹³ Quoted from the speech as reproduced in full in Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: Panaf, 2001): 447. Nujoma has dedicated his autobiography “to the gallant sons and daughters, heroes and heroines under the leadership of their vanguard SWAPO, and to those who struggled and sacrificed their precious lives for the total liberation of Namibia.” His inaugural speech is also reproduced in the brochure issued on the occasion of the official opening of the Heroes’ Acre, Heroes’ Acre Committee on Media Liaison, *The Unknown Soldier: Inauguration of Heroes Acre, 26 August 2002* (Windhoek:, 2002): 36–38. The publication includes a statement by the President on the occasion. Most strikingly, this official document pictures the Head of State wearing full military combat dress.

LSM also conducted in-depth interviews with SWAPO activists and pioneered Namibian literature in this category.¹⁴ Less prominent remained another autobiographically oriented publication from a woman's point of view published in exile.¹⁵ To some extent autobiographically inspired fiction was among the first truly Namibian-owned novels.¹⁶ After Independence, other personal narratives continued to relate to the history of, and involvement in, the anti-colonial struggle.¹⁷ So does, most prominently, the (auto) biography of Sam Nujoma, whose account ends with Namibian Independence.¹⁸ The exceptional role and influence of the latter in the formation of anti-colonial resistance as well as the building of the Namibian nation puts this volume into a different category and makes it the most prominent case of what in the literature has been dubbed – originally with reference to Zimbabwe's post-colonial historiography – as patriotic history.¹⁹

Poetry has been a popular and prominent vehicle to mobilize and promote Namibian resistance to colonial rule. In addition to the numerous poems published in printed media by

¹⁴ Dennis Mercer, ed., *Breaking Contract: The Story of Vinnia Ndadi* (Richmond: LMS Information Center, 1974); Ole Gjerstad documented the experiences of Hinananje Shafodino Nehova, "The Price of Liberation," in Liberation Support Movement, ed., *Namibia: SWAPO Fights for Freedom* (Oakland: LSM Information Center, 1978): 70–78; and finally, the collected efforts giving voice to John Ya-Otto (1938-1994) resulted in his biography, widely published and introduced to the international book market through the legendary *African Writers Series*: John Ya-Otto, with Ole Gjerstad & Michael Mercer, *Battlefront Namibia: An Autobiography* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1981; also London: Heinemann, 1982; with further editions in Harare and Bulawayo, 1982).

¹⁵ Selma Ndeutula Hishongwa, *Marrying Apartheid* (Abbotsford, VIC, Australia: Imprinta, 1986).

¹⁶ Joseph Diescho (with Celestine Wallin), *Born of the Sun: A Namibian Novel* (New York: Friendship Press, 1988); and the semi-biographical narrative of Helmut Angula, *The Two Thousand Days of Haimbodi ya Haufiku* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1990).

¹⁷ Most notably Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf: The Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990).

¹⁸ Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: Panaf, 2001).

¹⁹ See Chris Saunders, "Liberation and Democracy: A Critical Reading of Sam Nujoma's 'Autobiography'," in *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2003): 87–98; Chris Saunders, "History and the Armed Struggle: From Anti-colonial Propaganda to 'Patriotic History'?" in *Transitions in Namibia – Which Changes for Whom?*, ed. Henning Melber (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 2007): 13–28; André Du Pisani, "Memory Politics in *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma – My Life in SWAPO and my Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia*," *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 1 (2007): 97–107.

both SWAPO and associated anti-colonial organizations, several distinct collections of Namibian poetry of combat testify to Namibian aspirations to find their own means of expression. The book privately printed by a journalist in the service of the Department of Information and Publicity of SWAPO is the first collection of poems published in English by a Namibian writer.²⁰ This was followed by an anthology of poems by students at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka and another collection of poems by teachers in refugee schools in Angola and Zambia.²¹ Finally, the poems by a local trade union activist transcended what Frantz Fanon has characterised as “a literature of combat” without abandoning it and were among the first of their kind published at home.²² This illustrated at the same time the dynamics unfolding in the domestic setting towards the end of the 1980s, when voices of resistance were articulated more openly and in defiance of political repression.

Post-colonial Markers of Heroic Narratives

In many ways Namibia’s society today still bears the traces and marks of its violent colonial history. President Pohamba, who followed Sam Nujoma as the Head of State in 2005, ended his speech on Heroes Day on 26 August 2013 with the flaming appeal:

Namibia is now free and free forever. The destiny of our country is in our own hands. We will work harder to make Namibia a winning nation. We will do our best to secure a brighter future for our children and for the future generations. This we will do in honour of those who made the supreme sacrifices for Namibia’s freedom.

We will do this to honour their legacy of bravery and gallantry because as we sing in our National Anthem “their blood waters our freedom.” They gave their lives and shed their precious blood so that all Namibians can live in peace and security, free from hunger and poverty.

²⁰ Mvula Ya Nangolo, *From Exile* (Lusaka, self-published, 1976). A few poems from this volume have been included in *When My Brothers Come Home: Poems From Central and Southern Africa*, ed. Frank M Chipasula (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), while the re-publication after Independence added more recent poetry, Mvula Ya Nangolo, *Thoughts From Exile* (Windhoek: Longman, 1991).

²¹ Henning Melber, ed., *It Is No More a Cry: Namibian Poetry in Exile* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1982); Helgard Patemann & Nangolo Mbumba, eds., *Through the Flames: Poems From the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (London: Zed and Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988).

²² Ben Ulenga, *Seeds: Poems by Ben Ulenga*, ed. Annemarie Heywood (Windhoek: MIBAGUS Collective, 1989).

Glory to the memories of our Heroes and Heroines!²³

Formal Namibian independence began with the choice of 21 March 1990 as Independence Day. This was in accordance with a suggestion by SWAPO in the Constituent Assembly that this date should be honored in memory of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa.

Although this is a widely unknown fact in Namibia's public sphere, it reiterates the liberation movement's commitment to remember the victims in times of peace as well as in those of war. Each year on 4 May Cassinga Day is celebrated as a public holiday to commemorate the biggest single massacre of refugees in exile, while 26 August remains as Heroes Day the most significant occasion to remember the sacrifices as a public holiday. The date was introduced earlier as Namibia Day by the United Nations to commemorate the beginning of the armed struggle in Omgulumbashe.²⁴ Since Independence a memorial has been erected there. Although 10 December was originally celebrated as Human Rights Day, in the Namibian context this conjures up the memory of violent oppression in 1959, when police opened fire on protesters at a demonstration against the planned forceful removal of the black urban residents from the Old Location in Windhoek to the new township of Katutura, killing eleven people. It has been re-named Day of Namibian Women in accordance with a decision of the SWAPO majority in Parliament. As the Prime Minister argued when tabling the motion, the decision "was in recognition of the heroism of Namibian women during the forced removal from the Old Location."²⁵

The war memorial constructed in Omgulumbashe was complemented by a Heroes' Acre designed and constructed by a North Korean contractor outside of Windhoek in the Auas mountain range, officially opened in 2002 in close proximity to the military base at Luiperdsvallei.²⁶ Bearing "the triumphant image of the victors," these images

²³ Quoted from "Full Speech: HE President Pohamba at Heroes Day. Omugulu gwoombashe, 2013," *Informanté*, posted 28 August 2013 and accessed 2 January 2014 at https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=183476948385940&story_fbid=541626679237630.

²⁴ The spelling of the place has been modified since then into Omugulu-gwoombashe, but the old name is still in use, too.

²⁵ Quoted from "Rights Day to be Renamed," *The Namibian*, 30 September 2004.

²⁶ See i.a. Elke Zuern, "Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 50.3 (2012): 497f.; Reinhart Kössler, "Facing a

clearly embody the vision of victors who lay claim, in Walter Benjamin's words, to the heritage "of all who have ever prevailed before". However, in so doing they not only deny the existence of actual cleavages, including the social realignments that have occurred after independence with the rise of a black elite. By glossing over social contradictions, these winners of the entire process also acknowledge symbolically their cross-over on the side of domination.²⁷

The same North Korean company also designed and constructed an Independence Museum. Contrasting the surrounding colonial architecture,²⁸ it is the new symbolic language. It borders on a post-modern monstrosity, referred to by critics as 'coffee machine' because of its architectural features. Opened on Independence Day 2014, the history visually displayed has been strongly criticized for its omissions, flaws, distortions and even outright manipulations.²⁹

The old colonial monument of the German equestrian (*Schutztruppenreiter*), which presided over the town center from the very same place on the hillside for almost a century, was relocated to a less prominent site a few meters away in 2009/10 after negotiations with a group of German-speaking Namibians at their costs due to the construction work for the new Independence Museum. In an unannounced surprise move, the monument was installed during the night of 25 December 2013 in the inner yard of the *Alte Feste* (Old Fort) erected during German colonialism, tucked away another few meters from where it had been re-located to earlier. Initial reactions among those in support of the SWAPO policy welcomed

Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia?," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33.2 (2007): 369ff.

²⁷ Kössler, "Facing a Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia?," 370. See also Heike Becker, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010," *Journal of the International African Institute* 81.4 (2011): 519–43; and Godwin Komes, "Celebrating Independence Day: The Aesthetics and Politics of National Commemoration in Namibia," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 17 (2015): 27–50.

²⁸ For a summary and preliminary assessment of Namibia's present *mnemoscapes* and memory landscapes, see Reinhart Kössler, "Public Memory, Reconciliation and the Aftermath of War: A Preliminary Framework with Special Reference to Namibia", in *Re-Examining Liberation: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2003): 99–112.

²⁹ For an assessment of the North Korean monumental architecture see Tycho A. Van Der Hoog, *Monuments of Power: The North Korean Origin of Nationalist Monuments in Namibia and Zimbabwe* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2019).

this as a long overdue move to remove an anachronistic glorification of a colonial past and celebrated it as an act of further emancipation from the erstwhile colonial yoke. Others suggested that this might be seen not only as the removal of a historic reminder of German colonial subjugation but also as the visual disappearance of the directly connected original resistance against foreign occupation. As they maintain, the equestrian monument had gradually been placed in a wider context of being a symbolic reminder not only of defeat but also of the primary anti-colonial struggle waged by the Ovaherero and Nama and their sacrifices at the beginning of the 20th century.³⁰ Beyond glorification, by commemorating the fallen German soldiers the monument in the view of some also fulfilled a multi-dimensional function and could be considered as a much more ambiguous reference point, which was also suitable for cultivating an historical awareness on struggles preceding the birth of SWAPO. Its removal from the public sphere might in this perspective be interpreted as a further marginalization of earlier resistance narratives, reinforcing the monopoly of patriotic history in formation after World War II and rooted mainly in the people originating from the Northern parts of the country.³¹

It is noteworthy that in the ensuing controversy, also black voices articulated concern about dealing with history by simply removing its relics from the public space:

what are we teaching the future generations though? That's it is (sic) okay to blot out pieces of history that we deem inappropriate? If it irks you, just get a bulldozer and remove it? It's almost as if we just slowly pulled away the hand of national reconciliation.

It's clear there are still remnants of bottled emotions from the past lingering around. A friend of mine said: "We were all preaching Madiba's spirit of forgiveness weeks ago. What we need to do is to find ways on how to deal with our skeletons from the past, and not running away from them. We need that statue."

³⁰ For observations with regard to such a view see Elke Zuern, "Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia," 507; Reinhart Kössler, "Facing a Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia?," 375.

³¹ The complexities of the *mnemoscape* is further documented by a variety of regional and local expressions of collective memory by particular communities especially among the Nama, Ovaherero and Damara, which do not reinforce the heroic narrative of the dominant party but are rooted in different times, places and encounters. See i.a. Reinhart Kössler, Henning Melber & Per Strand, *Development From Below: A Namibian Case Study* (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 2003); Reinhart Kössler, "Political Intervention and the Image of History: Communal Memory Events in Central and Southern Namibia," in *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, eds. André Du Pisani, Reinhart Kössler & William A. Lindeke (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, 2010): 371–402.

To make it seem as though removing the statue is actually for the good of the people, smacks of the hypocritical nature that stalks our leaders.³²

The Founding Father and the Party as Family

Sam Nujoma, as the political father figure of Namibian independence (mothers are conspicuously absent in Namibia's history), personifies in a particularly pronounced fashion the cultivation of the memories of the liberation war beyond these changes in infrastructure. He frequently enjoys posing as the military (rather than a diplomatic) figurehead of the struggle for liberation and prefers to display the virtues of an uncompromising man, with the emphasis firmly on man rather than human being. One testimony to this is the personified memory culture cast in stone and metal at the new Heroes Acre site. The cultivation of the militaristically reduced and highly personified liberation gospel of this monument displays the symbolic features of autocratic rule, and as such is rather revealing.³³ Just as enlightening is the content of Nujoma's autobiography, (dis-)qualified as

a true measure of the moral obtuseness that has become part and parcel of the Swapo project – an ironic index of events to which, over long years of struggle, the cruelty and callousness of the apartheid masters also entered into the souls of those who spent much of their lives fighting apartheid. The book can fairly be said to have raised the practice of “forgetting history” in Namibia to a new level.³⁴

³² Filemon Iiyambo, “The Horse, the Past and the Hypocrisy,” *The Namibian*, 7 January 2014. For a different view see Hugh Ellis, “Reiter no Reflection of White Namibians' Heritage,” *The Namibian*, 10 January 2014. He argues that the Reiterdenkmal represents an “acceptable” face of colonialism and hence deserves no place in the public sphere, since people should know “their real history, not a sanitised version.” It might be debatable, however, if the simple removal of a controversial relict of the past is not also a form of sanitisation. As argued by another columnist: “Surely, the prominent display of such symbols of our past should be continued, so that visual contact by live minded students and others open the explanatory avenues of what happened in the past – good or bad. Are we trying to hide something?” Chris Smith, “Chasing the Dots... Here Endeth the Kudu,” *The Namibian*, 15 January 2014.

³³ The massively oversized statue of the ‘Unknown Soldier,’ posing in front of a similarly gigantic phallic symbol (aka obelisk), does not leave any doubt about the intended connotation. Not only does it bear a striking resemblance to SWAPO's founding president, as if to underline the fact it also has a quote from Nujoma with his signature – subtlety is not as yet a feature of Namibia's post-colonial political culture.

³⁴ John S Saul and Colin Leys, “Lubango and After: ‘Forgotten History’ as Politics in Contemporary Namibia,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.1 (2003): 351.

Significantly, a quote from one of Nujoma's earlier speeches during the days of the struggle was chosen as the programmatic title (*Where Others Wavered*) and tells it all: "When the history of a free and independent Namibia is written one day, SWAPO will go down as having stood firm where others have wavered: that it sacrificed for the sacred cause of liberation where others have compromised."³⁵ The autobiography is treated as official history and was turned into a Hollywood film at a cost of N\$50-million from the public purse. As "a partial, highly selective account," it "wishes to try to stamp a certain version of the past on the nation's collective memory, to help shape the future" and "will bring no comfort to those concerned about the future of democracy in Namibia today."³⁶

The historiography of both the man and the movement reveals an interesting view on the mindset of the freedom fighters from their own perspective. It offers access to some reasoning and the underlying driving forces which otherwise might be not as clearly captured and understood. The impact of this patriotic history, which at the same time casts the "father of the nation" in a particular mold, should not be underestimated. Sam Nujoma is not only the personification of SWAPO, but also the mirror image and figure for identification and admiration of the dominant post-colonial political culture. His story is the story of SWAPO. And as the SWAPO version of Namibian history, it is at the same time part and parcel of the ideological core composing the official post-colonial Namibia.³⁷ As a dominant narrative, it is hardly counteracted by attempts to tell the story or stories from another perspective – such

³⁵ Quoted in SWAPO Department of Information and Publicity, *Information on SWAPO: An Historical Profile* (Lusaka 1978).

³⁶ Saunders, "Liberation and Democracy: A Critical Reading of Sam Nujoma's 'Autobiography'," 98.

³⁷ This official post-colonial discourse was prominently displayed on occasion of the 10th Independence Anniversary celebrated in March 2000, when two glossy volumes with the official (but edited) speeches of Namibia's President since independence as well as his State of the Nation addresses were published with a total volume amounting to more than 1200 pages; cf. Sam Nujoma, *Ten Years of Freedom, Peace & Prosperity. March 1990 – March 20, 1995: Speeches of the President of Namibia* (Windhoek: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2000); Sam Nujoma, *Ten Years of Freedom, Peace & Prosperity: March 21, 1996 – March 20, 2000: Speeches of the President of Namibia* (Windhoek: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2000); Sam Nujoma, *Ten Years of Freedom, Peace & Prosperity. 1990 – 1999 State of the Nation* (Windhoek: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2000). Nujoma's exit from office was honoured by another compilation, claiming without any modesty to offer a collection of the President's wisdom by means of selected quotes: Matthew Gowaseb, ed., *The Quotable Sam Nujoma: Wisdom of Namibia's First President* (Windhoek: Legacy, 2005).

as that, for example, particularly based on the exile experiences by those who were victims of the SWAPO leadership's paranoia and subsequent terror in the Angolan and Zambian camps. These voices are brushed aside as the views of misguided elements, whose memories have no place in Namibian national history.

Nujoma personifies the resilience and perseverance of the struggle mentality. He managed to survive all internal power struggles taking place in SWAPO and hence showed his qualities as a leader able to remain in charge. An exclusive interview with President Nujoma published in a widely read African monthly journal towards the end of his three terms in office as Head of State served as ample evidence in confirmation of the particular liberation perspective cultivated further during the execution of statesmanship, thereby adding to the creation of the dominant heroic narrative in post-colonial Namibia. Some of the passages represent his official version of liberation history and his legacy to younger generations. When asked, with reference to a statement in his autobiography, why he had sent all three of his sons into battle, his only answer was: "The struggle was supposed to be fought by all Namibians." When the interviewer returned to this issue and re-iterated surprise at Nujoma's decision, asking what the situation would have been had they all been killed in that battle, Nujoma refused to be drawn into an emotive reply and answered: "Well, but the liberation of our country was supposed to be done by all Namibians irrespective of birth."³⁸

The tendency towards glorification of the history of liberation warfare is an obvious symptom in Namibian society today. It plays a significant role in the current symbolism and rituals of the post-colonial political culture. Furthermore, it leaves no room for true mourning. This is once again well illustrated in typical fashion in the Nujoma interview on his published autobiography. The interviewer refers to the traumatic Cassinga massacre of 4 May 1978, the mass killing of Namibian refugees (mainly women and children) by the South African army, which was attacking one of the SWAPO camps in southern Angola, as "a very emotional event." In response, after a short explanatory note on the background of the camp, Nujoma offers a vivid description of the events on the ground:

³⁸ Baffour Ankomah, "Interview with Sam Nujoma," *New African* ("Namibia Special Report"), 37.423 (2003): VIII. Hoffe das geht so? It is by the way questionable if the statement that all three sons of Nujoma were sent to the front immediately after they had left Namibia to join their father in exile is accurate. Suffice to say that at least the impression that this had been the case was promoted and confirmed in the particularly unemotional way documented above.

On 4 May 1978, the Boers sent a wave of Buccaneer aircrafts over Cassinga. The first bombs they dropped were filled with poisoned gas, biological weapons, that destroyed the oxygen in the air and made our people collapse. The Boers then sent a second wave of Mirage jetfighters to strafe the camp and set it ablaze. They then sent yet a third wave of helicopters that dropped paratroopers into the camp. They proceeded to shoot and bayonet our people who had not already died from the bombing. As you correctly stated, they killed more than 1,000 and injured many more. They even took some of our people away.³⁹

This was how his answer ended. Not a single word was added. But the interviewer returns to the issue and asks: “When something like this happened during the struggle, how did you feel? Did you cry? Have you ever cried?” Nujoma’s full response to this enquiry (and therefore the one presumably authorised by his office) in the glossy magazine was as follows:

Well, we were then in New York negotiating with the apartheid regime and the Western Contact Group made up of Canada and Germany (as non-members of the Security Council) and France, Britain and the US (as members). So we just walked out of the discussion and returned to Africa. We re-organised ourselves and intensified the armed struggle.⁴⁰

Once again, no word was expended to offer any emotive feelings. It was as if the struggle was a technical matter which involved no human beings and was executed by inanimate dummies. The rhetoric of liberation, as this example shows, can be rather invasive. It has its framework set in the paradigm of victory and/or defeat, and leaves no room for empathy, not to mention grief and tears. Such an attitude was maybe even necessary to stand any chance of survival and ultimately become successful in ‘the struggle against the Boers.’ It might also offer some insight into the process of how victims, as liberators, might turn into perpetrators when in control and wielding power. The so-called ex-detainees, survivors among the thousands who have suffered from human rights abuse as alleged spies in the camps of SWAPO in exile since the 1970s, are among those who are able to share insight on this hitherto unresolved issue.⁴¹

³⁹ “Namibia Special Report,” IX.

⁴⁰ “Namibia Special Report,” IX.

⁴¹ For a summary of their ordeal and current fight for rehabilitation cf. Godwin Kornes, *Negotiating ‘Silent Reconciliation’: The Long Struggle for Transitional Justice in Namibia* (Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg University, 2013); Justine Hunter, “Dealing with the Past in Namibia: Getting the Balance Right between Justice and Sustainable Peace?” in *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, eds. André Du Pisani,

Nujoma's mind-set is not an accident, nor is he the victim of an obsessive, misguided personality. His understanding and particular competence is a result of the socialization process within an armed struggle relying on underground practices, guided by the utmost loyalty towards the leadership of an organization, entrusted with the absolute right to take decisions. The liberation organization represented a distinct notion of family. There was a general suppression of 'the personal' in favor of 'the collective.' Individual judgment (and thereby autonomy) was substituted by a collective decision from the leadership. Such "warrior culture, the militarist tradition entailed not only heroic acts but also many cases of abuse and power."⁴² This form of applied patriotic history, which defiantly refuses to acknowledge any meaningful and legitimate opposition, equates the national liberation movement with the nation emerging. It is an exclusive, all-embracing concept,

a language of unity and a language that *tends to represent the unified people as embodied in the liberation movement organisation and then equates them with the people as a whole.* [...] In a sense the liberation movement depicts itself as a proto-state. This notion derives from a framework of ideas in which the seizure of the state was represented as the central issue of the day.⁴³

The situational application of militant rhetoric as a tool for inclusion or exclusion in terms of post-colonial national identity discloses a decidedly exclusivist monopoly on being the one and only liberator. The Heroes Day celebration in Omgulumbashe on 26 August 2013 underlined the continuity of the heroic (party) narrative, when in honour of the Founding Father another gigantic statue of him was unveiled. Sam Nujoma attended the ceremony in a combat suit. In his acceptance speech he stated:

Self-definition is a self-empowering mechanism that goes a long way in forging a common identity in any nation. Therefore, in naming historic places and monuments after our own heroes and heroines, we assert who we are and a nation that honours its citizens, honours itself.⁴⁴

Reinhart Kössler & William A. Lindeke (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, 2010): 403–33.

⁴² Raymond Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976: A Social and Historical Study* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008): 119.

⁴³ Raymond Suttner, "Talking to the Ancestors: National Heritage, the Freedom Charter and Nation-building in South Africa in 2005," *Development Southern Africa* 23.1 (2006): 24 (original emphasis).

⁴⁴ Sam Nujoma, *Acceptance Speech by His Excellency Dr Sam Nujoma, Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Father of the Namibian Nation, on the Occasion of the*

Like Sam Nujoma, many in the SWAPO leadership and its rank and file expect unconditional loyalty also by others to a kind of struggle which remains an ever-lasting act of patriotism and service. In such a mind-set there is no space for retirement. One can leave office but will remain a leader with responsibilities. It might well be that such first generation anti-colonialists were necessary, even though they at the same time reflect the limits to liberation and the price at which national sovereignty came to many among the people. Their behaviour shows that formal self-determination in a sovereign state does not equate individual liberty and freedom. They sacrificed their humanity also for others – but expected others to sacrifice theirs, too.

Exploring the Limits to Liberation

Until Namibian Independence, analyses of the politically organized liberation struggle were highly polarized and either unashamedly propagating a South African ideology and perspective, or uncritically taking sides with the anticolonial movement as the legitimate alternative to the oppressive regime. This antagonistic climate made it difficult, if not impossible, to present any (self-)critical reflections in solidarity with the struggle. Analyses by scholars with a credible track record of practiced solidarity with the anti-colonial struggles emerged only a few years into Independence. These presented a sobering picture of the national liberation movement as an organisation with a limited emancipatory potential, characterised by internal power struggles.⁴⁵ Gendered perspectives gradually also displayed the male dominance and the degree of control over and sexual exploitation of women in exile.⁴⁶

Unveiling of a Statue at the National Heritage Site at Omugulgwombashe on Heroes Day, 26 August 2013, Omugulgwombashe, Omusati Region. Windhoek: Sam Nujoma Foundation, 3.

⁴⁵ Colin Leys and John Saul, eds., *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-edged Sword* (London: James Currey and Athens and Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995); Lauren Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means* (Basel: P. Schlettwein, 1998; 2nd edition 2000).

⁴⁶ Heike Becker, *Namibian Women's Movement 1980 to 1992: From Anti-colonial Resistance to Reconstruction* (Frankfurt/Main: IKO, 1995) shows how the nucleus of an independent women's movement was hijacked and forced into the ranks of the anti-colonial liberation organization; Martha Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014) adds an important perspective hitherto taboo by recording the experiences and views of women living in the exile camps.

One of the most contested taboos was disclosed with the publication of the personal accounts and testimony of a German Lutheran Pastor tasked to cater also for the needs of Namibians in Zambia.⁴⁷ His revelations of the treatment of suspected spies within the ranks of SWAPO in exile confirmed what had been known but less visibly and openly discussed. Further testimonies to these unresolved matters were subsequently documented in volumes providing space for the articulation of local voices,⁴⁸ in books by those directly involved⁴⁹ and critical observers.⁵⁰ This issue was also a subject of intense soul searching in a study on the role of the Namibian churches since transition.⁵¹ The maybe most forceful emotional expression of the moral and ethical dimensions of this tragic episode so far has been a documentary film.⁵²

With national sovereignty, a number of texts engaging with social realities before, during and after the Independence process were published.⁵³ While a few more personal life stories

⁴⁷ Siegfried Groth, *Namibia: The Wall of Silence* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995).

⁴⁸ Barbara Becker, *Speaking Out: Namibians Share Their Perspectives on Independence* (Windhoek: Out of Africa, 2005); Colin Leys and Susan Brown, *Histories of Namibia: Living Through the Liberation Struggle – Life Histories Told to Colin Leys and Susan Brown* (London: The Merlin Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ Keshii Pelao Nathanael, *A Journey to Exile: The Story of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (Aberystwyth: Sosiumi Press, 2002); Samson Ndeikwila, *The Agony of Truth* (Windhoek: Kuiseb, 2014); Hans Beukes, *Long Road to Liberation: An Exiled Namibian Activist's Perspective* (Johannesburg: Porcupine Press, 2014); Oiva Angula, *SWAPO Captive: A Comrade's Experience of Betrayal and Torture* (Cape Town: Zebra Press 2018). For a detailed engagement with the account by Hans Beukes see: André Du Pisani, "Thinking and Writing Liberation Politics – A Review Article of: Hans Beukes, *Long Road to Liberation. An Exiled Namibian Activist's Perspective*," *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 23 (2018): 101–23.

⁵⁰ Paul Trewhela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2009); Christian A. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁵¹ Gerhard Töttemeyer, *Church and State in Namibia: The Politics of Reconciliation* (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, 2010).

⁵² *From Namibia With Love* was released in 2011 by Laura Meriläinen. It tells the moving story of Salatiel and Anita Ailonga, a Namibian-Finnish couple which while in exile took sides with Namibians intimidated and harassed by SWAPO.

⁵³ Notably Joseph Diescho, *Troubled Waters: A Novel* (Windhoek: Gamsberg MacMillan, 1993). See also the overview by Bruno Arich-Gerz, "Postcolonial English Language Prose from and about Namibia: A Survey of Novels from 1993 to the Present," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 7 (2014): 7–28.

recalling the struggle days before Independence appeared,⁵⁴ personal memories and reflections on political and social changes became more diversified⁵⁵ – especially in accounts guided by a female perspective.⁵⁶ Grand narratives of patriotic history and introspection guided by self-glorification gradually faded away, stressing individual human relations more than anything else.⁵⁷ New forms of recorded and published oral history also provide access to testimonies that afford insights into processes of social and political transition, and transformation.⁵⁸ Such recorded evidence provides ample opportunity for critical interpretations, transcending patriotic history into narratives closer to Namibian realities.

Other novels offer a gendered perspective which engages with forms of structural as well as individual physical violence.⁵⁹ Violence is a recurrent issue provoking literary engagement

⁵⁴ For example Marcus Shivute, *Go and Come Back Home: A Namibian's Journey Into Exile and Back* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1997); for more details on this literature see the article by Mbongeni Zikhethle Malaba in this issue.

⁵⁵ Jackson Kaujeua, *Tears Over the Deserts* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1994).

⁵⁶ Ellen Namhila, *The Price of Freedom* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997), was among the first to set such an example, most prominently followed by Libertine Amathila, *Making a Difference* (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2012) and more recently Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant* (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2016). See on this genre Kelly Jo Fulkerson-Dikuua, "Conceptualising National Transition: Namibian Women's Autobiographies about the Liberation Struggle," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2018): 57–69; Netta Kornberg, "Power at the Margins: Black Female Agency in Two Namibian Novels," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2018): 241–61; on Amulungu's account see Julia Rensing, "The Politics of 'Othering' in Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu's *Taming My Elephant*," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 24 (2018): 33–58.

⁵⁷ Somewhat different in perspective and experiences, the story of Lucia Engombe, *Child No. 95 – My German-African Odyssey* (Windhoek: Hess, 2014; German original 2004) belongs to this category, too. On the group widely referred to as "ex-GDR kids", to which she belongs, see the article by Bruno Arich-Gerz in this issue, as well as Jason Owen & Sarala Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten Child of Namibia: An Analysis of Misheke Matongo's autobiography," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2018): 90–111.

⁵⁸ Ellen Namhila, *Kaxumba kaNdola: Man and Myth – The Biography of a Barefoot Soldier* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005).

⁵⁹ Kaleni Hiyalwa, *Meekulu's Children* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 2000); and Neshani Andreas, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001; also Harare: Weaver Press, 2004). In particular the novel by the late Neshani Andreas (1964-2011), published like John Ya-Otto's book in the renowned *African Writers Series*, has been a widely acclaimed landmark, resulting in international recognition. See on both novels the article by Renzo Baas in this issue.

guided by gendered awareness in other forms, which gives this sad phenomenon a prominent place in response to a social anomie characterizing Namibian realities.⁶⁰ Other forms of indirect documentary evidence through collections of literary and poetic narratives show the affinity of Namibians to express their emotions and awareness through short stories⁶¹ and poetry.⁶² In particular, articulations through poetry feature prominently and often in expressions taking vanguard forms, such as performance poetry and the Spoken Word initiatives.⁶³ They offered exchanges and inspiration resulting in more publications.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ See among others Siballi E I Kgobetsi, ed., *Poets Against War, Violence and Nuclear Weapons (PAWN): An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2000); Victoria T Hasheela & Tumweneni M Nghaamwa, *Shower of Voices* (Windhoek: Macmillan Education, 2009). For an overview on the new poetry see Volker Winterfeldt “In search of questions – an introduction,” in: Keamogetsi J. Molapong, Christi Warner & Volker Winterfeldt eds., *In Search of Questions: A collection of New Namibian Poems* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005): 15–29. For contemporary Namibian poetry and prose see Helen Vale & Volker Winterfeldt, “Encodings of Society in Namibian literature,” *Journal of Namibian Studies* 9 (2011): 85–108; Helen Vale, “Namibian poetry in English 1976 – 2006: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow – Unearthing the Past, Critiquing the Present and Envisioning the Future,” *Nawa: Journal of Language and Communication* 2.2 (2008): 27–57.

⁶¹ D Jasper Utey, *All Sorts and Other Stories* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1991); Sister Namibia Collective, ed., *A New Initiation Song: Writings by Women in Namibia* (Windhoek: Sister Namibia Collective, 1994); Dorian Haarhoff, ed., *Personal Memories: Namibian Texts in Process* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1996; reprint 2003); Margie Orford and Nepeti Nicanor, eds., *Coming on Strong: Writing by Namibian Women* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1996).

⁶² Namibia Young Writers Club, *The Innermost Explosion. An Anthology of Poetry by Students at the Augustineum Secondary School* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1993); Dorian Haarhoff, ed., *The Inner Eye: Namibian Poetry in Process* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1997).

⁶³ Promoted most prominently by Kitso Poets, *New Namibian Poetry and Short Fiction* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1998); Ama Poets, and PAWN (Poets Against War, Violence and Nuclear Weapons). See also the article by Hugh Ellis in this issue as well as Hugh Ellis & Don Stevenson “Who Speaks at Spoken Word? Performance Poetry in Namibia,” in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2018): 136–43; Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong (interviewed by Helen Vale), “Namibian Poetry Since Independence: A Poet’s Perspective,” in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, ed Sarala Krishnamurthy & Helen Vale (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2018): 164–71; Mbongeni Malaba, “Exile and Return in Kavevangua Kahengua’s *Dreams*,” in *Engaging With Literature of Commitment. Volume 1: Africa and the World*, eds Gordon Collier, Marc Delrez, Anne Fuchs & Bénédicte Ledent (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 141-151; Mbongeni Malaba, “Literature and Social Justice: Poetic Voices and the Quest for a Just Society in Namibia,” *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies* 32.1 (2015): 54-69; and the MA Thesis by Mercy Chiruvo Mushonga,

Performances provide mainly the younger generation a means to come to terms with new social realities. These are often improvised and impromptu on stage and lack printed documentation.

Speaking Truth to Power

As shown, more recent contributions responding to and analyzing Namibian social and political realities summarize and critically reflect on developments since Independence beyond the praise songs of a patriotic history that romanticizes and idolizes the fight for freedom. In doing so, they challenge parts of the dominant narrative of the liberation movement – not only through scholarly lenses but even more so through the literary arts. While SWAPO's dominant narrative suggests that the struggle for independence achieved meaningful change for all people in most spheres of life, more sobering assessments present a more nuanced, if not a different, perspective. It is noteworthy in this context, that to some extent the logistical problems facing the pre-Independence literature in support of the liberation struggle now, albeit to a lesser extent, confront the post-Independence critical analyses, too, namely the lack of a supporting environment and, related to this, few suitable opportunities to publish at home.

Namibian authors, especially scholars willing to embark on a critical examination of post-colonial realities, remain confronted with the challenge of finding appropriate forums to voice their concerns. Their role is as relevant as in any other given society, and the responses from the sphere of politics testify to the fact that they are considered as a force to be taken seriously. The insults hurled at some of them for their civic courage to publicly question progress, combined with a refusal to accept them as a necessary, integral, part of a vibrant civil society, testifies to a deep-rooted suspicion towards scholarly motivated interventions.

Investigating the Portrayal of Social Issues in Namibian Post-Independence Poetry Written in English (Windhoek: University of Namibia, 2018).

⁶⁴ Keamoetsi J. Molapong, Christi Warner & Volker Winterfeldt, eds., *In Search of Questions: A Collection of New Namibian Poems* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005); Keamoetsi J. Molapong & C Barr, *Come Talk Your Heart* (Windhoek: New Namibian Books, 2005); Luna Fhulufhedzani Ramphaga, *Dance Mama – A Collection of Poems* (Windhoek: Township Productions, 2009); Habaitapeli Hendricks Macaba, *A Hellowish: A Collection of Poems in English* (Windhoek: Township Productions, 2009); Hugh Ellis, *From Hakahana* (Windhoek: Wordweaver, 2012); Keamoetsi J. Molapong, *The Scars on my Skin* (Windhoek: Township Productions, 2014).

Overtly harsh responses to criticism by some policy makers, party activists and higher-ranking civil servants border on anti-intellectualism and dismiss alternative discourses as unpatriotic. Marginalising and ridiculing those who articulate dissenting views confirms a narrow-mindedness anchored in the arrogance of power, void of any ability for self-critical reflections. But this does not silence those who are determined to contribute to better governance by voicing their frustration.

Nor does it eliminate agency of those who, as victims in the process of the Independence war, became victims of their own organization. Among them is the exile voice of Edward Imasiku Ndopu. As a young journalist and poet he ended in the notorious Southern Angolan dungeons in which SWAPO kept thousands of its members in exile accused of being traitors. Most of them never returned to Namibia. Ndopu was among the survivors, but returned silenced and broken. Leaving after a decade back home to Canada, he for many years fought the demons haunting him and finally regained even his ability to turn feelings into poetic words. While the poems now published in his new country of residence often testify to his desperation and hopelessness, they also signal his desire to return to life.⁶⁵ Bemoaning “Africa’s Lost Dance,” he asks:

Is it possible to dance once again
to those songs in our lives
and be able to take
a completely different direction
to the one that has made us
who we are

Given the painful, sobering experiences of having been exposed to the violence of those victimizing others in the name of liberation (and thereby betraying the true meaning of it), Ndopu will hardly be able again to toy-toy as a dance of claiming emancipation from the colonizers. He has been through too much to regain a naïve conviction that pseudo-revolutionary jargon resembles true emancipation. But yet, with this anthology, Ndopu at the same time represents and personifies the freedom there is: The freedom from fear; the freedom to criticize; the freedom to regain voice; the freedom to mourn; the freedom to cry; the freedom to accuse. And, most importantly, the freedom to deny defeat. The freedom of

⁶⁵ Edward Imasiku Ndopu, *All of Africa Belongs to Me: Selected Poems* (Montreal: Taba Yensu Press, 2017).

continued living against all odds, despite all agony and bitterness, and finally to practice the freedom of choice by venturing into a new beginning.

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