

**THE LIBERATION NARRATIVE AND THE POST-
RETURN LIFE STORIES OF NAMIBIAN FORMER
EXILES**

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1 Introduction: version and ‘subversion’ of lives and history

‘But all of them have the same story.’ This was the response of an Ondangwa Development Brigade Centre¹ officer when I told him that I was interested in the life stories of former exiles with diverse backgrounds. It is easy to arrive at such a position. The culmination of the historical process that is often called the Namibian liberation struggle — in the Constituent Assembly elections in late 1989 and in the proclamation of an independent Republic in March 1990 — coincided with the return of most of those Namibians who had gone into exile over three decades. In exile, the personal trajectories of the exiles² were submerged within the broad historical trajectory of the ‘liberation struggle’ in many ways. An overwhelming majority of them lived under the wing of Swapo,³ in its civilian settlements in Angola and Zambia, at the military front, or in various educational institutions around the globe. And indeed, as the development brigade officer argued, ‘the struggle’ was to have profound significance in what kind of stories about their life the exiles would tell. This can be seen easily by reading John’s and Anna’s initial narratives.⁴ In these stories, the narrated life is clearly tied together with the trajectory of national liberation.

However, life stories are hardly direct reflections of their narrators’ lived past. If there really is a ‘same story’ in how (personal) pasts are narrated, it should be understood as a

¹ The Development Brigade project was initiated in 1991 with the stated aim of providing training in agriculture and construction to ex-combatants. According to Preston (1997: 464-466), its practical purpose was rather to contain veteran discontent.

² The terminology of displacement is a contested terrain, where any term carries particular connotations. Namibians who left their homeland before Namibia’s independence were formally recognized as ‘refugees’ and some of them used this term on occasions in the interviews. However, it was common, especially by those who adhered to a militant commitment to ‘liberation struggle’, to refer to themselves as ‘freedom fighters’ and reject the term ‘refugee’, apparently because of the image of a passive object of intervention associated with it. I have chosen to use the term ‘exile’, which is at least somewhat more neutral than ‘freedom fighter’ or ‘refugee’. I simply take it to mean those Namibians who left their country before independence because of unfavourable political conditions. Liisa Malkki (1995a and 1995b) provides an instructive analysis of the connotations of the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘exile’.

³ The movement’s full name was originally South West Africa People’s Organization, of which Swapo is the shortened form. The movement has been commonly referred to both as SWAPO and as Swapo. I will use the form Swapo throughout this study.

⁴ Appendix 1: pp. 1-6, lines 1-17, 72-124, 141-188, 205-225, 259-260, 262-268, 301-303 and 319-321; pp. 9-20, lines 1-12, 15, 46-60, 74-83, 96, 115-135, 137-139, 144-168, 176-193, 196-220, 231-285, 293-362, 375, 382-386, 391-394, 398-416, 418-427, 465-466, 516-531, 541-544, 552, 591-592, 609-612, 618, 622, 626-629 and 683.

By ‘initial narrative’, I refer to the original, uninterrupted life story which the narrator produced as the first thing in an interview. In appendix 1, these parts appear in bold type and in the order they were presented. I will also speak of ‘subsequent narrative’ or ‘subsequent presentation’, by which I mean those parts of a story that were produced after the initial narrative, in response to my questions. In appendix 1, these parts appear in normal type.

discourse, that is, as a socially constructed and reconstructed practice. As I will demonstrate in the course of this study, the historical process of the ‘liberation struggle’ did not simply imprint itself on the consciousness of individual exiles. Rather, the relation of the two is a result of both intended and unintended production and reproduction, up to the present, of specific social practices and a ‘grand narrative’ of liberation. I will argue that this ‘liberation narrative’ came to be seen as the proper context for understanding and telling one’s personal history. Indeed, to claim that all the former exiles have ‘the same story’ is a fitting illustration of its dominance. Understanding it as a socially constructed discourse and observing its dominance as a narrative resource that is appropriated for understanding and representing personal histories, leads one to ask how and why does it gain this dominance. What are its historical origins and the sources of its persuasiveness in the present?

For persuade it must. When one reads more former exile stories, one is led to question the degree to which the former exiles really tell ‘the same story’. One notes not only an apparent convergence with the ‘grand narrative’ of liberation, but also that in many respects the stories are not similar. Read, in addition to John’s and Anna’s stories, also the initial narratives of Martha, Matthew and Maria.⁵ To point out just a few things, Martha and Matthew also tell stories of becoming politicized and participating in the liberation struggle, and subsume individual subjectivity into the collective one at many points. However, Matthew deviates from this narrative completely with his detention, an incident that turns out to occupy the centre stage in his story. Moreover, the narratives differ in form. Martha’s narrative is considerably shorter and less detailed than the others and contains very little explanation and evaluation about the meaning of events it depicts. In contrast to all the above, Maria’s story avoids commitment to the liberation struggle and concentrates on her hardships in the military and on her individual advancement in education.

Indeed, even if the liberation narrative is a dominant discourse, it may not be unitary and incontestable. Rather, its limits are tested by a multiplicity of voices on three levels.⁶ First,

⁵ Appendix 1: p. 22, lines 1-11; pp. 29-36 and 38, lines 17-30, 36-41, 98, 119-122, 128-142, 154-162, 189-190, 199-209, 234-235, 249-255, 296-345, 401, 403-409, 412-414, 417-424, 526-532 and 538-546; pp. 40 and 43-44, lines 1, 4-5, 36-37, 173, 175-176, 180-182, 210 and 231-248.

⁶ An instructive analogy can be drawn from the literature on Zimbabwe’s liberation war, which underwent a transition from approaches that stressed large-scale popular support (Ranger 1985; Lan 1985) to approaches that focus on various interests and conflicts among ‘the people’ (Kriger 1992; Maxwell 1993; see also Werbner 1991). Partly, these differences seem to result from the choices of where and among whom the research has been undertaken. However, and more importantly, I believe that the same ‘informants’ may produce evidence both for the ‘shared values’ or ‘shared ideology’ thesis and for the ‘conflicting interests’

the liberation narrative is challenged by stories that are narrated in direct opposition or with critical distance and indifference to it. The Swapo dissidents' stories are the most obvious example of such alternative forms of public remembering. They also highlight what is not remembered or narrated in the dominant version. Second, one may ask to what extent the liberation narrative is one discourse. Does it dictate the narration of those stories that apparently adopt it as their framework or are there multiple forms of constituting 'liberationism'? Third, what is told in a life story is related to its 'official' character. It is one form of narrating 'the self' and history in a field of symbolically mediated practices, of other discourses. What are the limits and the role and purpose of such narrativizations in relation to what is 'said' in other forms of discourse?⁷ In this context, the words of the Development Brigade officer acquire new meaning. At the time when I visited the centre, the brigade institution was under heavy general criticism and most of the inmates had been sent home for an indeterminate period. In addition, members of that particular brigade had been involved in a widely publicized incident of violence just a few months before. Apparently the officer was reluctant to let me discuss freely with the members of the brigade, possibly fearing that the canon would not hold, that the 'same story' would be revealed as a specific, historically and socially constructed form of narrating history that was challenged by post-independence conditions.

The forces that constitute and challenge the liberation narrative in the stories of the former exiles are the subject matter of this study. Primarily, I will describe the main forms of life-narration in the former exile stories through their structural characteristics, as combinations of convergence with and divergence from the liberation narrative. Secondly, I will seek the processes from which such combinations arise.

I will study the relation of the main characteristics of the stories to various forms of self-representation and to different versions of the 'popular history' of 'the struggle', that is, to how the historical and social contexts of one's life are portrayed. This means that I will read the stories simultaneously as narratives about individual trajectories and as a body of historical narration in comparison to Swapo historiography and to scholarly and critical writings about Namibian modern history. I will assume that in addition to historical

thesis, depending, firstly, on the situation and, secondly, on how one's interest and focus guides the reading of the material.

⁷ Cf. the distinctions Werbner (1998b) draws between privileged 'appropriations' and 'counter-appropriations' of the past and between 'immediate memory' and 'anti-memory' – the structured, social forms of forgetting – in 'postcolonial' Zimbabwe.

circumstances, two other obvious sources go into their construction: narrative genres and the immediate social and interactional context of narration.

Before analyzing the stories, I will outline the contexts of their production and interpretation, as these are indispensable for understanding the stories properly. Chapter 2 deals with the various stages through which this study was produced, including the post-independence social context where the former exiles lived, the conditions of my interaction and interviews with them, and the development of my interests and interpretations from research plan through field practice to later readings of ‘the material’ produced in the field. I will also provide a theoretical introduction, charting alternative ways of reading life stories, and introducing my own view. In short, I will argue for taking life story as a *narrative representation* of identity and, at the same time, *formative* of that identity. It is not a direct reflection (whatever that might be) of the life it supposedly tells about but a form of *practice* that is directed by various forms of *convention* and *circumstance* as well as by *intentionality*. As such, it is a profoundly *social activity*. I will clarify what I mean by these arguments that form the basis for reading the stories in the course of the study. Chapter 3 will deal with the wider historical context of the production of the life stories. The ‘facts’ and ‘events’ mentioned in them do not emerge in a self-contained universe but only in relation to what academic historiography has long called a ‘bias’, that is, an interpretive frame, a discourse on social and political identities. Therefore, it is necessary to chart what narratives of recent Namibian history resonate in the background of the ostensibly personal life story narratives. I will focus particularly on the nationalist historiography produced by Swapo and its allies during the ‘liberation struggle’ and on the autobiographical writings produced as a part of this effort. I will argue that this literature (as well as other forms of representation) constitutes a single narrative representation of collective (and individual) subjectivity, a ‘liberation narrative’, that grows from the same root with the personal narratives of former exiles and provides a model for them.

After having outlined the above contexts, I will move on to analyzing the life stories themselves, reading them for their relation to the ‘liberation narrative’ and suggesting interpretations of the various narrative ‘strategies’ that I introduce. In the first part of this analysis, in chapter 4, I will introduce the main variants of liberationist stories through analyzing whole individual stories for their structural characteristics. I distinguish the variants according to the form of their plotting and subject positions. In the second part, in chapter 5, I will look at the appearance of the liberation narrative from another angle, charting how it emerges as a popular history of ‘the struggle’, as a both concrete and

narrative journey, from the stories treated as a single body of material. Simultaneously, I will also attempt to trace some of the historical circumstances that supported its adoption as the narrators' favoured narrative framework. In the third part, in chapter 6, I will discuss the alternative emplotments that are either narrated in direct opposition to the liberation narrative (the dissidents) or deny it by establishing a critical distance or indifference to its heroic collectivism (the deniers).

2 From the field to text

2.1 Fieldwork

2.1.1 To the field

My fieldwork took place between early December 1992 and early March 1993. Before this, I had visited Namibia for a month in July 1992. Although the main reason of the first trip was not connected to the present study, I already had ideas about what I was interested in and thus the visit greatly contributed as a preparation to the actual fieldwork. I also started the interviews already in Finland before returning to Namibia. Discussions with one of the Namibian students in Finland helped me at the time when I was formulating my research interests. He was one of the first people I interviewed and he also helped me considerably in establishing contacts with other former exiles, both in Finland and later in Namibia. I also got names from Finnish Namibianists.

Finding interviewees turned out to be easy once I got started. Most of the people whom I contacted were willing to meet and discuss with me and be interviewed and they quite readily gave me further names to contact. Thus, I just networked from one person to another. Some not only agreed to be interviewed but were pleased at my interest and clearly considered that their stories were worth sharing with others.⁸

Originally I had an idea of getting to know the people first, and not starting the interviews immediately. This was in the hope of not giving the impression that I was only interested in interviewing them and thereby closing the doors from informal contacts. I felt that these contacts would have an influence on what kind of stories would be produced in our interviews and would provide insights into the relations of the stories to other discourses of history and society and to lived practice.

However, if it was easy to get in contact with the people initially, it was considerably less easy to have informal contacts with them. They did not constitute a classical anthropological field setting in the sense of living together in one particular place where they could be observed 'from the door of the tent'. Rather, they were dispersed around the country, though mostly in Ovamboland and Windhoek. These two locations were where I

⁸ I will discuss this more in chapter 4.1.

conducted my fieldwork. Most of the time was spent in Windhoek, apart from a few days visit to Ovamboland in December and a one-week interviewing trip there in February.

This situation is not uncommon today. The 'field' has been fragmented conceptually, and in many cases also concretely. Conceptually, this is related to how the object of anthropological study is constructed. Concretely, we face the 'changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity' (Appadurai 1991: 191). For these reasons, it is not tenable to assume the object of study to be a clearly demarcated 'culture' that would cover all the various aspects of its members lives. One cannot assume that the 'political', 'economic' and 'social' relations, or the various moral discourses and ontological assumptions, neatly converge to form a shared totality that can be called a 'culture'. The former exiles of this study form a shared 'culture' only in certain respects. Their lived practice and the cultural resources that they use in it vary in important ways.

However untenable the assumption of an unfragmented and clearly bounded 'field' may be, the situation bothered me. As surely as there are no clearly demarcated cultures to be 'observed', it is also untenable to conclude that all cultural meaning is equally fluid. People still act in specific historical circumstances. The abovementioned relations and discourses exist, and understanding them is necessary if one wishes to understand the people whom he or she studies. The fact that the ways in which they converge in the lives of these people cannot be taken as a given does not dissolve but reinforces the importance of understanding them, as it becomes a part of the study to find out whether the assumed relations and discourses really are the ones that are important and in which ways.

Therefore, I felt that I was missing out on many important things if I did not get to socialize with the former exiles also informally. Conducting interviews, however, was what the people I contacted expected me to do. If someone is doing research, of course he or she will interview, seemed to be the reasoning. Fortunately, there were some things that helped me in getting in touch with the life of former exiles, and the black urbanites more generally. The most important of these was that I lived with a local middle class family. Bob, my host, had not left Namibia as an exile but he had spent several years in Great Britain as a student. He was employed in a relatively high position in the civil service. His wife, Julia, was a nurse. Socially, they shared a lot with the elite stratum of the former exiles, and knew a lot of them. When I was not out in the evenings, I often discussed with the family about the events of the day, my studies or Bob's work, family-life and our personal histories, and Namibian social and political issues (often compared to Britain and Finland). The incidents

of the colonial time, liberation struggle and the meaning of independence, as well as the present ‘hot’ topics, such as the relations between the old and new civil service or crime — especially after someone had attempted to rob me — cropped up with them as with many other people. Although they knew many former exiles, and even introduced me to some of them, I did not really get to spend time with the latter through them. We did not go out together, apart from a couple of times when I happened to meet Bob in town. With a small kid, and both of them working, they did not go out much, and when they did, I did not want to intrude. However, even what happened at home helped me a lot in forming a picture about the way of life of the Namibian educated, urban middle class.

Another context to intermingle with the former exiles was provided when my Namibian friend who studied in Finland visited Namibia during my field work. I went out a few times with him and his friends. I also had the opportunity to enjoy their hospitality at a wedding in Ovamboland, a big event that lasted for three days. These occasions provided me with many insights concerning the ‘returnees’ relations with the ‘remainers’ and with each other. A further opportunity to socialize with the former exiles arose as I befriended a Finnish man who had worked in Swapo’s camps in Angola during the 1980s. Many of his friends and ‘family’ were former exiles and on occasions we would sit and spend the evening together chatting the time away. He also told valuable stories about life in Swapo’s camps in Angola.

Mostly, the situations where I informally met the former exiles were of the type of happening to meet them, either alone or in bigger groups, in cafes and bars and chatting there for a while. This happened quite frequently. Sometimes I also met them as they visited my hosts; sometimes I visited their homes informally, without interviewing them; and sometimes I happened to meet and discuss with friends of my interviewees before or after my interviews. Even though I was not in constant contact with the ‘returnees’, the abovementioned occasions were informative. However, my participation and understanding of these situations was hindered by my incompetence in the Oshiwambo language. When I discussed with only one or two people this was not a problem as we could speak English. However, in a bigger company the people tended to speak Oshiwambo and I was left out of the discussion. These would have been the most interesting situations in comparison to the interviews, because the people were not addressing me directly but each other. A similar problem of language emerged in my contacts with those rank and file returnees who could not speak English.

However, most of my time was taken up simply by contacting the people, meeting and interviewing them, listening to the tapes and writing notes. I strove to put down the details of daily events, both in the interview context and otherwise. Additionally, I photographed the places and people I met, but not systematically. The first couple of weeks went by mostly in acquainting myself with the setting and establishing the initial contacts. Thereafter I met more people and my schedule got tighter all the time up to the day I left.

2.1.2 The life of the former exiles

The number of Namibians who returned from exile during Namibia's transition to independence or thereafter has been estimated at 'some 50 000' (Preston 1997: 454) or 'just over 50 000' (Saul and Leys 1995a: 63-64).⁹ Of them, approximately one-third had acquired education or skills training (Preston 1997: 457), while the rest had mostly served in the PLAN or lived in Swapo's civilian settlements in Angola and Zambia. After their return, a dividing line was soon drawn between the well-educated and the poorly educated in terms of survival and life style. The former soon found employment and mostly settled in towns, joining the ranks of the emerging black elite and middle class. By contrast, most of the latter initially settled in Ovamboland, their place of origin, without formal employment. Driven by expectations of better opportunities, a considerable number of them were soon driven from rural areas to towns. (Preston 1997; Tapscott and Mulongeni 1990.)

It was the middle class urbanites and their life-style that I was most in touch with during my fieldwork. What struck me most was the similarity of the conditions of their life to many other, for example European, urban middle class conditions and the difference between this way of life and that of their less affluent colleagues in the townships or those living rurally. Living in town and being in paid employment gave them access to modern housing, services and consumer goods. It was clear that the ideal of bourgeois nuclear family life had permeated the life style and aspirations of the tiny black elite of Namibia. For example, the homes functionally emulated the structure of their South African,

⁹ Up to date, it is not possible to establish the exact number of Namibians in exile. Before independence, Swapo grossly exaggerated the number of people in exile, probably to maximize its diplomatic leverage and the humanitarian support it received. This was revealed during the transition period before Namibian independence when almost all those exiles who had not died in exile returned. There is no exact information about how many died or were born in exile. Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan (1990: 259) estimate the combined casualties of both sides in the Namibian war at over 1000 annually at least since 1976/77, the majority being on Swapo's side. Roughly, this would mean about or over 10 000 Swapo casualties during the war. Groth estimates that the number of Namibians who died in exile was 'over 11 000', including not only those who died in the war but also those who died in other situations (Groth 1995: 37). Together, the figures for returnees and the deceased would indicate a total of about 60 000 exiles.

European or American counterparts, with separate kitchens, sitting rooms and bedrooms. In the sitting rooms, a sofa and armchairs invariably faced the tv; in the walls there were works of art, posters, and photographs marking important family occasions (apart from the occasional ‘liberation genre’ portraits of Sam Nujoma and other emblematic figures of the Namibian nationalist movement). In the bookshelves one found not only books but also decorative items. In the townships one could see that this ideal was often aspired to but hard to achieve. All this stands in stark contrast with the conditions in, for example, rural Ovambo. The division of space in a traditional Ovambo egumbo is completely different from a modern town home, and it is meant to accommodate a larger number of people. Usually, there are no amenities such as electricity or running water. Also, it has not usually been similarly furnished and decorated as the town homes. Partly these things are due to lack of resources, but partly they are a matter of different ideas of what is important for a good life.

Another example is the role of the media. Reading newspapers and watching tv is common among the urban middle class, which it is not in the rural areas where tv sets are rare and where it is hard to get hold of a newspaper. Moreover, reading newspapers is not an everyman’s habit in a society where about half of the population is illiterate. In Ovamboland, radio is the only mass medium to which majority of the population has access. In these conditions, the use of the media can be a site of drawing the lines of distinction and identity. On one of my first evenings in Windhoek, my host family had another couple for a visit. When it was time for the tv-news, all discussion stopped and everybody duly turned towards the tv-set. This news ritual was to repeat itself every night thereafter. After the news Bob told an anecdote of how the Prime Minister Geingob had been asked to deliver a speech at 8 p.m. but had started only after half past because he had had to watch the news. The implication that it is the duty of every good Namibian citizen to keep oneself informed of current affairs is not hard to see. Here it is a marker of national identity, of belonging to the national community that is drawn together, among other things, by the media.

If the media was something to construct a national (as well as ‘international’ and ‘Pan-African’) community, the community of everyday interaction was considerably smaller. It soon became clear to me that, as my host once said, ‘everybody knows each other in Namibia’ — although actually it was among the tiny elite that everyone knew each other. Many of the members of the black urban middle class had personal contacts to the very top of the ruling elite. During my stay I was introduced to many government and Swapo high

officials and other prominents. Generally, it was common that it turned out that many people whom I had acquainted separately knew each other.

However, even if the former exiles with at least relatively high formal education and employment in Windhoek formed a social network, which variously extended also to other sections of the tiny black elite, this did not necessarily make their social life a lively one. More than once I heard people complaining that they do not meet people and hear about things as easily as they would if they lived in Katutura. The middle class mostly lived in former whites only-suburbs and socialized with other middle class people, visiting each other and occasionally arranging braais (barbecue parties). Their contacts with their less succesful former exile colleagues in the rural areas and townships appeared to be far fewer and restricted to family contacts and accidental encounters. This was well illustrated when I had decided to contact and interview also the latter group and asked my interviewees and some other former exiles in Windhoek for possible contacts. None of those whom I asked came up with anything else than general suggestions about where the kind of people that I was looking for could be found.

Although I had read about the differences between the unemployed and poorly educated former exiles' and their better-off fellow returnees' lives, I could not help wondering about the pervasiveness of this difference when I saw it with my own eyes. When I visited Katutura's new Ombili area or Oshakati's Omashaka location, I met people who lived in shacks made of corrugated iron and whatever other stuff they could find and who had to survive without most of the amenities and public services taken for granted in town houses. They also seemed to live without the air of constant hurry of the town people, as they were without permanent employment, trying to make a living from odd jobs and small-scale trade in foodstuffs, drinks and other such things. They had plenty of time to spend with me, and therefore our meetings were not restricted to interviews, apart from the times when I was the busy one.

I spent a hectic week in Ovamboland towards the end of my field period, trying to catch as many of the rank and file returnees based there as possible.¹⁰ Working in Ovamboland was

¹⁰ The definition of 'intellectuals' used in this study is closely connected to educational background but also related to contacts with different cultural environments in exile, a relatively good position in the liberation movement and independent Namibia and an analytical and 'enlightened/administrative' approach to issues; conversely, 'rank and file', 'non-intellectual' and 'ordinary' refer to the lack of above qualities. Thus, in some cases, those with a 'middle-level' education fall into the group of intellectuals and in some they don't. Otherwise, educational background and 'intellectualism' largely go together. It should be noted that that these concepts do not imply any valuation of either category and associated modes of representation over

completely different from Windhoek. First, right at the start I got a reminder of Ovamboland's enduring position as Swapo's stronghold, when the first person whom I approached for interview demanded authorization from the local Swapo office.¹¹ I duly went to the office and obtained permission for doing interviews. After that, the interviews could be arranged smoothly. However, one should not be in a hurry when working in Ovamboland, and I was. The distances were longer than in Windhoek, transportation was more difficult, and appointments did not necessarily hold. All this made the work more demanding, but I mostly managed to reach the people I was looking for and they friendly agreed to be interviewed. However, I could not spend much time or make more than one interview with most of these interviewees because of my tight schedule. There were also a few interviews for which I needed a translator. She was a former exile herself and I received most valuable help from her as she could easily arrange interviews and discuss with the interviewees in a friendly and informal atmosphere.

In Ovamboland the demarcation between people in different socioeconomic positions was not so stark as in Windhoek. Still, it clearly existed. In the semi-urban centres and rural areas of Ovamboland, class differences were visible but the members of the middle class were not isolated from others in the same way as in Windhoek.

Kinship relations seemed to be the major form of contact of the well-to-do former exiles to those Namibians who were not members of the middle class. Many mentioned it as their duty to try to help their relatives who had not had the benefit of education and were unemployed. It was also common for families to have children, mostly girls, of kin members living with them. Here, family networks were reproduced and responsibilities and resources (money and labour) were allocated within the family much in the same way as traditionally. The children participated in housework and received food and accommodation in return.

another.

¹¹ In Ovamboland, Swapo has pervasive authority far extending that of a mere political party. In many respects, it has taken the place of the traditional local structures of authority. Many of these still exist, but the real locus of power is Swapo.

2.1.3 From research plan to field practice

Originally, my intention was to concentrate on how life histories constructed in thematic interviews would express 'national identity'. This started changing soon in the field when I was caught by the actual narratives and discourses of the people I met and started to find out things that I had not anticipated. Confronted with the richness of the social reality in which I found myself and the narratives I was told, I felt that I should try to avoid restricting my interpretations in the field and at an early stage of analysis by looking through the lens of 'nationalism', 'identity' or any other particular theoretical concept.

As my conceptual framework started opening up, so did the scope and the structure of the interviews. Initially, I intended to interview only those Namibians who had studied in Finland, because I expected them, as well-educated people, to be a part of the new black elite of Namibia. I thought that as a Finn I would be better equipped to understand the stories of those who had lived in Finland than the stories of others. I also thought that the stay in Finland could have been a significant issue in their narratives. There was also a practical reason: there still were Swapo scholarship students in Finland, so I could start by interviewing them already before going to Namibia. I soon realized that one's stay in Finland was not a major issue in the stories. Therefore, my initial decision to restrict my interest to those who had studied there seemed unfounded. As it also turned out to be easy to get in contact with potential interviewees and as most of them agreed to be interviewed, I decided to include also other well-educated former exiles into the study.

Soon I became interested also in the contrasts that there might be between the stories of these well-educated, 'cosmopolitan' former exiles and those who remained in Angola and Zambia without much formal education and whose situation after independence was also very different. Therefore, I decided to broaden my focus to include the latter too. These decisions were linked with a shift in my interest from a preconceived conceptual focus on nationalism to a craving for understanding the historical process of Namibian exile as a whole as the people themselves would represent it. I wrote in my diary that I wanted to show that the liberation struggle emerged as a many-sided phenomenon from the different perspectives of different people who participated in it and that the people themselves were thoroughly influenced or constituted by it.

The broadening of the scope of research led to acceleration in the pace of the fieldwork and swelled the amount of interviews. In addition to the nine interviews with seven Swapo

scholarship students and two other students in Finland, there were 73 interviews with 43 interviewees, of whom 40 were former exiles, in Namibia.¹² However, the benefits of these inclusions amply compensated for the required effort. Not only did they produce knowledge on the new groups that were interviewed but they also enhanced my understanding of the previous interviews. Also, I felt that the research gained new relevance when it covered the exile experience relatively widely in terms of individual backgrounds.

As regards the structure of the interviews, I initially had a list of themes that I wished to cover. These were focused on the interviewees' personal histories and the themes of nationalism and identity from various angles. As I discussed with the people, I realized that the thematic list of topics would restrict the interviewees and produce fragmentary statements on issues that I had decided beforehand to be noteworthy. What I wanted was to hear what the interviewees themselves considered a proper and suitable presentation of a life and what were the things they thought as worth including. This was the only way to find out issues that went beyond what I already knew to look for and to get beyond mere content into the structuration of narratives. Therefore, after about a month in the field I switched into a method in which I would first ask the interviewee to tell his or her life story in his or her own words and tried to avoid defining more specifically what I expected. After he or she had completed this initial narrative I would ask supplementary life historical and other questions.

This method provided both more extensive and deeper results than the original one. First, the life-historical narratives grew considerably longer.¹³ Second, it made it possible to look at how the interviewees structured their lives as stories, how the stories were emplotted,

¹² For background information on the interviewees, see appendix 2.

¹³ With the first 15 interviewees, when I frequently cut the narration with questions or asked questions on life in Finland first and for a life historical narrative only later, the 'free' life-historical narrative was, on average, only half the length of the narrative of those 32 interviewees who told a life story right at the start. Another factor that seems to coincide most consistently with the length of initial life stories is education. Among the interviewees who were given the opportunity for uninterrupted life story narratives, those who were well-educated told stories that were, on average, slightly longer than the stories of those who were relatively well educated and four times as long as the stories of those with little education. Also gender coincided quite strongly with the length of initial narratives. Among those whom I gave the opportunity for unrestricted initial narratives, men's stories were, on average, twice as long as those of women.

These differences may of course be coincidental, since the total number of interviews is quite small. However, I feel that there is a pattern underlying the differences, reflective of the different genre-specific assumptions that different sets of narrators bring into the process of constructing the narratives, of their assumptions of proper ways of presenting personhood and of their assumptions about the more immediate context.

what kind of breaks or deviations emerged in them, and what was the social and moral universe within which the narrated lives were placed.

Apart from being crucial for understanding what was said in the interviews, what happened in the field also entered into the very construction of them. What I saw about the life of the former exiles, what I discussed with them, and what I learned about the Namibian postcolonial condition in general greatly influenced how I understood what the interviewees said and what I thought to be important and worth asking after the initial narratives.

Of the various factors that influenced the production of the stories, some were specific to the particular situations where the interviews took place. Of these, perhaps the most important one was that in most cases, the interviewees either had not met me at all before the interview, or had met me once, when I had explained my research interests to them. Apart from this there are, of course, countless other things, such as gender, nationality, age and the personal impression the interviewee had about me; the physical context of the interview; or the mood of the interviewee and myself. It is possible to take some of these into account, but definitely not all.

The interview situations were broken off from the give and take of informal discussion by my turning the tape recorder on and giving the interviewee an indication to begin his or her story. Usually it was clear from the way their manner of speaking and posture changed that the interviewees saw this as a more formal and serious situation than ordinary discussion. In various ways, they strove to act according to what they thought to be the proper procedure. They came forward with a narrative 'strategy', whether it was an oral presentation of their cv, a seemingly pre-meditated autobiography or a more open-ended process of constructing a narrative representation of their life. Some even deliberated aloud about what they *should* tell before they started their narrative.

The systematic silences, the existence of which I soon started to realize, most notably on the internal conflicts of Swapo, gave me a lot to think about. I pondered on how I should approach these issues during the interviews. Should I be content with what the interviewees told me or should I try to dig beneath the surface, right into the unspoken but surely important issues? I decided to hang on to the idea that the stories were valuable and highly informative precisely the way they were told voluntarily, as my interest lied not so much in finding out what had actually happened as in recovering my interviewees' personal and

historical imagination. However, I also decided to try to be careful not to miss any hints to the directions of what could not be openly stated and to utilise the opportunities that would arise for further questions that would not appear too abrupt.

In spite of arriving at the principle of accepting whatever the interviewees present as their stories, I grew more persistent with some questions at the later stage of fieldwork as I started to learn the ways in which some things were discussed, or alternatively, not discussed among the people with whom I worked. Earlier I was more careful in order not to close the doors that had started to open. It is probably a general phenomenon that learning the discourses of the people one works with crucially enhances one's sensitivity to what happens and is said in the interviews. It helps to understand the nuances of what the other person has said which in turn helps one to formulate one's answers and further questions more properly and delicately, and gives the other discussant a better sense of confidentiality and sharing than with an obvious uninitiate.

English was usually the medium in which the interviews were conducted. Although not the interviewees' maternal language, most of them had fluent or at least good command of it. Two interviews were conducted in Finnish, and seven in Oshiwambo with the help of a translator. In two cases the translator was a person who was formally senior to the interviewee, and this seemed to exert a measure of self-control, perhaps even self-censorship to the narratives. In the five other cases the translators and interviewees did not have a formally hierarchical relationship, and their relationship was a friendly one. In these cases, the translator may have had a positive rather than negative effect to the atmosphere of the interviews. Still, even in cases like these, the use of a translator ultimately hides most of the nuances of what the interviewee tells, and only leaves the content more or less intact. Apart from the interviews conducted with the help of a translator, only the interviewees and I were present at the interviews. Usually the interviews took place at the interviewees' homes or work places. Some were conducted at my residence, in a public park in the centre of Windhoek or in a bar.

The life story narratives and answers were shorter when a translator was used than in other interviews. However, there seems to be another, and more fundamental, reason to this than the presence of the translator: the more education an interviewee had, the longer were his or her narratives and answers, and most of the interviewees with whom a translator was used were also poorly educated. The rank and file interviewees may have taken the interview situation more formally than others, because it most probably was more unusual and

unknown to them than to the well-educated ‘cosmopolitans’. Also the use of English most probably restricted them more than their better-educated colleagues. Furthermore, it is unlikely that they understood my explanation about the topic of the study as well as the ‘intellectuals’, which probably restricted their scope of improvisation.

2.2 Life story and practice: delimiting the problem

The deconstruction of the essentialist concept of ‘identity’ has not led into the demise of the concept itself. On the contrary, there has been a flow of studies about various facets of ‘identity’ in recent years. A recurring thread in such studies has been that identities are historically and socially constructed, transformable, and multiple. Various forms of narration, including life-narration, have been seen as an important site of the ‘making’ of identities.¹⁴ In what sense, then, can life stories be seen as reflective of identities? I shall argue that in order to understand the relation between life stories and ‘identity’, it is important to differentiate between two common but distinct usages of the concept: those that lay stress on conscious representations of ‘self-identity’ or other representations by an agent, on one hand, and those that focus on characteristics deemed, from an outside perspective, as fundamentally constitutive of an individual or group, or on their self-experience and action in general, on the other.

To try to account for an individual’s or a group’s identity ‘objectively’ would mean trying to describe and analyze either the totality or the ‘essence’ that constitutes that individual or group. Before the ‘interpretive turn’ in social sciences (see Rabinow and Sullivan 1987), such an attempt was relatively common in anthropology, including its approach to life stories. These were often understood as a reflection of and a window into an individual and his cultural environment, understood as a functional and self-contained totality. With the concepts of culture and identity deeply problematized, such a task seems impossible.¹⁵

For instance, what would be the ‘culture’ determining the life-stories of Namibian former exiles. Traditional Ovambo culture? Modern Namibian culture (gradual commoditization,

¹⁴ An extensive discussion of the concept of identity is not necessary for my purposes nor is there room for it. For such discussions, see Hall 1992 and 1996.

¹⁵ For ‘postmodernist’ criticism of ethnography and the concept of culture, and counter-criticism, see Abu-Lughod 1991 and 1993; Brightman 1995; Clifford and Marcus eds. 1986; Lindholm 1997; Siikala 1997. In two related discussions, both anthropological practices of interpreting and representing ‘the other’ and the concept of culture have been brought under scrutiny.

urbanization, formal schooling etc.)? Ideologies of nationalism, Christianity, socialism? Western popular culture (magazines, pop music etc.)? The condition of exile or being a refugee in ‘the national order of things’ (Malkki 1995a and 1995b)? Ideas and practices engendered by the everyday life in exile? All of these are important but they certainly do not constitute a coherent and self-contained whole. Rather, they provide the narrators with ‘life-worlds’ that are not exactly the same for any two narrators.¹⁶ Therefore, the cultural ‘background’ from which representations of identity are drawn should be understood in the sense of the totality of ‘practice’ or lived ‘experience’. The former concept is related to a processual social theory that has been influential in anthropology during the last couple of decades (Bourdieu 1977 and 1990; Ortner 1984),¹⁷ while the latter is related to the phenomenological perspective (Jackson 1996).

The practice perspective has brought about a conceptual shift from cultural systems to the lived practice of people, to a processual understanding of society and culture instead of cultural or socio-structural determination. This does not necessarily indicate a relapse into methodological individualism because individuals are still seen as enmeshed in social relations and cultural meanings. However, instead of ‘culture’ or ‘social organization’ producing outcomes in individuals, the process is seen to be continuous and cyclical; individuals reconstruct their sociocultural universe as well as initiate changes in it through appropriating it in their everyday existence. The practice perspective leads to presentism, because ‘culture’ is seen to exist primarily in what the agents do. However, it is far from ahistorical, because the agents themselves are seen as socially constructed and the social relations and cultural symbols amongst which they live form ‘structures’ that constrain the ways in which their ‘action’ may proceed.¹⁸

¹⁶ It should be noted that by rejecting a view of ‘culture’ as a hermetic totality I am not suggesting that the concept could not be useful in some other senses. Some (for instance Abu-Lughod 1991 and 1993) have suggested that the concept of culture is inherently problematic and that it should be replaced altogether by other concepts, such as ‘discourse’ or ‘practice’. However, as Brightman (1995) eloquently points out, this approach lapses into a one-sided and simplistic reading of the history of the culture construct. First, at least a part of the arguments against culture that were raised by the ‘postmodernist’ or ‘textualist’ writers (see Clifford and Marcus eds. 1986) had been voiced earlier and incorporated in various ways into culture constructs and anthropological practice. Second, concepts such as ‘practice’ or ‘discourse’ are immensely useful but cannot replace ‘culture’ altogether. They actually presuppose a concept of culture, for there have to be some shared understandings in order for subjects, who engage in ‘practice’ and employ ‘discourses’, to exist in the first place, as the process of becoming ‘a subject’ is an intersubjective one. Third, it is not necessary to abandon the concept of culture in order to bring in such things as contestation, strategy and discontinuity since these have in fact become a part of the anthropological usage of ‘culture’.

¹⁷ Giddens’s theory of structuration is, in many respects, a related exercise (Giddens 1984).

¹⁸ As Ortner (1995: 186) puts it, criticizing the poststructuralist approach to subjectivity: ‘The de(con)struction of the subject...cannot be the only answer to the reified and romanticised subject of many resistance studies. On the contrary, the answer...must be an actor understood as more fully socially and culturally constructed from top to bottom. The breaks and splits and incoherencies of consciousness, no less than the integrations and coherencies, are equally products of cultural and historical formation.’

In phenomenology, the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy is replaced by a focus on ‘being-in-the-world’. In other words, human beings are seen to exist primarily as bodily processes and to become conscious ‘minds’ only through them so that their identity is fundamentally grounded in ‘embodiment’. For example, Csordas (1994a) argues against representationalism that he sees as the predominant orientation in anthropology. In it, people’s representations of identity are given precedence over studying the actual experience of ‘embodiment’. However, in closer scrutiny the line between ‘experience’ and its ‘textual representations’ becomes less clear than might initially seem. For example, life stories are representations. At the same time, they result from acts of remembering and actively formulating what is remembered and can therefore be seen as a form of experience. Furthermore, there may be serious methodological problems in the study of ‘embodiment’. We may have no other access to other people’s ‘experience’ than their various (though not only verbal) representations.¹⁹ This is even more difficult when ‘things of the past’ are at issue. There is no way for me to go to, say, Angola of the late 1970s. The only way the past can be approached is through its various representations and its embodied and material repercussions in the present. Third, proponents of the phenomenological perspective on ‘embodiment’ seem to invest it with a considerable degree of authenticity.²⁰ Yet ‘embodiment’ may be an important site for the reproduction of myth and power,²¹ precisely because of its noncognitive character and apparent ‘preobjectivity’ and ‘immediacy’. (Bourdieu 1990: 66-79). To assume ‘experience’ to be autonomous from cultural mediation and power any more than its representations are would merely invert the Cartesian

Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun (1993: 4) provide a good summary of Bourdieu’s approach: ‘[S]ocial structures and embodied (therefore situated) knowledge of those structures produce enduring orientations to action which, in turn, are constitutive of social structures. Hence, these orientations are at once "structuring structures" and "structured structures" ... Practice, however, does not follow directly from orientations ... but rather results from a process of improvisation that, in turn, is structured by cultural orientations, personal trajectories, and the ability to play the game of social interaction. This capacity for structured interaction is what Bourdieu terms the "habitus"...[It] is at once intersubjective and the site of the constitution of the person-in-action...[It is] meant to capture the practical mastery that people have of their social situation, while grounding that mastery itself socially.’

¹⁹ Csordas recognizes this, and argues that ‘language gives access to a world of experience in so far as experience comes to, or is brought to, language’ (Csordas 1994a: 11). However, unless the ways in which experience is supposed to ‘come to’ or be ‘brought to’ language are specified, this argument just states what is obvious, namely that language is part of lived experience.

²⁰ Hence, although Csordas, importantly, recognizes that the body is not precultural (Csordas 1994a: 4, 10, 20 note 2), he still speaks of embodiment as a ‘preobjective’ (*ibid.*: 7, 10) and ‘existentially immediate’ (*ibid.*: 10) process that is ‘the existential condition of cultural life’ (Csordas 1994b: xi) and ‘the source of subjectivity’ (Csordas 1994a: 9).

²¹ Myth is here understood in the Barthesian sense as depoliticized discourse. See Barthes (1973: 155-157); see also Comaroff and Comaroff’s (1991: 19-32) and Williams’s (1977: 55-71, 108-114) distinction between ideology and hegemony. Their use of the concept of hegemony closely resembles Barthes’s definition of myth.

dichotomy it seeks to deconstruct by cutting the ‘authentic’ experience of embodiment off from the totality of lived experience.²²

In the light of the above discussion, a crucial analytic distinction has to be made between active subjectivity and representations of selfhood. My aim is not to unearth the Namibian former exiles’ ‘experience’, ‘desire’ or any other ‘authentic’ essence, nor their lived practice as a whole. Such practice or ‘experience’ will have to be taken into account as the basis from which their life stories arise, but I will focus on the stories as partial and mediated representations of it. Thus, I do not approach life stories as a window into their narrators’ ‘psyche’ or identity in the full sense, as not all the characteristics that constitute this identity enter their self-narratives. If this is the case, then what is the process through which particular self-narratives are formed? Why do people tell their stories in the way they do?

The analytic distinction between practice and representation should not obscure the fact that life stories are themselves a result of a part of their narrators situated experience, an instance of their practical engagement with the world. In short, life stories are simultaneously representations of past practice and a form of present practice. A life story is not an unmediated summary of the past but an activity in which the narrator, informed by his or her present concerns, uses narrative devices, the discursive resources he or she possesses, to make sense of ‘the past’ and act upon ‘the present’. I propose that life story narration involves an attempt to justify oneself, usually both to the listener/reader and to oneself, and to establish and reproduce a sense of continuity as an agent, which is necessary for being able to act meaningfully in one’s social universe. This is itself a socially constructed motive, for a sense of self in whatever form is acquired only through intersubjective engagement.²³ In this effort, the narrator draws from his or her cultural ‘background’, memories, embodied practices, discourses about the ‘self’, and present social action, but always selectively. Such organization of remembrance involves a dialectical relation between the past and the present as well as between the narrator and the social situation in which he or she narrates. Therefore, life stories, read against the background of cultural influences and situational factors that constitute the ‘life-worlds’ of the narrators,

²² A related, and to my mind, similarly mistaken dichotomy of narrative representations and prediscursive ‘desire’ has been suggested by Rosenwald and Ochberg (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992; Rosenwald 1992).

²³ Furthermore, this motive does not imply a universal model of rationality, because what constitutes ‘justification’ depends on cultural variables. Neither does it imply a full awareness by the narrator of why certain decisions are made in narration. One may feel how things should be presented without being able to explain why.

are immensely useful for charting identities in the sense of public self-representation, as expressions of moral ideals and conceptions of social and historical belonging. They abound with specific shared meanings that both reflect and constitute various cultural repertoires.

However, the narration of a life story takes place in a specific social situation and its result is therefore one particular constellation of past and present experience. Other situations may involve different kinds of discourse and produce different representations of this experience. Indeed, comparing the life stories with what the interviewees and others said and did in other situations suggested that the stories were specific to both context and genre. One conceptual tool that is useful in making sense of this specificity is the distinction between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses of personhood. For example, Jackson and Karp (1990: 15) contrast ‘cognitive stereotypes about personhood’ with ‘less explicit, more elusive experiences of self and other’. Following Mauss, Jacobson-Widding (1990: 31, 34) distinguishes the ideology of personhood from the emotional experience of selfhood. The former is likely to arise in statements given in formal situations and is, in her Congolese case, sociocentric. By contrast, the latter crops up, with subjective interpretations and with reference to concrete events, in informal discussions or ‘non-verbal interaction’ on such issues as ‘witchcraft, sorcery, photographs, shadows, bodily emissions, nail parings, or passions’, and can be termed egocentric. (*Ibid.*: 32-34, 44-52.) Likewise, Mageo (1995), in her study of Samoan ‘self-representation’, distinguishes between self-experience and discourse about it and describes different discourse types — moral, compartmental and strategic — that follow on a sociocentric ontological premise of personhood as well as on each other to bring different aspects of self-experience to the fore. And Battaglia (1995) contrasts ‘prevailing valuations’ of personhood with their practical countertendencies and focuses on the self as a process that emerges from a ‘multiplicity of rhetorics’.

All of these writers lay stress on practice or the ‘problematics of self-action’ (Battaglia 1995: 2) in contrast with doctrines or ‘ideologies’ of personhood. According to this line of thought, any given social context, irrespective of whether its favoured mode of discoursing personhood is individualist or relational, is bound to consist of multiple, partly contradictory and competing discourses of ‘the self’ instead of one single discourse that

moves subjects as its puppets. These discourses make existential sense of different aspects of lived experience to the subjects.²⁴

In sum, this study is not about life histories or biographies in the conventional sense of trying to chart an individual's life trajectory as fully as possible. It is about life stories, which I see as partial reflections of past practice and a specific, transitory form of present practice.²⁵ They are not a window to their narrators' lived experience as a whole (especially when told to a relative stranger), but a particular, relatively public, form of discoursing identity and history. There are various other discourses that express and help to live through other aspects of 'self-experience'. The existence of the lived practice of the narrators and the idea of various discourses of personhood should be kept in mind in reading life stories, but I will not concentrate on them apart from seeing them as contexts from which the stories emerge. My focus will be on the stories in the restricted sense of partial, transitory and context-specific representations that are constructed from the perspective of acting and justifying oneself in the present. As such, they may open a window to the public memory and morality of the former exiles. For sure, I gained insights on other aspects of their life through participant observation and informal discussions, but the kinds of discourse that emerge in these situations are only used as a contrast to the 'public' narratives. They shed light on the way in which these narratives are constructed out of various possible alternatives, and on the forces that are at play in this construction and make it a non-coincidental and ordered process.

²⁴ This idea is at loss in extreme social constructionism that subsumes all agency within a unitary, hegemonic discourse (Harré 1989; Parker 1989), as well as in the totalizing psychologism found in some articles in the collection edited by Rosenwald and Ochberg (Rosenwald and Ochberg eds. 1992), in which the 'personality' of the narrator is inferred from his or her narrative.

²⁵ I take autobiography to be an account narrated, usually written, by someone about his or her own life. A biography, by contrast, is an account about the life of someone else. Biographers may use the subjects' own words and interpretations to varying degrees, but they structure the account according to what they consider to be important. In my usage, 'life history' and 'life story' come close to biography and autobiography respectively. 'Life history' is a general term for life accounts that arise from collaborative biographical activities. Usually it is a narrative constructed by an investigator by using both the subject's own representations and other information on his or her life. Life story, by contrast, is the subject's own representation of his or her life.

The oral transmission of the life story in the presence of an audience makes the production of life stories more strongly dialogical than that of autobiographies. Of course, even autobiography is dialogical in the sense of emerging intertextually and with an audience in mind, but the immediate context of its production is still very different from that of life story interviews. The production of a life story is aimed not only to the silent, implicit audience, but also to the person who wants to hear the story, who is present with his or her gestures, expressions and interjections even when he or she does not say anything.

My contribution to the initial narratives was with a silent presence, through the assumptions of the narrator. The subsequent discussions were directed more by my concerns and by the give and take of active dialogue.

A set of other, more specific assumptions is implied in the above formulations: 1) Life stories should not be read as simple reflections of past facts, events, and their relations. The past enters into their construction but not by way of simple determination; 2) Rather, it enters as a partial and meaningful representation, a narrative whole. This means that 3) the construction of a life story is constrained by certain general rules of narrativity; 4) It is also influenced by culturally more particular structures of meaning, the favoured models for narrating history and ‘the self’; 5) Furthermore, it is influenced by the individual narrator’s need to make sense of the past in the circumstances of the present. All of these things enter into the construction of life stories and are necessary in order to understand them as narratives of identity and history. In the following theoretical introduction I will develop these points further into an analytic framework.

2.3 History and story: the narrative ordering of life

Above I suggested that life stories cannot be said to be directly reflective of the actual courses of their narrators’ lives. I will now shortly discuss some of the theoretical premises of this argument.

The use of life stories in anthropology goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. Well into the 1970s life history was predominantly used as a descriptive window into the details of an individual’s life trajectory and culture. It was thought that the stories quite transparently speak about the subject’s life or about the culture from which they emerge. In the 1940s and 1950s, life histories were also used in culture-and-personality studies, mainly in the United States.²⁶

As late as 1981, Langness and Frank were still concerned about establishing the ‘reliability’ of the oral accounts one was told. They suggested three methods for checking this: comparing what one is told with one’s own observations; checking an informant’s accounts against those of others; and asking the informant same questions repeatedly over time (*ibid.* 1981: 50-51). I would add that oral accounts can be checked against published accounts or other documents too. There is also a common assumption that one might judge the

²⁶ For more detailed narratives about the history of anthropological life story research, see Linde 1993; Watson and Watson-Franke 1985: 1-16; Langness and Frank 1981. For a classification of more recent analytical perspectives, see Peacock and Holland 1993.

‘reliability’ of an account from the mode of its presentation; that a ‘realist’ presentation is a natural form of correct representations, as opposed to ‘myth’ and ‘fiction’ (Tonkin 1990).

While I agree that these methods may considerably improve one’s sense of how the informants’ accounts are constructed and what they tell about, I do not agree that they necessarily establish their ‘reliability’. First, direct observation may well provide an immediate comparison with what an informant tells, but it is not a comparison between ‘reality’ and its representation. Rather, it is a comparison between the informant’s representation and that of the researcher, for the latter does not have a privileged access to reality.²⁷ Furthermore, direct observation is not possible when studying the past. Second, the consistency of many informants’ accounts may result not only from their correspondence to the reality of events but also from a shared discourse of remembering and telling — or forgetting and remaining silent.²⁸ Third, the consistency in what an informant tells over time may arise, for example, from the central place that an event, detail, or interpretation has come to occupy in a person’s narrative conception of his or her life. Fourth, what a possible match between what an informant tells and published accounts indicates depends on the ‘reliability’ of these published accounts themselves, and it may even be that a published account forms a basis for a shared ‘mythical’ discourse.

As for whether an account is ‘realist’ or not it has been demonstrated both historically (e.g. White 1987) and cross-culturally (e.g. Tonkin 1990; 1992) that ‘the past’ can be narrated in multiple ways and that there is necessarily no dependence of factual accuracy on the mode of presentation. A ‘realist’ presentation is not a natural representation of the past, but a genre that is assessed in terms of specific criteria shared by those who have learned it as a mode of presenting ‘real’ facts and events. Even coherent and detailed stories can be factually inaccurate, and even incoherent and non-sophisticated stories can be factually accurate. The ‘myth of realism’ (Tonkin 1990) just conditions us to lend greater credibility to claims for veracity that are conveyed in the realist idiom. What is accepted as accurate is not in direct relation to facts ‘out there’ but to the constitution of facts in epistemological practice and to the ways in which they are linked together in a representation.

²⁷ The researcher may be informed by theoretical considerations and self-reflective about the way in which representations are formed. Crucial as this is, it should not be confused with having a transparent access to reality.

²⁸ Peneff (1990) gives an example where a shared mythical discourse not only bends facts into a certain interpretation but actually runs contrary to factual accuracy. On the side of ‘silencing’, the treatment of Swapo’s internal conflicts in the material scrutinized in this study are instructive (see chapter 5.3); cf. Werbner 1998b.

Indeed, informed by such observations, the focus of life (hi)story studies has, since the 1970s, shifted towards looking critically at how lives and history come to be structured as stories.²⁹ It has become increasingly accepted that in dealing with life story material, factual accuracy cannot be separated from the context and medium of presentation. Indeed, there is much more to understanding life stories than merely establishing whether they are factually accurate or not. It would be a mistake to treat the stories as if they were merely lists of facts and events of the past that either reflect this past correctly or are distorted by ‘subjective bias’ or intentional misrepresentation (cf. Linde 1993: 14-16). They are narratives, processed through actively reflecting, in the present, on what ‘a life’ has been in the past, with a horizon of living it on in the future. To represent ‘everything’ would be impossible. Therefore, what is represented is necessarily a partial account. ‘Facts’ and ‘events’ are not mentioned because they are the only possible ones but because they are seen as important. Apart from being selected, they are also ordered and explained so that temporal, causal or other relations are established between them so that they form coherent and meaningful wholes (*ibid.*: 4, 7-8, 13, 127-162). Therefore, life story is an at least implicitly moral narrative that both represents and contributes to historical identity. According to Ricoeur (1991: 21-22; emphases in the original), *emplotment*:

serves to make *one* story out of...multiple incidents...In this respect, an event is more than an occurrence...it is what contributes to the progress of narrative as well as to its beginning and to its end...[I]t organizes together components that are as heterogeneous as unintended circumstances, discoveries, those who perform actions and those who suffer them, chance or planned encounters, interactions between actors ranging from conflict to collaboration, means that are well or poorly adjusted to ends, and finally unintended results; gathering all these factors into a story makes the plot a totality...We obtain an understanding of this composition by means of the act of *following* a story...[This] is guided by our expectations concerning the outcome of the story, expectations that we readjust as the story moves along...[T]here are two sorts of *time* in every story...on the one hand, a discrete succession that is open and theoretically indefinite, a series of incidents;...on the other hand...integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration. In this sense, composing a story is...drawing a configuration out of a succession.

This narrativist position is best brought forward by such writers as Ricoeur (1991: 28-33; 1992), Carr (1986) and Kerby (1991), working within the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition. They go as far as turning the relation between ‘reality’ and

²⁹ Early examples include James Freeman’s *Untouchable* (1979) and Vincent Crapanzano’s *Tuhami* (1980). The latter study is a clear example of the growing awareness of the differences between the life as lived and the life as narrated, and of the multiple possibilities of narrative representations of a life, depending on the context. The last couple of decades have produced quite an extensive, if varied, body of life story (and oral history) research that combines ‘interpretive’ insights with taking the ‘pastness’ in the narratives seriously. This is a multidisciplinary ground where insights from anthropology, history, literature, sociology, psychology, and philosophy come together. Also, the boundary between ‘life story’ and other forms of historical discourse often becomes blurred. See, for instance, Tonkin 1992; Werbner 1991; Malkki 1995b; Geiger 1997; Caplan 1997; Werbner ed. 1998; Crapanzano 1986; Samuel and Thompson eds. 1990; Chamberlain and Thompson eds. 1998; Portelli 1997; Skultans 1997 and 1998; White 1991; Rosenwald and Ochberg eds. 1992; Linde 1993; Abu-Lughod 1993.

‘narrative’ the other way around from what the ‘realist paradigm’ teaches us, advocating the primacy of narrativity. In this view, narrative is a basic human characteristic of ‘being-in-the-world’. In such views, meaning and narrative coherence are characteristics of an intersubjective human reality, not of ‘objective’ reality. However, this is the form of reality in which we live. In other words, narrative is not only a way of representing but also a fundamental way of experiencing. It enters the very formation of subjectivity and thereby it is impossible to see reality without the mediation of some narrative forms.

While the above writers advocate the idea of continuity between reality and narrative, there are also ‘narrativists’ who retain the discontinuity of the two. White (1987) is one of them. In his view, reality does not order itself to be represented in any particular way. Therefore the focused selection, ordering and explanation of ‘facts’ involved in any narrative account of history is bound to reflect a particular standpoint that is anchored to the moral and other considerations of the present and therefore to distort past reality.

To an extent, I am persuaded by the argument for the continuity of (experienced) reality and narrative. It appears that there is a ‘double bind’ between living and narrating. First, experience is itself organized by coherence principles, general assumptions concerning relations between things and events. Second, this may account for why narrative offers itself so persuasively for representing experience. However, and here I side with White, this need not imply that reality could be narrativized in one way only. Nor does it imply that the assumptions that order experience are necessarily the same that produce coherence in later narrative representations of that experience.

Hence, I believe that the life stories that constitute the subject matter of this study are simultaneously reflective of ‘real’ history and ‘mythical’ constructions of the past. I shall argue that the two cannot be separated from each other. Narrativity enters into the construction of life stories first in shaping the social reality and historical agency from which the stories are drawn and later in ways of remembering the past and structuring it into a narrative account. In the words of Samuel and Thompson (1990: 6; emphasis in the original; cf. White 1991: 4, 241), writing of myth:

We are arguing for the universality of myth as a constituent of human experience. It lies behind any historical evidence. Hence to identify the element of myth in oral sources is certainly *not* to say that we are working with memories of a false past. Furthermore, a high proportion of the rich detail in a typical life story remains objectively valid: sometimes demonstrably so, from other sources, and by extrapolation from such proven credibility sometimes the only good evidence we have from an undocumented, hidden world. But every life story is also potential evidence for the subjective, and even

the unconscious....Oral memory offers a double validity in understanding a past in which...myth was embedded in real experience: both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception.

Contrary to the assumptions implicit in the ‘objective–subjective’ dichotomy and the worry about ‘biased’ accounts, ‘factuality’ and narrativity can be complementary, and it is necessary to take both aspects into account in order to understand life stories. To concentrate only on the ‘documentary’ aspect of the stories would both leave important aspects of them aside and hamper an understanding of where and how they actually do represent — and constitute — ‘the past’. One can only extract the ‘facts’ from the stories if he or she has an understanding of their ordering as narratives. Only then can the various, perhaps contradictory accounts be weighed against one another properly. Conversely, demonstrating how life narratives function as stories does not imply treating them as factually inaccurate. Their ‘versions’ of history make best sense in relation to the contexts of their production, including other versions of that history. These versions approach ‘reality’ from a different perspective, the scholarly historiographical versions perhaps more systematically than others.³⁰

In order to be included in a narrative, past events have to be remembered. To a large degree, similar processes are at work in remembering as in narration. It is a sign of the times that, in a collection published in 1998, Richard Werbner introduces the concept of ‘memory crisis’ in reference to ‘postcolonial Africa’ (Werbner 1998a). Yet I would suggest that what is in a ‘crisis’ is the concept of memory as a stable imprint of past events in an individual mind, rather than the social processes of remembering itself. No longer is memory understood as an ‘image bank’ confined within an individual psyche into which experience leaves traces to be recalled, as the ‘social constructionists’ in anthropology as well as in related disciplines have recently drawn attention to remembering as a social process (e.g. Tonkin 1992; Middleton and Edwards eds. 1990).

In this view, remembrance is subject to discursive reproduction, reconstruction and contestation. Things of the past do not just imprint themselves in ‘memory’ to be retrieved in their original form but are defined and redefined in social and cultural interaction. The

³⁰ Therefore I have compared the stories with each other, with Swapo’s historiography and autobiographies and with other works on Namibia’s recent history. The stories are a gold mine when it comes to details of, say, the student activities of the 1970s, the conditions and atmosphere of leaving the country, and the practices of exile — an area that has been very little researched so far. They seem to be generally ‘reliable’ when it comes to dates, facts and events depicted in them, but this is the furthest one can go in this regard without extending one’s analysis to questions of narrativity, as all ‘explanations’, in other words, all interpretations of the causal relations and ‘meanings’ of those facts and events, are narrative representations constructed from particular perspectives.

‘truth’ of remembering, that is whether something we think of or feel occurs to us as a valid recollection or as something else, is not one of correspondence to the original ‘fact’ or ‘event’ (since it cannot be directly compared to past reality) but one of fitting individual remembrances together with those of other rememberers or sources as well as with one’s other ‘memories’ and present situation. All of these may also cause changes in one’s memories.³¹ Therefore, interpretation and narrativity are not external to remembering (and forgetting) but important parts of it. Not only is narrative ordering of remembrances selective and interpretive, to an extent remembering is too.

This implies that, at least partly, the interpretations involved in the process of narration exist already before the act of narration. There is a narrative character to remembering itself, for an experienced continuity is a necessary precondition of successful social action. First, this continuity partly takes the form of ‘narrative unity’ (MacIntyre 1997), that is, perceiving and interpreting new experience within the framework of how ‘the past’ is understood. However, this ‘narrative unity’ does not emerge automatically, as the only possible one. The ‘narrative unity’ that motivates ‘an action’ can be different from the ‘narrative unity’ into which it is placed retrospectively. Furthermore, there are various complementary and contradictory discourses of ‘experience’, of which the singular narrative representation is merely one. In spite of these reservations, the notion of narrative unity expresses the sense in which a narrative representation of a life cannot be an arbitrary process. Second, apart from narrative unity, the continuity of experience also exists as relatively enduring ‘unconscious’ dispositions, established ways of being and doing. These are not ‘representations’ but, rather, blueprints for acting and representing.³²

Thus, one carries his or her personal history within in the form of dispositions and previous representations. The life story arises in the interplay of them and the present conditions.³³ It

³¹ The ‘constructivist’ approach to remembering and narration brings in the present tense as an important mediator of what can be remembered and how it can be discoursed. Yet, I do not agree with the ‘presentist’ argument that remembering and self-narration are a discursive product of the here and now (e.g. Harré 1989; Parker 1989). I feel that this ‘presentist’ argument oversimplifies the case; although it is not fully clear how things are remembered and although ways of remembering and representing remembrances are socially mediated it is also obvious that memories are usually correctly identified as something else than the ‘here and now’. Discourse does not simply impose itself on consciousness to create remembrances, just as reality does not order itself to be remembered in one particular way.

³² MacIntyre (1997) fails to see these restrictions to understanding human life as narrative unity. The latter perspective of enduring dispositions would fit his claims for ‘unity of character’ perhaps better than the former one of explicit representations, but the central position of intentionality and ‘self-accountability’ in his formulation makes it clear that his emphasis is on the conscious representations.

³³ In Werbner’s (1991: 109) words: ‘Around family members lies the debris of the past...They can reconstitute the debris in a whole kaleidoscope of different ways. But what they cannot do is simply ignore it.’

is just one instant in the constant re-evaluation of one's 'identity' in lived practice, though perhaps an exceptionally explicit and coherent one. Indeed, life stories should be seen as historical discourses that are socially produced and reproduced not only in the particular historical conditions of the present but also in multiple 'past presents' — the forces of experienced continuity and 'narrative unity' account for this. This implies that the narrative 'schemes' through which Namibian former exiles appropriate the past in the present are not merely the combinations of general narrative forms and what genres and present conditions the narrators happen to find surrounding them when they narrate their stories. The past is not mere raw material for a separate force of remembering. Rather, their narrative schemes themselves have a history and charting the forces of their social production and reproduction adds depth to understanding the stories. Thus, there are multiple layers of interpretation and social remembering in a story and the past has to resonate through them.

Despite such continuities between experience, remembering and narration, the demand for a singular, coherent 'life' that can be represented as a verbal narrative separates the narrated 'self' from the narrating agent in an act of narration. I propose that the dialectic between this represented, coherent 'past' and 'self', on one hand, and the various forms of remembered and present experience, on the other, creates tension and easily makes any particular narrative representation of a life a passing one. The present challenges narrative constructions with indeterminacy and relative uncontrollability. Hence, the present is not as easy to narrativize, and it can also challenge the established interpretations of 'the past' and lead to revisions in narrated life.

So far, the focus of the published accounts of Namibian exile experience has either been on using exile narratives as a source of historical facts or just 'letting the stories speak for themselves'. The questions of narrativity and remembering have not been analyzed, as if the stories spoke directly about what happened in the past or about how those events were interpreted back then. This is where the present study radically departs from these earlier efforts. My starting point is that people's stories do reflect past events and interpretations but not without mediation by various forces that influence the recollection and narration of these events and interpretations. These forces include rules of argumentation and narrativity, the expected themes and particular forms of specific genres, the processes of remembering, the personal qualities and roles that the narrator finds socially appropriate, and, generally, the potential of any particular narrative 'strategy' to 'justify' the narrator.

2.4 From oral accounts to anthropological text

Interpretive social science cannot be squeezed into the classical hypothesis – test – result model. Rather, it consists of multiple interrelated questions that are ‘tested’ all the time both in the field and in reading the texts produced there and reformulated until a ‘saturation point’ is reached, in other words when a satisfactorily comprehensive and coherent picture of the phenomenon under study is reached.

For instance, it seems quite clear to me now that to the theoretical emphasis on nationalism and the detailed thematic lists of what to discuss in interviews were necessary devices for justifying the study, both to myself and to others, and for going to the field. It gave a sense of direction at a moment when there were yet no empirically acquired insights to give one. However, it was just as inevitable that they be discarded or modified during the course of the study, as the material would lead me to new questions and insights. These, in turn, would lead me to read new bodies of literature or to new readings of something that had already been read. This, again, would inform new readings of the narratives and notes. And so on. In this process, the lines between ‘collecting’ and ‘analyzing’ material and between ‘empirical’ and ‘theoretical’ become less than clear-cut. The process of analysis should be seen as a result of both following a plan and drifting with the material. Many of the interpretations presented in this study arose already in the field but most emerged as the result of multiple immersions into the primary material and different bodies of literature and cross-pollinations between them.

More specifically, one faces the question of transforming the narratives of ‘informants’ into the social scientific narratives of anthropologists, a question of both interpretation and presentation. A common strategy has been to concentrate on one or a couple of narratives, thus respecting the richness of the content and the form of an individual narrative. This strategy has the defect that either the narratives that have been chosen are assumed to be representative of ‘the culture’ or social reality from which they come or the issue of representativeness is pushed aside. Recent years have seen an increasing flow of studies that deal with multiple narratives (e.g. Werbner 1991; Geiger 1997; Crapanzano 1986; Malkki 1995b; Skultans 1997 and 1998; Abu-Lughod 1993). Roughly, one finds two ways of approaching and presenting the material in them. One is to support ‘major’ narratives with occasional quotes from other narratives, making those that are presented in detail to stand for individuality and narrative coherence, form and detail, and the quotes for the overall picture. Another is to present multiple narratives in detail as sources for forming a

wider picture. This strategy fares better in terms of representativeness but this is at the cost of leaving the special character of life story or other oral history narratives unanalyzed or at least largely undemonstrated.

For example, Abu-Lughod (1993) adopts the latter kind of an approach. She justifies it by criticizing ‘objectivist’ anthropology for forcing its object into preconceived theoretical models and calls for the abandonment of generalization.³⁴ By contrast, Malkki (1995b) goes to another end of generalization. She uses thematic ‘panels’ that are either longer excerpts from single narratives or compositions from many narratives. This approach emphasizes coherence and shared themes at the expense of individual and possibly discordant voices.³⁵ Crapanzano’s (1986) and Werbner’s (1991) strategies fall in between of the above two. Crapanzano organizes his discussions with ‘the people of Wyndal’ into thematic chapters within which he has long quotes from identified interviewees, interspersed with often short, sometimes longer, explanatory comments. Werbner, in his ‘social biography about a Kalanga family’ (Werbner 1991: vii), groups the narratives generationally as well as according to the few genres or ‘styles’ that he identifies in them, namely heroic adventure, cautionary realism, romance and nostalgia (*ibid.*: 68). However, he does not go deep into the analysis of these genres, but rather points out their existence and then lets the stories ‘speak for themselves’.³⁶

My own focus in reading the stories has been on both convergence and variance and I try to follow this principle also in my exposition. As the gist of my analysis is to unearth the overall structuration of the stories, that is, the main plots and accompanying roles that emerge from them,³⁷ I present multiple individual narratives in an appendix (appendix 1). The first reason for this is to demonstrate how they are structured into a coherent narrative.

³⁴ This is, of course, related to the ‘postmodernist’ critique of the ‘politics of representation’. Without going into a detailed exposition of the flaws of Abu-Lughod’s argument, suffice it to say that abandoning all generalization would be impossible, since the formation of any conceptual knowledge, let alone an anthropological body of knowledge always presupposes interpretive generalization. It would be impossible to think some kinds of generalization, typification, and comparison.

³⁵ Malkki is cognizant of this. Her approach is a considered choice that reflects her view that a considerably coherent and widely shared historical discourse indeed emerged from her material. However, giving a privileged position to the ‘standard’ versions of that history may also reflect her background in the Foucauldian analysis of ‘technologies of power’, which may lead her to concentrate on a ‘master discourse’ instead of the multiple versions of this (and possibly other) discourse(s). Thus, the shared ‘mythico-history’ which she finds may be at least partly dependent on her method of reading the the Hutu refugees’ narratives.

³⁶ Werbner recognizes one of the most important advantages of treating multiple narratives, namely the way in which life stories, in conjunction with other types of discourse, ‘argue’ with each other (Werbner 1991: 3). Therefore, they can be used to highlight a moral universe in a way a single narrative cannot.

³⁷ This means that it is not possible to dig deep into all other possible aspects of the stories as narratives. I will not, for example, be systematically concentrating on discourse analysis at the level of sentences or ‘narrative units’. For an example of such an approach, see Siikala 1984.

The second is to highlight their similarities and differences of form and content. Additionally, I have included thematically organized excerpts from other stories in the main body of the text to reflect the emphases prevalent in the narratives.

In the stories presented in the appendix, the reader will find that the initial narratives are printed in bold type and subsequent narratives in normal type. This is because for the sake of my arguments it is important to be able to distinguish the two from each other. Initial narratives are presented completely and in the order in which they were told, apart from omitting repetitions and non-verbal utterances. Subsequent narratives have been moved where I have thought they best fit in. Very little has been omitted, mostly discussions on such themes, in longer interviews, that do not relate directly to the initial narrative. I have tried to preserve all those parts that the narrators seemed to consider as the most interesting and important, judged on the basis of the length and urgency with which they discussed them.

It is a common practice in anthropology to conceal the identity of informants to protect them from possible negative consequences. Life story material presents a difficulty in this regard, especially if complete stories are presented. Usually changing the name of an informant is not enough to avoid him or her being identified by those from the same social environment or otherwise knowledgeable with the community in question. This problem is aggravated when the community that is studied is small and its members have strong links with each other, as is the case with former exiles, especially the 'intellectuals'.

All but one of those interviewees whose stories are presented in the appendix gave me permission to publish their account with their real name (I asked this for another purpose). Also, I was not looking for life histories in the conventional sense of trying to form an as complete picture of the interviewees' life as possible. I did not try to dig for missing pieces of information to find out the whole 'truth'. Rather, I was happy with what they themselves chose to tell me. On these grounds, one might think that protecting their identity would not be necessary.

However, there are reasons why I have chosen to try to obscure their identity anyway. First, even though they had the opportunity to choose what they told me, all such choices are context-specific. Quite a long time has passed since they told their stories and I am not sure of how they would now feel about their names being published or about the stories they told. Second, it is reasonable to believe that only a few, or perhaps none, of them had an accurate perception of the context in which their stories would appear. I did explain this —

to the extent that I could be aware of it myself at that time — but since the interviewees were not professional anthropologists or oral historians, it is probable that the intricacies of life story analysis did not enter into their decision.

Trying to strike a balance between protecting the interviewees' identity and being open about presenting my research and how my conclusions are based on the material, I have opted for presenting some of the stories almost completely. However, I have omitted all personal names except for widely known historical characters. Similarly, I have omitted or altered some other facts when this could be done without considerably altering narrative content. On the other hand, there is a point where something cannot be left out without compromising the integrity of the narrative. With most stories, this problem did not arise, as they did not, to my mind, contain sensitive issues. However, there were some stories with which I felt I should be more careful.³⁸ The issue had to be considered case by case.

³⁸ Matthew would be the most obvious case had he not gone public with his story already. As he had done so and it was clear that it was his wish to make his story heard as a part of the campaign for a public investigation of the detainee issue, I felt that there is no point in trying to conceal his identity at all costs.

3 Versions of history, versions of lives

As I noted above, the line between ‘life historical’ and ‘historical’ is thin in life stories. They simultaneously portray ‘a self’ and a wider social universe within which this self emerges. I will now have a closer look at the particular historical representations that converge with the general conditions of narration in the former exile stories.

The life stories of Namibian former exiles have narrative precedents that have to be taken into account in order to understand them. Two bodies of narrative on history and identity are particularly relevant in this regard, namely the nationalist historical narrative, privileged both during the liberation struggle and as the founding mythology of the independent nation, and the accompanying autobiographical tradition. I will describe both of these before proceeding to the versions of history and personhood that are narrated in the life stories. However, I will first briefly situate these historiographical genres in the context of the various bodies of literature about Namibian history.

3.1 Representations of Namibian history

The nationalist historiography and autobiographies of Namibians who participated in the ‘liberation struggle’, mentioned above, should be seen as specific genres within an array of representations. More specifically, they emerged as partisan literature within a contested field. The version of history presented in these accounts cannot, of course, be compared with an ‘authentic’ history, since history is only accessible in its various interpretations. However, these interpretations can be understood by juxtaposing them and reading them through each other and through the contexts of their creation. Below, I briefly classify the main bodies of Namibian historiography, concentrating on the nationalist and critical variants that are most relevant for this study. I will then proceed to analyze the nationalist version in more detail. Later in the course of this study, it will be compared with the critical version in connection with specific issues.

a) History of the precolonial period. Primary sources for this period mostly consist of writings by missionaries, traders and explorers. They are mostly descriptive. Later, political and social history of the period has been written on the basis of these sources. Often the scope of these studies is not Namibia as a whole, as Namibia did not yet exist as an entity.³⁹

³⁹ For accounts written in the precolonial and early colonial period, see e.g. Galton 1980 [1853]; Hahn 1984-1985; Andersson 1987 and 1989. For later research, see Estermann 1976 [1957]; Loeb 1962; Siiskonen

b) Colonial history. This was historiography produced by the colonial regime against the perceived threat of black resistance and nationalism. It is often mentioned in the stories as the evil against which the true Namibian history (nationalist history, in some cases a more critical view) may emerge (see chapter 5.1.2). It is political history in the sense of being motivated from an administrative perspective and/or concerning political institutions.⁴⁰

c) Nationalist history and other nationalist literature. This was produced by Swapo, the United Nations Institute for Namibia, and various, mostly Western solidarity organizations, such as the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa to counter the colonialist version of Namibian history. It is a varied genre, consisting of Swapo pamphlets, schoolbooks, popularized historical narratives for international audience, policy papers, and scholarly works.⁴¹ In addition to their own experience and schooling in Namibia, on one hand, and the so-called political training and informal discussions in Swapo camps, on the other, these were the most important sources of historical interpretation (on a national scale) for Namibian exiles. It is worth mentioning that this history was mainly produced outside Namibia, it was exile history informing exile (and supporter) imagination. This was political history both by motivation and by the issues it concentrated on.

After Namibian independence the nationalist historiography has largely been transformed in its coverage and ways of presentation, but its aim remains the promotion of nationalism. Whereas it previously sought to legitimize and draw support for the liberation struggle, a tool of resistance, it has turned into a state-sponsored activity seeking to enable nation-building and to consolidate the hegemony of the present constellation of power. Thus, the nationalist interpretation of history has found its way into school books (e.g. Katzao *et al.* 1992a and 1992b) and into media controlled and sponsored by the state or the ruling party.

1990; Salokoski, Eirola and Siiskonen 1991; Lau 1987. There is also at least one study that uses oral sources extensively, namely Williams 1991.

⁴⁰ For example Ellis (1988) and Lau (1988) describe and analyze colonial historiography.

⁴¹ For nationalist historiographical and other writings, see for example the following: Catholic Institute for International Relations 1989; Hishongwa 1983 and 1992; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa 1989; Green, Kiljunen and Kiljunen eds. 1981; Kaakunga 1990; Katjavivi 1986 and 1988; König 1983; Liberation Support Movement 1973, n.d. (1976), and 1978; Mbuende 1986; Melber 1986; Moleah 1983; Swapo 1976a; Swapo 1976b; Swapo 1978a; Swapo 1978b; Swapo 1981; United Nations Institute for Namibia 1986 and 1987; Williams 1987; Wood ed. 1988; and the following bulletins, all published by Swapo: The Combatant, Namibia News, Namibia Today, Namibia Youth, Namibia Woman, and Swapo Information Bulletin.

There has also been considerable interest in oral history and other popular history (see e.g. Hayes 1992; Williams 1991).⁴² It appears that these attempts have mostly been harnessed into the service of the nationalist project. National archives have been established, oral histories situated into a national framework, and motivated by a wish to justify that framework (respectable nations have respectable and recorded national pasts).

d) A part of nationalist historiography which deserves special attention for the purposes of this study are the autobiographies, biographical descriptions and interviews of Namibian national characters, mostly prominent Swapo leaders (see chapter 3.2.1).⁴³ Accounts by non-Namibian journalists, churchmen and others mostly fall somewhere between nationalist history and the genre of liberationist autobiography (e.g. Soggot 1986; Winter 1977; Lush 1993).

e) Critical political and social history. This category consists of a wide array of subjects and perspectives. I treat them here as one entity because they have one important feature in common: they all make a serious attempt to step outside the colonial – nationalist dichotomy either by not linking themselves explicitly to either one or actively deconstructing both categories. During the colonial period there was some amount of such studies produced by both South Africans and Namibians, as well as by ‘outsiders’.⁴⁴ In some respects, some of the more scholarly studies categorized under nationalist literature could also be entered here by virtue of their sophistication and detail. Similarly, many studies that deal with the precolonial period could as well be here. On the other hand, the border line between some studies of the precolonial period and nationalist historiography is blurred.

⁴² The wish, often mentioned to me by former exiles, to write autobiographies is a part of the same phenomenon.

⁴³ These writings include Angula 1990; Diescho 1988; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa 1981: 42-52; Liberation Support Movement 1973; Ndadi 1989; Shamena and Shamena 1980; Shityuwete 1990; Wood 1987; Ya-Otto 1982; and numerous short interviews or autobiographical writings. Ndadi’s, the Shamenas’, Shityuwete’s and Ya-Otto’s books are ‘proper’ autobiographies. In addition to these, there is Andreas Shipanga’s dissident autobiography (Shipanga 1989). Also Groth 1995 contains many fragments of autobiographical accounts from a dissident perspective.

Angula’s and Diescho’s books are novels, but Angula states that his intention is to portray the experiences of an ‘ordinary Namibian’ through an amalgam of his own experiences and accounts told to him (Angula 1990: 5-6) while Diescho’s book also follows a relatively typical liberationist plot. Poetry was also written, see for example Melber ed. 1982; Patemann and Mbumba eds. 1988; Swapo Women’s Council (n.d.); and Ya Nangolo 1991. For an analysis of this genre see Haarhof 1989.

For liberationist autobiographies and autobiographical novels from elsewhere in Southern Africa, see for example, Duka 1974; Mazorodze 1989; Pepetela 1980.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Clarence-Smith and Moorsom 1977; Gordon 1977; Moorsom 1989; du Pisani 1986; Serfontein 1976; Töttemeyer 1977 and 1978.

Importantly, some accounts are critical in the sense of openly criticizing Swapo's dominance and way of conducting the struggle for independence. Their most important contribution is the reinterpretation of the internal politics of Swapo by granting voice to those who were on the losing side in the movement's internal conflicts in exile.⁴⁵ After independence both mapping of previously non-researched issues and reinterpreting issues treated by colonial and nationalist historiography has got new wind under its wings. Often these accounts combine a reinterpretation or deconstruction of the main political points of view with a detailed analysis of some particular social and political issues and trajectories.⁴⁶

3.2 Versions of nationalism

Nationalism has been a topic of considerable interest in various social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, in recent years. By and large, primordialist explanations have given way to the view of nationalism as a central myth in modern societies, holding them together as 'imagined communities' by creating a unity, supposedly extending from 'ancient times' to the future, between 'a people' and a particular national space.⁴⁷ In this view, elite-driven practices, rituals and rhetorics have been accorded a crucial role in establishing the imagery of the nation as a dominant ideology. As a reaction, there has arisen a concern with popular versions of nationalism and their interplay with the elitist versions,⁴⁸ a current which this study joins.

Ortner's (1995) criticism of 'resistance studies' is useful in clarifying this transition. According to her, there has been a tendency to overgeneralize and simplify both the dominator and the dominated. The binary logic of this relationship has been given predominance over all kinds of internal contradictions and ambivalence within movements or even individual acts of resistance (or domination). Ortner argues that in order to understand 'resistance' it will have to be understood processually and the complexities of

⁴⁵ Some of these accounts have been written by the 'dissidents' themselves. They include Beukes, Beukes and Beukes 1986; Shipanga 1989; and the reports of the Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement (1996 and 1997). Also some accounts by scholars and other close observers give considerable weight to the dissidents' views. These accounts include Groth 1995; Leys and Saul eds. 1995; Peltola 1995; and Trewhela 1990, 1991a and 1991b.

⁴⁶ For accounts published after Namibia's independence, see Bauer 1998; Cliffe *et al.* 1994; Dobell 1998; Dreyer 1994; Hayes *et al.* eds. 1998; Leys and Saul eds. 1995; Peltola 1995.

⁴⁷ See Anderson 1991; Bhabha ed. 1990; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger eds. 1983; Smith 1987. Of these, Smith grounds national formations in 'ethnic roots', whereas the others propose various forms of 'inventionism'. For a summary of different positions, see Schlesinger 1987.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Geiger 1997; Papadakis 1998.

‘internal politics’ and ‘the ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance itself’ have to be analyzed. (*Ibid.*: 176-183, 190.)

Likewise, the concepts of nationalism and ‘liberation’ are abstractions from complicated sets of events. The broad historical trajectories they imply are not always similar, nor are they monolithic. Rather, they denote processes of localized practice. To concentrate on broad historical trajectories, as if they embodied a universal process easily leads to teleological explanations. In such an approach, collective actors, for instance liberation movements (or the state), become bearers of an essential identity, a unitary will, instead of heterogeneous motivations and interests. They come to play a certain role, carry out a certain function within the structure of history while appearing ahistorical and non-constructed themselves.

Such an approach has dominated the nationalist writing of Namibian history, which is an indication of the fact that movements of ‘resistance’ can play with the binary images of domination in order to unproblematize their own position within the configuration of power. During ‘the struggle’ Swapo tried, as it still does, to uphold the binary image of apartheid domination and united nationalist-revolutionary resistance. What is left out of this picture is the myriad of power relations and contradictions within Swapo (as well as within the apartheid state).

This interpretation of history was privileged in the contexts in which Namibian former exiles lived in exile, to the extent that it ostensibly approached naturality. It was promoted by Swapo in its publications and political education during the struggle and is still utilized in ‘nation-building’ after independence. Still, nationalism should not be taken as a given but as a discursive resource that has to be constantly reproduced in particular historical circumstances. The meanings it acquires in the life stories of former exiles do not appear to be determined by the experiences of colonialism or the formulations of the liberation movement in any straightforward manner. Thus, the nationalist history should not be taken as a pervasive and homogeneous discourse but rather as a field where different versions, ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’, elitist, popular and scholarly, compete for recognition and legitimacy.

After Namibian independence views that either reject or are critical of the established ‘liberation narrative’ have gained more prominence than before independence, voiced primarily by those in political opposition and by both local and foreign scholars. For

example, the critical study of Namibia's liberation struggle by Leys, Saul and others (Leys and Saul eds. 1995) is thorough and carefully argued, but instead of being about the 'liberation struggle' as a whole it concerns Swapo's evolution and practices as a political force. It tells much less about the daily practices, social relations, and consciousness of the 'rank and file' of the movement, of those ordinary Namibian men and women who, for one reason or another, participated in the struggle. There are also publications that shed light on the practices and social relations 'on the ground' but do so either within the nationalist dichotomy, or unanalytically. Thus, a critical analysis of exile life and the 'popular memory' of liberation struggle largely remains an untrodden terrain.

Apart from the reinterpretation of 'the struggle', the post-independence condition poses also a more immediate challenge to the liberation narrative. The demands of nation-building differ from those of the struggle. Therefore, the rhetoric of 'national reconciliation' is different from the rhetoric of 'liberation', although the former utilises and attempts to incorporate the latter. The emphasis has shifted from resistance to colonialism to the promotion of national unity. There have also been extensive practical changes in the lives of many Namibians, 'returnees' and 'remainers' alike, after independence.

Against this background, it is important to identify and analyze the discourses that the individual subjects enmeshed in these processes articulate and adhere to in their stories. How far do the narratives of former exiles conform to the nationalist version of history and what is the relation of the narrated self to this collective process? And is the narrative framework transformed at independence?

3.2.1 The liberation narrative

The nationalist historiography, including the autobiographies of Swapo leaders, advances particular images of colonialism and nationalism. I will refer to the amalgam of these images as the 'liberation narrative'. It formulates a continuous process of history that will inevitably lead to independence and stresses the role of Swapo as the main protagonist of this process. It postulates unity of 'the Namibian people' and establishes a utopian moral order to be fulfilled through 'national liberation'. It also presents a 'regulative' (Tölölyan 1989: 114-116) model of a Namibian 'freedom fighter' as opposed to 'Boers', 'collaborators' and 'puppets'. Peter Katjavivi's foreword (Katjavivi 1981: i, iii) to the 'official' Swapo history of the liberation struggle (Swapo 1981) provides an example:

Formed [in] April 1960, Swapo drew together various anti-colonial forces in Namibia. Then, it was the realisation of the Namibian people's need for a nation-wide movement to confront effectively the South African regime. Now, it has become the embodiment of their aspirations for freedom, locked in combat with South Africa in a war of liberation, and recognised by the international community and the United Nations as the 'sole authentic representative of the Namibian people'...There is much that remains to be done — not least to close the last chapter of the liberation struggle itself. That moment, however, will only herald the beginning of a new task of national reconstruction, a new era of control over our own lives, a time when, free of imperialist domination, we can begin not only to write, but to make our own history.

Here, Swapo appears as the natural and 'sole authentic' embodiment of the self-evident desire for national liberation, which is shared by all Namibians. Swapo fights the colonial evil with the support of the 'international community'. And, crucially, there is the foreseen culmination of the struggle in national independence, and the ensuing collective effort of development, or 'national reconstruction' and 'making our own history'.

Some themes emerge time and again in the narrative histories of liberation.⁴⁹ These include the following: the precolonial equilibrium of trade, alliances, and occasional conflict among the Namibian 'nations'; the deceits and predations of the colonial powers, foremostly the war of the Germans against the Herero and Nama in 1904-07; the 'fathers of the nation', that is, the precolonial leaders who resisted colonial intrusion and the later leaders of the nationalist movement; the homeland system and related restrictions enforced upon the black population by the colonial regime; the brutalities of the contract labour system; Bantu education, that is, the system of inferior education designed to prepare blacks for a subordinate position in society; the evolution of modern nationalism from the activities of students, chiefs, and, foremost, contract workers, leading into the formation of nationalist movements, especially OPC, OPO, and finally, Swapo⁵⁰; the 'Windhoek massacre' of 1959, in which the police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators who were opposing the forced removals of blacks to the new Katutura location in Windhoek, killing over ten and wounding over 50⁵¹; Nujoma's and other first generation Swapo leaders' leaving into exile; the start of the armed struggle in 1966; the 'terrorism trial' of 1967 in which Andimba (Herman) Toivo ya Toivo and several other first generation Swapo leaders were sentenced to long imprisonment; the International Court of Justice's withdrawal, in 1971, of the mandate given by the League of Nations to South Africa to rule Namibia; the churches'

⁴⁹ See, for example, the tables of contents in Swapo 1981; Katjavivi 1988; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa 1989.

⁵⁰ For a view that questions the portrayal of the birth of OPO and Swapo as the joint project of intellectuals and contract workers and stresses the role of 'a nascent intellectual élite' that then mobilized the workers, see Tapscott 1995: 155.

⁵¹ Figures concerning the dead and wounded vary. Soggot (1986: 28) puts the numbers at 11 dead and 54 wounded; Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan (1989: 253) speak of 13 dead and 54 wounded; and Swapo (1981: 287) of 13 dead and over 60 wounded.

decision to openly join in the liberation struggle; the general strike of 1971-1972 and the related worker and student activities; resistance against the bantustanisation schemes of the colonial power, especially the 1973 Ovamboland election boycott; the exodus of young Namibians into exile in 1974-75; South African attempts at an 'internal settlement' in the Namibian question, from 1974 onwards; the recognition of Swapo as 'the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people' by the UN General Assembly in 1976; the 'Kassinga massacre' in May 1978, in which the South African army attacked a Swapo camp in southern Angola, killing several hundred refugees; campaigns of repression, harassment, and arrest against Swapo activists inside Namibia, as well as atrocities committed against the civilians by the colonial military and paramilitary forces, at various times during the struggle; heroism and successes of Swapo's guerrilla warfare, with the help of popular support; the student, worker and community-based resistance of the 1980s⁵²; the Constituent Assembly elections in 1989; and the formal attainment of independence in 1990.

In addition, a specific set of pictorial themes accompanies the verbal narrative. These include: the early 'national heroes'; working and living conditions of the black majority in apartheid Namibia, contrasted with white affluence; the brutal appearance and actions of the police and the army; demonstrations by unified, defiant masses with clenched fist salutes, dressed in Swapo t-shirts; noble and heroic nationalist leaders, most often Sam Nujoma and Andimba Toivo ya Toivo; activities in the Swapo 'health and education centres' in exile, usually schooling, health care, and farming; PLAN cadres, usually in a parade or on a mission; and Kassinga before and after the massacre. These verbal and pictorial themes are so constantly repeated that each of them becomes emblematic of the liberation narrative as a whole.⁵³

The nationalist historiography is organized around the theme of resistance right from the beginning. In some of these writings, the acts of precolonial resistance to European influence and colonial aspirations are portrayed as direct predecessors to modern Namibian nationalism. However, in more scholarly presentations, the motives of precolonial resistance are seen to have been crucially different from the nationalist ones. Writes Mbuende (1986: 140):

⁵² In nationalist literature, this resistance is read as indicative of Swapo's growing support and directly linked to its activities. For a contrasting view, see Leys and Saul 1995b: 81-84.

⁵³ See, for example, International Defence and Aid Fund 1989 *passim*; Melber 1983 *passim*; Swapo 1981 *passim*; Katjavivi 1988: xxv-xxxii; König 1983: between pp. 16-17 and between pp. 48-49.

[T]here was no national social formation in Namibia during the pre-colonial era and...its formation was an effect of colonialism...[This] process...was accompanied by the destruction of the natural economy...and by the deformation of ethnic political institutions with their integration into the colonial administrative system. The integration of the various African communities into the colonial system, and the resultant common experience of colonial oppression and exploitation, created a sense of common destiny among Africans which found its expression in nationalism and the idea of national liberation.

Also the portrayal of life in the precolonial societies varies from images of harmony and well-being within and between these societies to more critical views that acknowledge the existence of conflicts and inequality even before the arrival of colonialism.

However, despite these differences, these accounts are always motivated by their relevance to the nationalist perspective. Thus, the precolonial period is meaningful only insofar as it enters into a relation with the historical narrative of national liberation. This is the reason for concentrating on the aspect of resistance, for instance. Katjavivi's 'history of resistance' in Namibia (Katjavivi 1988) provides a good example of this tendency. Relatively critical and well-informed as this study may be, its nationalist motivation directs the choice of the topic and the decision of what should be discussed and what left out. The result is a narrative where history seems to flow naturally into Swapo's emergence as the victor in the struggle for national liberation.

Apart from the general accounts of nationalist history, the Namibian struggle was personified to a large extent. The Swapo leaders were made to exemplify the ideal typical nationalist hero. A genre of autobiographical writing within the framework of the liberation struggle was a part of this activity (for titles, see p. 36, fn. 43). It was an instance of 'great man' biography in which a person is made into a heroic emblem of a collective, here national, myth. In it, powerful individuals embody collective mentality and collective aspirations.

There are assumptions in the autobiographical tradition that converge to form the idea that a life is a unity that proceeds chronologically onwards from early childhood and demonstrates personal change. We also commonly expect the subjects of these accounts to attach meaning to the events of their life by interpretation, evaluation and emotion. To someone conditioned by the genre of Western autobiography, these ideas seem to describe a 'natural' form of personal account. And furthermore, the autobiographical genre offers a model for 'living out' lives and thus helps to recreate the very modes of personhood that it represents. Yet autobiography is not a natural form of representing experience. It is a

peculiar form of narrative, a genre that was popularized with the rise of bourgeois individualism in the West.⁵⁴

No 'classic' autobiographies in the sense of concentrating on self-reflection, individual agency or conflict and negotiation between the individual and the collective emerged within the Namibian liberation struggle.⁵⁵ Haarhof (1989: 91, 93, 94) finds this 'emphasis...on...a people rather than the private life of an individual' as 'problematic' because the 'purging of human ambiguity and inconsistency makes the life stories...less human and less convincing.' However, the fact that such autobiography did not emerge from 'the struggle' is hardly surprising, since this kind of 'self-accounting' is one specific form of telling one's life and one has to be conditioned and willing to narrate in it. The motivation behind Namibian struggle autobiographies was quite different. They were intended to draw support to the liberation movement and to establish and keep up commitment among its cadres. There may also be a more fundamentally different conception of an individual's place and role in society involved in the production of these accounts. These writings constitute a hybrid genre in the sense of intermingling the Western form of 'individualist' autobiography with the heroic mythology of the 'liberation narrative'.

Helmut Angula's book *The Two Thousand Days of Haimbodi ya Haufiku* is a good example of this genre. It is not a straight autobiography but a novel based on the experiences of Angula himself and other Namibians. This makes it highly informative in regard of the autobiographical genre of the Namibian liberation struggle, as it is not restricted by any single individual's life trajectory. Rather, it brings forth what Angula considers to be the 'typical' life of a Namibian involved in the liberation struggle. Let us have a brief look at the outline of the book's main events and turning points. The book opens with the subject undergoing torture in Pretoria before the 'terrorism trial'. After this introductory passage, we follow the subject's individual development chronologically. This consists of a short description of his childhood and youth, contract labour on a farm, breaking the contract and coming to Windhoek, leading a *tsotsi* (hooligan) life, meeting a nationalist mentor and

⁵⁴ Feminist critique has strongly contributed to the questioning of the established assumptions of autobiographical representation and to showing this representation to be constructed and culturally, historically and socially specific; see e.g. Marcus 1996; Personal Narratives Group eds. 1989. The self-narrative precedents of autobiography developed in Europe by the fifth century. Before the emergence of 'autobiography' as a distinct genre in the eighteenth century, the dominant forms of this self-expression were the confession and the memoir. The former denoted an account of an individual's emotions, feelings, secrets, and the like whereas the latter chronicled the events in the person's career; Langness and Frank 1981: 91-92.

⁵⁵ For accounts from the Southern African context that stand in contrast to the Namibian ones in this respect, see Pepetela 1980 and Sachs 1990a and 1990b.

getting involved in nationalist activities, the Windhoek massacre, returning to Ovamboland and spreading the Swapo word there, failing in an attempt to leave into exile to join Swapo there; being arrested, flogged and jailed by tribal authorities, then freed and welcomed by the family and friends, resuming political activities and being harassed by the police, being arrested and sentenced in the ‘terrorism trial’, serving the sentence on Robben Island,⁵⁶ being released and banished to Ovamboland, leaving into exile in a group of Swapo regional leaders and SYL activists after the overthrow of the Caetano regime in Portugal, the long and difficult journey through Angola to Zambia, setting up a military camp, going to combat and being wounded, Swapo’s internal crisis, portrayed as a result of a few traitors’ machinations, being forced to cooperate with UNITA, saving Namibians from a UNITA camp, fighting against UNITA and South African forces, being given a front to open and crossing back to Namibia to fight there.

Around this skeleton of events and turnings, Angula dishes out description of the inhumanity of contract labour and other colonial conditions, of the brutality of colonial authorities and their ‘puppets’ and of political mobilization and increasing political consciousness; there are long discussions and speeches explaining the nationalist position (including the discrediting of other nationalist organizations than Swapo). Swapo appears as the force that quickly succeeds in unifying the people in resistance, largely because a fundamental unity is already there, waiting to be awakened.⁵⁷ Swapo activists emerge both as everymen and as heroes (cf. Haarhof 1989: 92-93). The focus is on the public, political life of the individual subject while his personal life is bypassed.

Other liberationist autobiographies are largely similar in these respects. However, Ndadi, Ya-Otto and the Shamenas end their autobiographies at leaving into exile. This points out that the purpose of these accounts was to legitimize and glorify the nationalist struggle by portraying the ‘typical’ life of a black person in colonial Namibia. Also, life within Swapo structures in exile was a continuing circumstance to the authors at the time when their accounts were recorded. It was history still in the making that could not yet be brought into a closure by writing it down. By contrast, Shipanga, Shityuwete and Angula continue their

⁵⁶ The main South African prison where political prisoners were held. They included Nelson Mandela and the father figure of Swapo, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo.

⁵⁷ Ya-Otto (1982: 68) provides a fitting expression of this view: ‘Through hundreds of public meetings...SWAPO was able to win over the majority of Namibians to the cause of independence. The desire for self-rule was already there, in their gut feelings about daily life under the whites. We only articulated the discontent, generalized it, told people in Walvis Bay and Windhoek what people in the countryside were thinking and vice versa; we added the perspective of our history, of Africa’s history, and the new era of independence that was dawning.’

narrative beyond leaving into exile. The reason why Shipanga and Shityuwete do so is basically the same: the high point of their accounts is yet to come. In Shipanga's story, it is his conflict with the leading faction of Swapo in exile, which leads to his arrest and breakaway from the movement. In Shityuwete's story, it is his arrest as a guerrilla by the South Africans and his ensuing imprisonment on Robben Island. Angula's case may be related to the fact that his book is not strictly an autobiography. This gives him more freedom to choose which aspects of exile life he describes and to avoid disclosing information that would have run contrary to heroic liberationism.

The regularity with which the main themes of the nationalist accounts of history appear and relate to each other suggests that there is a considerable extent of structural similarity between them. This is in keeping with the suggestion (see p. 23-30) that the construction of life stories and other historical accounts involves processes of selection and structuration that establish coherence and express a particular perspective to the 'facts' and 'events' that are told.

We can start to unravel the apparent similarity of nationalist accounts of history by turning to a classic of structural analysis of folktales, namely, Vladimir Propp's study of Russian fairy tales (Propp 1968). According to Propp, all of these tales are constructed according to a few variants of a basic narrative scheme (*ibid.*: 21-23, 25-65, 104-113, 149-154). In the following figure, I have translated typical ingredients of the 'liberation narrative' into Propp's terminology of the elements ('functions') of the folktale.⁵⁸

Propp's elements of the folktale	Liberation narrative
the initial situation	precolonial harmony
interdiction	need for cooperation among Namibian tribes

⁵⁸ By making this comparison I am not suggesting that nationalist historiography and Russian folktales are similar in all respects. For instance, the narrative elements available in the construction of the 'liberation narrative' are largely restricted to what are generally accepted as historical facts and events, whereas folktales are not subject to this kind of a restriction. However, Propp may have discovered some basic structural properties of narrative, as amazingly little violence has to be done to the flow of typical presentations of nationalist history when applying his scheme to it, as long as one remembers that it is not a single narrative but an amalgam of many narratives ostensibly dealing with various events and characters.

In Propp's analysis, some of the 'elements' appear only in alternative variants of the basic scheme of the folktale. This is not relevant to the present analogy.

violation of the interdiction	tribes do not cooperate
villainy / lack	establishment and continuation of colonialism (recurs in many forms) / independence
mediation / connective incident	birth and formation of nationalism
consent to counteraction	taking up the liberation struggle (especially armed struggle)
departure	leaders leave into exile
the first function of the donor (the international community, Swapo itself, or, most importantly, history)	the movement in exile tested by hardships and lack of support and within the country by harassment (recurrently); requested to carry out the struggle in a certain way (by the international community)
reaction of the hero	sustaining hardships; overcoming harassment (recurrently); rallying for international and national support; taking up the armed struggle
acquisition of the magical agent	the 'progressive' forces of history side with Swapo; Swapo gets international and national support
struggle with the villain/ difficult task	fighting against South African colonialism on 'multiple fronts' (over a long time); mobilizing for the elections ⁵⁹ , facing the difficulties of the transition period and of ensuring national unity
branding	becoming the 'sole authentic representative' of the Namibian nation
claims of a false hero (over time)	South African 'tricks', including granting 'independence' for the homelands, attempts at an 'internal settlement' and, finally, attempts to get the DTA to win the constituent assembly elections
liquidation of misfortune or lack	South Africa and its 'collaborators' have to accept Namibia's independence as a unitary state (gradually)
return	the exiled leaders and other members of the liberation movement return to Namibia
victory/ solution of the task (over time)	multiple instances of victories at the military and diplomatic fronts and in the struggle against colonial domination at home; the election victory and victories in subsequent elections; national reconciliation
recognition of the hero	Swapo accepted as the justified ruler of Namibia after the election victory
exposure of the false hero	the public fall from grace of South Africa's 'puppets'
transfiguration	Swapo transformed from a 'revolutionary' liberation movement into a 'responsible' government; adoption of new, 'moderate' policies; 'from uniforms to suits'
punishment of the false hero and/or of the villain	South Africa's withdrawal from Namibia; the demise of the opposition
wedding and accession to the throne	formal attainment of independence; Swapo in government; development

Propp's scheme has been given semiotic depth in A.J. Greimas's work (see e.g. Greimas 1987a; 1987b; Greimas and Courtés 1982: e.g. 5-9, 203-211, 245-246; Perron 1987: xxvii-xxxv). He draws from Propp's typification of the 'dramatis personae' but subjects Propp's 'functions' to what Jameson (1987: ix) calls 'semiotic reduction' and arrives at a far more compressed basic structure of narrative. If we employ Greimas's actant model (see Greimas

⁵⁹ The first elections with universal suffrage in Namibia were held on 7-11 November 1989. In these elections, a constituent assembly with the tasks of drafting the constitution of the new republic and selecting its first president was voted in. After independence, the 72 members of the Constituent Assembly became the first National Assembly. Swapo received 57 per cent of the vote, which gave it 41 of the 72 parliamentary seats. The Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, a coalition of parties that participated in colonial government, got 28 per cent of the vote and 21 parliamentary seats. The rest of the vote went to eight small parties. Cliffe 1989:157-158; Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan 1990: 52-53. The constitution was to be adopted by a two-thirds majority. Therefore, Swapo, with its 41 seats, could not draw up the constitution on its own.

1987a; 1987b) to the specificities of the liberation narrative, they boil down to the following categories, whose interaction constitutes its progression:

Actant	Actors of the liberation narrative
subject	Swapo
object	independence, freedom
sender	history
receiver	the Namibian nation
opponent	South Africa, colonialism
helper	Namibian ‘masses’, ‘progressive forces’

Thus, the liberation narrative is compressed to a reading where Namibia’s independence and the freedom of its people is taken away by the colonialists, and the forces of history send Swapo to reclaim them for the Namibian people with the help of the Namibian ‘masses’ and international ‘progressive forces’.

The important lesson of the above exercise is that the particular narratives that depict the ‘history of the Namibian liberation struggle’ are shown to be constrained in their construction by an archetypal, perhaps universal, narrative structure. This structure establishes meaningful relations between the particular elements — facts and events — of the liberation narrative and invests them with moral connotations. In this way, a particular set of past things come to be selected and to occupy specific positions in various tellings of ‘Namibian history’, themselves versions of the ‘grand narrative’ of liberation. Furthermore, because of this narrative structure, the morale of ‘liberation’ is easily graspable and memorable, and therefore lends itself to various forms of self-narration, as I will seek to demonstrate below.

It is impossible to say anything definite about the direct influence of nationalist writings on the people in exile. Many of those whom I interviewed were endowed with developed literary skills. Some told of having read the abovementioned autobiographical narratives. It is probable that also many other intellectuals with whom the issue was not discussed had done so too and thus been directly ‘influenced’ by them. Apart from these writings, they had also become familiar with other models of narrating and ‘acting out’ history and personhood as they had lived for relatively long periods away from the Swapo communities of Angola and Zambia. In this way, they had acquired also other discursive resources than those offered by their Namibian background and by Swapo’s practices and ‘political education’ in exile.

However, the direct influence of ‘Swapo autobiographies’ may not have been as important as the indirect effects of the mentality that they express. These writings are just one part of the effort on the part of the movement’s leadership to keep up the imagery of unity, heroic commitment and orientation towards the future among its members who were struggling in the often hard and unglorious everyday conditions of exile where Swapo was both a pervasive context of everyday existence and an idealized agent of liberation. Thus, the mythical figures, key symbols and historical morality of both the general historical writings and autobiographies emerged in a simplified form in the ‘political education’ and regulations of Swapo in exile. In this way, they permeated the consciousness of also those to whom the world of textual representation remained relatively strange (see chapters 5.2.4 and 5.3).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Whatever its source, the idea of powerful personalities as emblems of the struggle was expressed by many of the people I met when they referred to the ‘big guys’ who had ‘made it’ by becoming part of the new political elite, like government ministers and permanent secretaries, as the people whom I should interview. There was a widespread assumption that theirs were the paradigmatic lives and stories, the ones that mattered most and provided a model for others.

4 The main variants of the liberation narrative in the stories

I shall now start examining the plotting of the stories and the subjectivities presented in them. There is a simple reason for treating emplotment and represented identities together: I feel that they go together to a large extent so that particular images of personhood are related to particular forms of emplotment.

4.1 The liberation narrative in the stories: John

My request for a life story was not unintelligible to any of the interviewees. All of them readily produced some kind of a narrative. All of the stories followed a chronological pattern, although there was considerable variation in its precision. However, there was not a single narrative that would have laid equal weight to each unit of time. In all stories, some ‘events’ and ‘periods’ were granted a status of central importance and, conversely, even long periods of time could be passed over almost without a mention. This already points towards the ‘moral’ character of the stories, that they are not neutral lists of every conceivable ‘fact’ and ‘event’ but wholes linked together in a plot by a particular point of view.

In most of the stories one’s individual life course is firmly connected to the collective narrative of national liberation, presented in the previous chapter. Many of the major events and turnings of the liberation narrative find their place also in the life stories. Perhaps the clearest indication of this is that in most narratives the early parts of the subject’s life before politicization and leaving into exile are told very briefly or, in some cases, omitted completely. Accordingly, the chronology is often stopped at return to Namibia, the constituent assembly elections, or the formal attainment of independence. Thus, it is participation in the ‘liberation struggle’ and the period of exile, which dominate the stories. This might result partly from how I formulated my research interests when I introduced myself to the interviewees, but the pattern is so consistent that I am inclined to conclude that it arises from a more profound understanding of their lives on the part of the former exiles. Apart from these, many individually significant events and turnings are directly connected to the ‘liberation struggle’ by the narrators themselves. Things that are narrated as individually significant are most often justified by portraying them as beneficial to all. Only rarely is something presented as of only individual importance and not related to the ‘struggle’ in any way.

Let us analyze John's story as an example of how the liberation narrative frames the narration of individual lives. I interviewed him twice, once in a public park and once in a bar. He had been born and raised in Ovambo and left Namibia in 1976 at the age of 22. He stayed in Angola until 1978 when he was sent to Hungary to study. He stayed there until 1989 when he returned to Namibia. At the time of the interviews he worked as a journalist in the government payroll.

His story begins with a childhood account in which his polygamous Ovambo family and the traditional way of life in general constitute a happy and innocent environment, which is then shattered by the outside forces of colonialism and Christianity. There are biblical resonances in this part of the story, as John portrays the struggle over him (or his soul) between his father (or the pristine traditional order in general) and the school as an agent of Christianity and colonialism (or the Tree of Good and Evil, which simultaneously opens the way to knowledge — to good modernity, and to corruption by the white man's plans of colonization — to bad modernity; see chapter 5.5.3). Like many others, John says that he did not yet understand the colonial situation properly as a child. However, he has 'later realized' that his father 'was right to a certain extent' in trying to keep him away from school. (Appendix 1, pp. 1-2, lines 1-71.) This childhood narrative is exceptionally detailed. Most narrators omitted this part or related it extremely shortly, even if I asked them to tell about their childhood and family.⁶¹ This is the case especially in the 'less developed', fragmentary stories of the non-intellectuals (see chapter 4.3) but also in many otherwise detailed, coherent, and 'agentive'⁶² stories.

Tracing ancestry and tying one's life into a parts of a traditional order does not constitute a deviation from the liberation narrative. Rather, this part of his story establishes the 'initial situation' of a happy childhood as a background against which one then grows to encounter and understand the colonial evil, the 'villain', whose deceitful acts aim at instilling subordination and feelings of inferiority in the still innocent child. The contrast between the pristine 'traditional' order and the shattering and oppressive forces of colonialism serves as a background that motivates the ensuing narrative of politicization.⁶³ Like many others,

⁶¹ Note that the following scheme is, again, amalgamated from the number of stories studied. Not all of the narrative 'functions' can be found in all of the stories.

⁶² I borrow this concept from the Comaroffs' (1991: 22) distinction between 'agentive power...the command wielded by human beings in specific historical contexts' and 'nonagentive power' which is hidden 'in the forms of everyday life' and 'seem[s] to be beyond human agency'. I use the distinction to refer to the extent a story articulates individual agency.

⁶³ Haarhof (1989: 94) notes a similar contrast in Ya-Otto (1982: 3, 9, 77)

John tells about being introduced to the ‘good’ nationalist political forces as a child prior to politicization proper, as he attended meetings without ‘understand[ing] what was going on’ and saw how people were arrested (appendix 1, p. 2, lines 77-84).

Hence, belonging to political community is thus extended even beyond the beginning of their individual involvement. Some do this by telling of a tradition of political participation in the family that had fed one’s individual politicization while some others recalled aspects of the general history of Swapo and the liberation struggle. That this is in contrast with what is told of childhood and family apart from politics does not mean that the narrators did not consider their families important. It merely points out that at least in a life story presentation the ‘liberation struggle’ and Swapo emerged as the most important frameworks of belonging. The genealogy presented was almost exclusively the national genealogy, and not the family genealogy. This may as well be a matter of self-perception as of what was considered to be important to tell to an outside enquirer.

Despite these first stirrings of political consciousness, it is at secondary school that John is politically radicalized. The significance of this turning is marked by his narrative growing more detailed. He describes particular events of confrontation, telling how the students argued with South African soldiers and fought with a group of soldiers (appendix 1, pp. 2-3, lines 96-119). The significance of the latter event lies in its consequences; it serves as a triggering event that leads John into an unreconcilable conflict with the authorities and thus contributes to the major turning point of his narrative, namely his decision to leave the country a few months later.

Here John follows a narrative pattern typical of ‘liberationist’ stories. In them, description of various forms of colonial injustice and violence set the liberation narrative proper into motion. At this point, narration usually grows more detailed. Freedom from colonialism, violence and ignorance is presented as the opposite condition that is lacking. In militantly heroic ‘seeker’ stories, narratives of growing awareness and politicization, of attending Swapo meetings, arranging demonstrations, and participating in student activism, usually follow immediately, constituting the ‘mediation’ that leads into committing oneself to ‘the struggle’ in exile. In this respect, these stories come closest to the archetypal model of the liberation narrative. In some less militant but nevertheless nationalistically committed stories, developing a wish to get more and better education performs this ‘function’ (see chapter 5.1.4).

In the liberationist stories, the subject ‘consents to counteraction’ by deciding to ‘join the struggle’ in exile. The status of leaving Namibia (‘departure’) and joining Swapo in exile as the decisive turning point in one’s life is suggested by the vividness and detail with which politicization or other events that lead into leaving, as well as the episode of leaving itself, are recalled.⁶⁴ Leaving is a step into the universe of liberation struggle that has since become the axis around which one’s whole narrated life turns. It is tempting to think of it also as a liminal period in a transition from the status of a youth inside Namibia to the status of an exiled Namibian and Swapo cadre, most often portrayed as a heroic freedom fighter, or simply as a more mature person, an adult.

These characteristics come well to the fore in John’s story. His narrative of leaving is saturated with militancy.⁶⁵ He tells of having thought about leaving twice before but now the situation had deteriorated so much that he had to leave. However, he stresses, well-considered militant commitment was the fundamental motive and he ‘was ready to die’ in the liberation struggle. Education was also a motive, he says, but would come later.⁶⁶ Leaving emerges as a collective phenomenon: John leaves with ‘more than half of the...class’ and the group becomes bigger on the way. His narrative also conveys a sense of leaving as an adventure with mythical overtones. This is reflected in how the big group of leavers, helped by the guerrillas, manages to cheat the colonial army and slip out of the country, as well as in meeting the first group of guerrillas in Angola. Almost invisible even with their guns, and including someone whom he knew and idolized, now an armed guerrilla, they appear almost like someone from the land of the dead and inspire the newcomers with their weapons and liberation songs. (Appendix 1, pp. 3-4, lines 120-169 and 199-204.)

John then spends a few months in Kassinga. His narrative of this period concentrates on hard work and shortage of food. John turns these circumstances into a test of commitment, and contrasts his reaction with the attitude of a friend who regretted having left Namibia. (Appendix 1, p. 4, lines 188-204.) This is also a shared characteristic of the liberationist stories. Most narrators convey a sense of having been tested by the initial hardships of the

⁶⁴ Apart from John’s story, see chapter 5.1.4 and appendix 1, pp. 10-14, lines 80-299, pp. 22-23, lines 3-7 and 48-90. For further analysis of heroic but ‘anti-liberationist’ and non-heroic ‘victim’ stories, see chapter 6 and appendix 1, pp. 29-46. In them, leaving Namibia and joining Swapo in exile are seen in a different way than in the ‘liberationist’ stories, but appear significant nevertheless.

⁶⁵ Militancy is the favoured attitude in the narrated reasons for leaving. I deal with this issue more closely in chapter 5.1.4.

⁶⁶ In this respect, his presentation follows the order of what actually happened to him.

journey and exile life, by military training, and by demands of obedience and loyalty towards the liberation movement. The narrated subject reacts to these tests ('the first function of the donor'; cf. chapter 3.2.1) by overcoming hardships and taking up the duties delegated by the movement, and accepting Swapo's authority (sometimes only after confrontation) ('hero's reaction'). These actions lead into maturation into a proper cadre of the liberation movement in exile through the achievement of military skills, education and other means of contributing to the struggle (and of personal advancement), political morale, and commitment ('magical agent'). These motifs usually form a whole that is often narrated in detail (see also chapter 5.2). After this, the subject is transferred to the front or to an educational institution, where the actual participation in the 'liberation struggle', consisting of armed fighting or of encountering hardships and obstacles in education and other tasks aimed at 'liberation', takes place ('struggle/difficult task'). It is complemented by accounts of enduring hardships and overcoming obstacles by determination and thereby gradually winning the struggle ('victory/solution'). In many stories, there are not only one but multiple instances of 'struggles' won, and of hardships overcome by determination.

Along with these lines, when John is directed to an educational career, he justifies it by 'the good policy' of Swapo that the 'struggle should be waged on multiple fronts'. This is a crucial formulation, as it indicates how he reconciles his narrated militancy at leaving with his actual departure to an educational career. Education is made a part of the front and thereby included within the sphere of militant commitment.⁶⁷ After spending some time as 'a PLAN member' in Zambia, apparently in military training, John lives in the civilian settlement of Nyango, going to school, until he is mobilized because of the possibility of South African attack. (Appendix 1, pp. 4-5, lines 173-182 and 209-215.) Notably, he passes over this period briefly, despite his narrated militancy at leaving. One possible reason for this is the plainness and lack of heroism of actual training and military life. However, it is more probable that this period has been relegated to the background by his subsequent departure into an educational career. From its vantage point the time in the military appears inconsequential. In his story, managing to achieve educational objectives in a foreign country, Hungary, for the benefit of the 'Namibian revolution' constitutes the main phase of his actual participation in the 'liberation struggle'. He tells of having been ambitious as regards education and of having overcome his longing to return back 'home' to the Swapo settlements with the help of this ambition. Yet he places his efforts towards educational

⁶⁷ The metaphor of 'multiple fronts' was not John's own invention but an established concept within Swapo for speaking about its various activities in exile, a rhetorical device to maintain a sense of unity and collective purpose among the members and supporters of the movement.

advancement within the idea of ‘fighting on multiple fronts’. Even here, John’s story is organized around belonging to the liberation movement. Education is merely one method of advancing the liberation struggle. In keeping with this attitude, he tells of having been the students’ representative of Swapo and says that there was no question of not returning to Namibia even when he got married to a Hungarian. (Appendix 1, p. 5, lines 216-238 and 255-262.)

On another scale from the liminality of leaving Namibia, the whole exile period can be understood as a liminal state, a period of waiting, uncertainty and temporary arrangements (which in practice lasted for years), of being out of category. Usually, such anomalies in ‘the national order of things’, to borrow Malkki’s (1995a; 1995b) formulation, are classified as ‘refugees’. As she (1995a; 1995b: 4-17) demonstrates, ‘refugee’ is an elusive concept, covering diverse situations. Significantly, many of the former exiles referred to having explicitly refused to be classified as refugees, the passive, helpless objects of others’ interventions. In their own eyes they were committed freedom fighters waging the liberation struggle on the ‘fronts’ of military action, diplomacy, and education.⁶⁸ The ultimate reference point of this struggle was the ‘promised land’ of ‘liberation’ or ‘independence’, which seems to have referred to a combination of longing for homes and families and of the more abstract imagery of an ‘imagined’ nationness. Narratives of exile life are largely narratives of waiting and living for the future, narratives of hardship, commitment and comradeship.

From this angle, it is not coincidental that return is another major turning point in the stories, as it fulfills the liberation narrative and ends the liminality of exile. The innumerable partial ‘victories’ of individual members of the liberation movement, working in the spirit of unity (see chapter 5.3; in John’s story, appendix 1, p. 5, lines 239-254), eventually lead to South Africa’s acceptance of Namibia’s independence and the return of the exiles (‘liquidation of the lack or misfortune’). This often coincides with the narrated subject’s return to Namibia during the transition period. Also in John’s story, his return from exile immediately after he has finished his studies is a victorious culmination: ‘It was...like a promised thing, like a dream that really came true’ (appendix 1, p. 6, lines 273-274).

⁶⁸ Apart from being based on narrative liberationism, this distinction was based on the fact that those Namibian refugees who belonged to Swapo were not taken care directly by the UNHCR but by the liberation movement that was granted considerable sovereignty and autonomy in dealing with its ‘citizens’.

However, return is only a partial victory. The returnees are presented with yet another ‘difficult task’, namely that of the elections against the colonial regime and its puppets. This task finds its ‘solution’ in election victory, whereby the members of the liberation movement are generally accepted as ‘liberators’ and national heroes (‘recognition of the hero’). At the same time, rumour mongers and sowers of seeds of disunity are revealed and disgraced (‘exposure of the false hero’). South Africa has to withdraw from Namibia and, gradually, the opposition faces demise (‘punishment of the villain’). With the attainment of independence, the exiled members of the liberation movement become citizens of an independent nation, having a country and ‘their’ party, Swapo, in government.

In John’s story, these events are portrayed as inevitable, as something prescribed by the objective logic of history. John is present at the independence ceremony in Windhoek, ‘observing the goal being scored that we had been playing for during those years’ (appendix 1, p. 6, lines 303-318). This reveals the teleological understanding of history associated with the liberation narrative. The workings of such a mode of thought are clarified by Harding, in her analysis of a born-again preacher’s life story. According to her, in born-again discourse:

What comes before prefigures, or ‘typifies,’ what comes after; what comes after fulfills, or completes, what came before...Story and event are utterly inseparable...[There is] a particular theory of causality and hence history, one that interprets, or posits, connections between events and persons (and stories) in terms of God’s design. (Harding 1992: 69.)

Only a couple of the Namibians’ stories, those by the two older generation narrators, refer to the will of God or ‘God’s plan’ as the origin of historical events and their meaning (see Lucia’s narrative on p. 73-75). Yet Harding’s words are applicable also to other ‘liberationist’ stories. Like born-again discourse, the liberation narrative is an inevitably teleological narrative organized by a moral point of view. It just articulates a secular teleology instead of a divine one, referring to objective forces of history rather than the will of God. Therefore, Namibian independence appears as inevitable. Sometimes this is stated explicitly and the inevitability is attributed to the fact that ‘all other nations have gained their independence’, to the ‘relentless struggle’ of Swapo, or to ‘the will of the people’.

Indeed, many end their initial narratives in their return or winning the elections, while in other stories the tone of narration changes considerably. This is the case also with John. In his initial narrative, he just mentions briefly that he participated in the election campaign and then started working in the government. This is reflective of the position of return and winning the elections as the climax of the liberation narrative. However, return is also a

concrete break that considerably altered the conditions of former exiles' lives. Everything before that is past, and everything after that is present. The present continues, so 'the true version' of it cannot be told yet. Furthermore, for many former exiles, the loosening of exile 'unity' and security in the post-independence condition challenges the successful ending of the liberation narrative ('accession to the throne'). This radical break between the past and the present is the clearest indication of the epic (see Bakhtin 1981:13-17) character of liberationist stories.

Indeed, the narration of 'after return' that emerges from what John told in our subsequent discussion is dual. On one hand, there are challenges to 'unity' and feelings of being out of place: 'Everything was strange', he says, commenting on what he felt after returning. He tells about still getting used to people and places. Partly, this is caused by changes in his home area; people who used to live there have moved out, new people have moved in and John finds that he is not always known anymore. Indeed, he has found that returnee communality overrules family solidarity. The former exiles have a common language and understand each other well, especially those who are 'intelligent'. They also help each other unselfishly.⁶⁹ On the other hand, he carries the collective effort of 'the struggle' forward by telling how he, in his work, puts the skills he achieved in exile into the service of the Namibian nation and attempts to participate in bringing about 'development' (appendix 1, pp. 6-7, lines 271-303, 319-332, 341-361). Far from an exception, this is an example of a pattern in the 'intellectuals'' narratives, a pattern that is one instance of an even more widely shared anticipation that the real liberation would take place in the future (see chapter 5.5.4).

The emplotment of liberationist stories can be distilled into the following actantial positions:

Actant	Actors of 'liberationist' life stories
subject	the exile
object	independence, freedom (including self-realization)
sender	history, wish to participate in the liberation struggle and to have a better life
receiver	the Namibian nation, one's family and friends, oneself
opponent	South Africa, colonialism, adverse conditions in exile
helper	Swapo, commitment, fellow exiles

⁶⁹ This is a view he shares with many former exiles, especially the well-educated urban-based middle class. See chapter 5.5.3.

In other words, in the elementary plot of liberationist life stories, the Namibian people's independence and freedom, and along with it, one's possibilities for self-realization, are withheld by the South African colonial regime and, sent by the forces of history and his or her own wish to attain national liberation and a better life, the subject sets out to fulfill the task of reclaiming them by joining the 'liberation struggle' in exile. There, the achievement of the above objectives is continuously thwarted by adverse conditions and counteraction by the colonial power. However, the subject overcomes these obstacles with the help of the liberation movement and his or her own commitment and, together with other exiles, achieves Namibia's independence as well as various forms of self-realization (often projected to the future) for the benefit of her- or himself, his or her family and friends, and the whole nation.⁷⁰

Through these readings, the life stories and autobiographies of Namibian former exiles can be seen to manifest a tendency to model one's life after a pre-existing structure of meaning, the 'liberation narrative'. Sometimes the narrators even made this relation explicit in the interview situation by reminding that one or another aspect of their life history 'is all in the books', implying that their subjective take on those issues conformed to the established narrative of liberation history.

Let us now have a closer look at the forms of subjectivity that appear in the liberationist stories. The fact that life stories are often told at someone else's request implies that they are not necessarily bound by autobiographical assumptions about the centrality of the narrated individual subject. One may expect them to vary in ways that are instructive of the narrators' understandings of agency, identity and history.⁷¹ Indeed, the former exile stories fuse the 'personal' and the 'public' or 'collective'.⁷² They are not merely 'life historical' but 'historical' as well since they focus not only on personal events and their interpretations by the subjects but bring in variable degrees of collective subjectivity. 'Namibian history'

⁷⁰ All narratives embody a 'journey', a progression of events that bring about a transformation of some kind. However, there are two senses of 'journey' in liberationist life stories: the narrative progression of events is supported by concrete spatial transitions, in addition to temporal ones. This may make it easier for the former exiles to utilize the models of archetypal heroism — which also involve concrete journeys — in the construction of their life narratives. For a detailed exposition of the liberation narrative as a journey, see chapter 5.

⁷¹ Somewhat surprisingly, this was ignored in anthropology for a long time. To a large extent, the biographical materials that were collected were edited to correspond to the Western autobiographical form. There was undoubtedly a humanistic motive involved, as this procedure makes it easier for an average reader to get nearer to 'the other', but the window into how the subjects of these 'autobiographies' themselves structured their experience was consequently closed.

⁷² Skultans (1997) speaks of post-Soviet Latvian life stories in similar terms as a hybrid genre that intermingles personal and collective experience.

and personal history go together to a large extent, so that personal experience is situated within the narrative of collective resistance and liberation, and this narrative, in turn, is given credibility by relating personal experiences which confirm it. Experiences considered most important and interesting are those that relate most directly to the liberation narrative. Most experiences are never told outside this context but either interpreted so as to fit into it or simply passed over. Much less emphasis is laid, for instance, to the practices of daily life unless they find meaning in the liberationist context. Likewise, the narrative of the liberation struggle, and one's own identity as part of the liberation community, emerges to order and give coherence even to those events that happened before actively involving oneself with the struggle, and these events, in turn, 'explain' and justify what comes after.

The substance of this ideal self-representation is shared by 'intellectuals' and 'non-intellectuals' alike. In it, the movement is understood as an organic collectivity, and the ideal is a similarly organic national community. The individual emerges more as a part of the larger social organism, an extension of collective morality and collective aspirations, than as an evolving, self-contained and self-reflective 'personality'. However, it should be noted that there are variations in the extent to which individual subjectivity is subsumed in the collective one. In the stories of the rank and file, the degree of individual agency as well as the inner voice of an individual subject is very limited (see chapter 4.3), whereas the intellectuals tend to complement the main narrative of their participation in the liberation struggle with a side narrative of individual development (see also chapters 3.2.1 and 4.3). Hence, while John anchors his personal life into the framework of the struggle right from the start he also speaks of personality formation in the psychological sense, as an individual phenomenon and something that basically happens before one reaches adulthood but can be continued even thereafter. It is brought about by different cultural influences and by 'making something out of myself'. (Appendix 1, pp. 7-8, lines 362-391.)

The latter motif of 'making something out of myself' can be found in the stories of many other 'intellectuals' too. However, as in John's story, it is usually softened by assertions of loyalty to the liberation movement and justified as a part of bringing about the collective good through the liberation struggle and, later, development. The narrators who adopt this 'strategy' of self-presentation portray themselves as determined individuals who pursue their goals relentlessly. However, although the actor is clearly the individual, the meaning and purpose of action emanate from the community, either directly from the liberation movement or from what is right from the perspective of nationalism at large.

Indeed, the popular moral theory articulated in liberationist stories is a communitarian one. According to it, the good life is realized in exercising the ‘liberation virtues’ within the Swapo community, of which comradeship or ‘familiarity’ is the fundamental one (see chapter 5.3). Swapo is seen as the embodiment of the correct view of the good life and of the associated individual virtues. In this context, Swapo appears not just as a political party, a vehicle of pursuing political interests and opinions that have been formed beforehand, but rather an important part of the community, or even *the* community, where its members have grown up and formed their very sense of morality and politics.

This collectivist ethos and its interplay with the practical circumstances of the various stages of the narrators’ lives can be analyzed further by having a closer look at the portrayal of subjectivity at different points of the narratives. In most stories, the exile period differs from other parts of the narrative in this regard. Life in Angola and Zambia is narrated in a collectivist mode that places the individual’s life firmly within the exile collective and downplays individual agency. This happens even in stories in which, for example, one’s stays as a student away from Angola and Zambia are narrated much more individually. Another contrast emerges with how life before exile is narrated. One’s own motivations and decisions largely disappear from the picture in exile even in the stories where they feature in narratives of earlier life. Either the individual is transformed from the actor into an object of action and authority is transferred to Swapo or the subject is extended from ‘I’ into ‘we’.

For example, Festus’s initial narrative is a skeletal, cv-like presentation in which he lists his educational and occupational career. Its skeletal character makes the locus of agency at different points of the narrative exceptionally visible. After he ‘was born’, he ‘completed standard eight’, ‘was expelled’, ‘went down south’ to work, ‘left Namibia’, ‘went through Angola to Zambia’ and ‘joined Swapo’ in exile. It is implied that, at this stage, it is he individually who takes decisions and acts accordingly. In exile things are different: ‘Swapo granted’ him a scholarship. After he completed his education, he duly ‘came back and joined Swapo’. Then, he was ‘sent’ to Kwanza Sul where he ‘was selected’ and ‘appointed’ for certain duties. Later, he ‘was sent’ and ‘appointed’ again for many times:

I was born...[in] 1950 in Ongwediva. I'm...married with two children. My formal education, Ongwediva primary school since 1960 up to 1968. Then Ongwediva higher school, I completed standard eight in 1971. [Then] I was expelled from school. I went down south...I got a job in mining exploration, since 1972 up to the beginning of 1973...I left Namibia [in] 1974. I went through Angola to Zambia...I joined Swapo there...Swapo...granted me a scholarship to the USSR...in 1975 and I completed my course there in 1980...I came back to Angola and joined Swapo. Swapo sent me to...Kwanza Sul. There I was selected to be one of the teachers...At the same time I was appointed to be deputy chief logistics officer in the settlement. In 1982 I was sent again to GDR...[for] teacher training. I spent there three months and I came back again to Angola...I resumed my previous work...In 1984 I was sent again...for a leadership

course in the USSR, up to 1985. After having completed...I came back and was appointed to be a chief administrator in...Kwanza Sul. In 1986 I was given opportunity to attend a project management and implementation course in Tanzania...I spent there one month and came back again to Angola and continued my previous assignment...In 1989 when the UN resolution 435 was about to be implemented Swapo...appointed some administrators to go home as an advance group, and I was one of them.

John's initial narrative is much longer and therefore I am not going to list all of the stages in its agential progression. However, observing its major shifts confirms the above point. In the beginning, things happen to him individually, but not through his own agency. Rather, he is the object of the struggle between his father and the forces of colonialism and Christianity. Starting school is the beginning of a new phase. A new kind of a collective subjectivity makes its first appearance: 'we saw helicopters' and 'we didn't know what was happening'. This 'we' may refer to the people who concretely surrounded him at the time, like fellow students and family members, but it is also indicative of a new political identity. It refers to the whole oppressed community of Ovambos and other Namibians, in opposition to the 'they' of the South African military and other agents of colonialism. This is expressed clearly when John tells how 'we took a know nothing stance' when 'the police' and 'the army' came to ask about Swapo. This is also the starting point of his individual agency, which is thereby integrally tied to the collective one: 'I used to attend meetings', 'I didn't...understand', 'I knew these things'. In addition to the individual and the collective protagonists and the colonial antagonist, there is also a 'helper' figure, 'a man called Leo' who imparted the first seeds of political consciousness to John and thus helped the emergence of the individual narrated subject, the 'hero', of John's story.

After this, the individual agent, who has been established as a member of the 'liberationist' political community, comes to the fore, contemplating leaving into exile: 'I was at the crossroads', 'I postponed', 'I discussed it [with a] friend', 'I proceeded', 'I went to attend'. Importantly, although it is mostly individual agency that is narrated here, it appears in firm connection to the major plot of participation in the liberation struggle. John speaks in relation to the assumption that one should have left, as 'many of my friends' did, and feels that his decision to stay needs to be explained. He justifies it by its assumed benefit to the struggle: he and his friend intended to leave, but only later when they had acquired more education and would be better 'equipped...for further study or even for fighting', whichever the movement might require.

John's narrative of leaving is even more closely related to the liberation struggle and individual and collective agency tightly interwoven. First, he outlines the context: 'They', meaning the big players of nationalist and colonial politics, 'were talking of Namibia

becoming independent' and when this came to nothing 'the South Africans militarized the whole Ovambo'. More specifically, 'they started sending South African soldiers, white soldiers to schools'. This action by 'they' causes a reaction by 'we', meaning the students, whom John portrays as a unified anti-colonial force: 'we started asking questions'. Individual agency arises as a part of the collective one: 'I was one of the people who...could stand up and ask'. The collective reaction is dramatically brought to a head when 'our school' fights with a group of black colonial soldiers after 'they' had assaulted some of the students. Again, the concrete and symbolic meanings of 'we' and 'they' are interwoven. At a concrete level, they refer to the students of one particular school and to the particular soldiers, respectively. However, the students also stand for resistance and nationalism generally, and the soldiers for the evil of colonialism.

From this incident, there is a brief return to the individual contemplation of leaving into exile, which results in John's decision to leave. Leaving itself is again a collective affair, done by 'we'. In part, this is reflective of the concrete circumstances of leaving. However, there is also a deviation from the straight recollection of the event of leaving when John remarks that most of the friends he left with 'are [now] serving in our government that we helped to bring to power'. This remark is a good illustration of the constant interplay between the two meanings of 'we', as it refers both to the group of friends and to the overall liberation movement.

Immediately after the new exiles' arrival in Angola, a new agent, Swapo, enters the scene: 'it was noticed in the leadership of Swapo', 'Swapo had a good policy', 'Swapo had...established'. The 'we' of John's group now loses its independent agency and gets under Swapo's control. From this moment on no decisions are taken by either 'I' or 'we'. John's narrative just records matter-of-factly the (narrative) movement that originates from Swapo's decisions and from South Africa's counteraction: 'we left that first base', 'we proceeded to Kassinga', '[we] proceeded to Luanda', 'I celebrated a national day', 'we left for Zambia where I spent some time as a PLAN [member]', 'I was attending a school', 'we were mobilized', 'I spent sleepless nights in trenches'. Interestingly, his only reference to his own will during this period emerges from our subsequent discussion, when he tells of his reactions to the conditions of exile. In effect, this passage amounts to a description of knowingly making the decision — an instance of individual agency — to surrender his individual agency to the will of the movement as a necessary sacrifice in furthering the cause of national liberation.

Narrated agency shifts again when John gets to study in Europe. Now the individual ‘I’ becomes the primary agent and appears as the origin of action rather than as an intermediary of action that has its true origin elsewhere: ‘I passed my exams’, ‘I was sent...after I successfully completed my school’, ‘I passed successfully...and was enrolled at the university’, ‘I completed my Master’s degree with high marks’, ‘I had an ambition to continue...I [had] developed an interest’, ‘I applied’, ‘I completed my Ph.D. degree’, ‘I led the group of my colleagues to come back and join the Swapo election campaign’. Although even this period is integrally tied to the overall narrative of liberation, this is also a narrative of individual achievement. It manifests the ethos of commitment common to liberationism, but its commitment is, significantly, self-regulated and has the individual as its end in addition to the collective cause of liberation.

As I mentioned above, John’s initial narrative does not tell much about his life after return. What little there is, is mostly about individual action and in a matter-of-fact tone: ‘I joined’, ‘we established Namibia Today’, ‘I was employed’, ‘I worked’, ‘I joined the ministry’, ‘I’m now working there’. This reflects two important changes. First, the *raison d’etre* of the ‘we’ of the liberation movement, namely national independence, has been achieved and the journey of the heroic collective subject has been completed in that sense. Second, although many of the former exiles, including John, think that there is still a need for collective effort in working for national development, the concrete community of former exiles has been shattered to various physical locations, positions and activities after return, and one therefore relates to the collective end of development more directly as an individual.

It is likely that the variation between the ‘I’ and ‘we’-modes of narration, as well as the central position of the Swapo collective, and the partial inseparability of individual and collective subjectivity in the narratives of exile, is partly reflective of how life was actually organized in different locations (see chapters 5.2 and 5.3). In Angola and Zambia one’s range of individual decisions was considerably smaller than elsewhere. Collectivity was a value that was constantly propagated in both word and deed. Swapo tried to uphold it also among those exiles who were pursuing studies elsewhere, but it was much more difficult to do this ‘in deed’ and not only ‘in word’, as the students encountered other social networks and ways of organizing social relations.

Siderailing personal relations may also be related to the experienced distance or closeness between me and the narrators and to the control of emotions in narration. From this perspective, the adoption of a liberationist context of narration may be a method of

avoiding or taming painful or difficult issues, such as death or separation from one's loved ones.⁷³

Important as these perspectives may be, the narrative emphasis on the collective body of Swapo is also a positive statement of identification, signalling one's belonging to the movement and surrendering of individual agency to collective commitment. Thus, in John's narrative, the transition to collective subjectivity occurs already before leaving into exile, at the point when he becomes politicized. In fact, this is the case also in other stories in which politicization before leaving into exile is narrated.⁷⁴ Therefore, the contrast between narratives of life before exile and narratives of exile, proposed above, should be qualified: in those stories that narrate politicization before exile, the subsuming of individual agency into the collective one usually occurs already at this point, whereas in the other stories it only occurs in exile.

Hence, the emphasis on collective subjectivity and the close connection of individual agency to collectivist motivation tells of equating 'life story' (as a relatively public account of one's 'personal' history) with 'political biography'. The liberation narrative emerges as the primary context for narrating lives, reflecting the value generally accorded to having participated in the 'liberation struggle' and having been a 'freedom fighter', and more specifically the influential model of 'committed cadre' conveyed in nationalist

⁷³ In exile, the possibility of death was always a concern to be taken into account. Some interviewees mention relatives and friends, who 'sacrificed' in the struggle. However, against the background that approximately (at least) every fifth exiled Namibian died in exile (see p. 9, fn. 9), the issue is mentioned rarely. Since a large proportion of the exiles were children, who were relatively safe, the proportion of adults who died is probably much higher. It seems that the issue of death is largely tamed by either silencing it or treating it as a necessary sacrifice in the liberation struggle.

This perspective may be relevant also in the case of illegitimate children. Although the matter was rarely mentioned in interviews, I was told informally by some of the interviewees and by other informed sources that it was relatively common that children were born out of wedlock in exile. This was attributed, on one hand, to the loosening of traditional bonds of social control and to the lack of stability and permanence of exile life, and on the other, to the idea of ensuring continuity on the face of death and of becoming a full person only when one has children. The latter idea concerned especially women. 'Without children you are not really a woman', said one of the interviewees. It was also claimed that women could use pregnancy as a way to get away from the front, as pregnant women were sent from the front to the 'health and education centres' (cf. Shikola 1998: 141, 142).

It seems that the attitude towards this phenomenon was dual in exile. On one hand, children were considered as a source of social value and it was relatively common to have children out of wedlock. On the other hand, it was considered disgraceful to have illegitimate children and Swapo attempted to prevent the 'decay' of sexual morality (see, for example, Shamena and Shamena 1980: 174). Returnees with illegitimate children have encountered this scornful attitude also after their return to Namibia. For these reasons, it may have been tempting to leave the issue out of the stories.

⁷⁴ See chapter 5.1.4 for an exposition of the various narrated motives for leaving.

propaganda.⁷⁵ In this context, the narrated subject primarily appears as a part of the liberation collective.

For the same reason, children, families, and friends are mostly left aside unless I ask about them. Even then they are not narrated extensively. John's story is a fitting example of the overall pattern. After he has outlined his family relations as a context against which the colonial evil and, thereafter, politicization can emerge, the main protagonists of his story are himself and the 'we' of the Swapo community against the antagonist of colonialism.⁷⁶ He omits personal relations from his narrative, apart from confirming his marriage with a Hungarian woman when I ask him about it. Even then, he immediately brings his marriage within the orbit of the liberation struggle — his wife was to be a 'wife...of a revolutionary' and 'join everything that [he] aim[ed] at' (appendix 1, p. 5, lines 255-258).

When 'I-narration' is brought about by the circumstances, like in accounts of one's studies abroad, it does not constitute a deviation from the liberation plot. Rather, the individual freedom that it reflects constitutes 'a challenge' or 'a temptation' which is overcome by one's commitment to liberation and contacts to Namibian colleagues and the larger Swapo community. Thus, stays and education outside Angola and Zambia are in many narratives mere deviations from the collective frame of the liberation plot.⁷⁷ Still, they seem to have influenced the way in which lives are narrated, hence their presence is there more in the structure than the content of the narratives, by way of bringing a strong thread of individual development to complement collectivist discourse.

4.2 From militant heroism to reproductive commitment: Anna

In the above analysis I used John's story as an example of the typical characteristics of liberationist life stories. But how far are they typical? For example, it has been argued that there are profound differences between men's and women's personal narratives, both written and oral (see e.g. Personal Narratives Group ed. 1989). Gergen (1992) argues that the typical Western life story is fundamentally a 'manstory', and that women tend to tell

⁷⁵ Note that I do not use the concept of propaganda in the derogatory sense that implies falsehood but simply to refer to any information, false or correct, that is published with the aim of promoting a particular political opinion.

⁷⁶ The dissidents' stories are similar in this respect, but the collectivity of detainees and other dissidents takes the place of Swapo as the 'we'. See chapter 6.1.

⁷⁷ Explicit examples of this attitude can be found in chapter 5.3. The picture would probably be different if I had interviewed more of those who decided to stay in the countries where they studied and only returned at independence, if at all.

and write less individualistic and more relational stories of their lives. It has also been claimed that women's writing is more 'confessional', more open about the intimate details of daily events and domestic emotions than men's (Langness and Frank 1981: 94). What is the case with Namibian former exile stories in this regard?

Let us analyze Anna's story in order to find answers to this question. However, we will also have to look at excerpts from other women's stories because, as I will demonstrate, there is more variation in women's than in men's narratives.⁷⁸ Anna opens her story in a similar way as John by presenting her childhood as a pristine, ideal order. She speaks of the 'good old days' of traditional rural Ovambo and of happiness within the home sphere in Tsumeb. These stand in stark contrast with the general conditions of apartheid, the theme to which she swiftly turns: 'Those were the days of apartheid of course.' (Appendix 1, p. 9, lines 2-15.)

At my request, she describes the colonial situation: the living conditions, restrictions and police brutality, as well as collective efforts of the oppressed to evade the colonial obstacles. She sums up this background description by referring to the colonial time as 'horrible times' when 'one lived in fear'. She also tells about the pervasiveness of 'racial' and ethnic classification in social life. In her initial narrative, she relates an anecdote: two early nationalist leaders come as teachers to the school she attends and try to teach the children away from the prevalent tribalist thinking that was encouraged by the colonial system. (Appendix 1, p. 9-10, lines 15-58.)

She also tells briefly about going to secondary school in Odibo until she has a baby and has to drop out from school. At this point, she introduces the theme of politics into her narrative by asserting that since she 'was a child there was always politics'. She tells of his father's political contacts and relates the incident of how her brother was born on the day of a Swapo rally and was nicknamed after the party. (Appendix 1, p. 10, lines 59-95.)

Like many others, Anna tells of having been more seriously exposed to political issues at secondary school. According to her, the atmosphere in the north, where she attended school, was much more lively and open politically than in Tsumeb. Discussions with

⁷⁸ I interviewed Anna three times, twice at her home, and once at her work place. She had left Namibia in June 1974 at the age of about 21. In exile, she completed her secondary education and studied nursing in Europe. She also worked in the Swapo settlements, and among Namibians in Lusaka and Luanda. After returning to Namibia she first worked as a nurse and later as a civil servant. She lived in a former white suburb in Windhoek with her husband — also a former exile — and family. For more information about the context of the interviews, see chapter 4.3.

friends, Swapo broadcasts from abroad, civil rights issues told about by a teacher, as well as witnessing colonial injustice and violence gradually lead her to get involved in politics. (Appendix 1, pp. 10-11, lines 96-114.)

In her initial narrative she skips this formative politicization and goes directly to the start of her personal involvement. Starting a Swapo youth branch in Tsumeb and campaigning to get her arrested friends released lead into strengthened political commitment. She proceeds to describe the general strike of 1971-72, noting it explicitly as a turning point in both her personal history and in ‘the history and the revolution in Namibia’. It leads into heightened political consciousness and is the moment when she and her friends start to think about ‘join[ing] the liberation struggle outside’. (Appendix 1, p. 10-11, lines 80, 96 and 115-139.)

A long and detailed narrative of leaving follows the above narrative of politicization. In it, Anna deliberates whether she can leave or not, balancing the prevalent militant atmosphere among the youth against her attachment to her mother and children and against her studies. She decides to leave and like many others, does it secretly, without telling her family. After getting to Angola she joins a growing group of other newly exiled Namibians. The group then proceeds towards Zambia, first escorted by the Portuguese army and then on foot, until they suddenly meet MPLA guerrillas. The guerrillas appear as almost mythical characters, fierce-looking and frightening men of the bush, whose leader becomes a legendary figure for Anna and her companions. The guerrillas help them and after a few more days they finally reach Swapo in Zambia.⁷⁹ (Appendix 1, pp. 11-14, lines 144-285.)

Leaving appears as a logical continuation of Anna’s political activities in Namibia as she emphasizes that ‘we’ did not want to go to school but to engage in armed struggle against ‘the Boers’. After the initial contact with Swapo in exile — with an official with a beard and ‘wild hair’, marking the irrevocable transition into the world of exile — follows a long and well-versed account of a conflict between the militant newcomers and the moderate veterans over whether the newcomers would get to fight or not. The leaders want to send some of the newcomers to school but they would not hear anything about it. As they are many, they expect to return to Namibia soon as fighters and liberate the country by arms. The ‘détente’ factor (see chapter 5.2.1) appears as the newcomers are taken to a refugee camp against their will. It justifies the actions of the leadership, but according to Anna’s narrative, the leaders were correct anyway, détente or no détente, and it only took the

⁷⁹ A similar narrative of meeting the MPLA can be found in Angula 1990: 87-90.

newcomers some time to understand this because they were immature and ignorant of how things worked in exile. The conflict with the leadership recurs once more when the newcomers are taken to the Old Farm. Then they finally settle down to a more stable exile life of working hard and schooling.⁸⁰

Political education is instrumental in this change of attitude. The young militants are told ‘the history of Swapo, what they are doing, what actually is happening, and what they expect from us’. She also tells how living in independent Zambia, going to school there and learning history made her understand ‘the development, economical side’ of independence whereas she earlier had only thought of chasing ‘the Boers’ out of the country. In this way, militancy is transformed into a more ‘matured’ form of commitment, into working as a Swapo cadre and a ‘mother’ in the educational ‘front’ and the ‘homefront’ of Swapo’s civilian settlements. (Appendix 1, pp. 14-15, lines 293-390.)⁸¹

Anna’s narrative of life in Swapo’s civilian camps is the most extensive example of many of the themes that dominate such narratives. She first lives at the Old Farm in late 1974. After the initial conflict with the leadership, the newcomers start building, cultivating the land and going to school in Lusaka in the evenings. This is a hard but happy life of working together without quarrels. Even when Anna later moves to a Zambian college to complete her secondary education, ‘the camps...was always home’ where the students return on holidays. There is a transformation of commitment from the impatient militancy of the newcomers into taking care of the exiles’ needs ever better by rational organization and by building new housing, schools, hospitals, clinics, kindergartens and maternity wards. The building of the new settlement of Nyango emerges as a prime example of this committed effort, with the energetic Libertine Amathila, the woman who rose highest in Swapo’s exile organization, as its emblem. Almost everyone contributes willingly. The situation differs from that in Namibia in the sense that people do not live with their families in their own homesteads but as individuals who are close to each other both physically and by virtue of having a ‘common cause and...common goal’. (Appendix 1, pp. 15-17, lines 375-464.)

From Nyango, Anna leaves to study nursing in Ireland. In her initial narrative, she does not tell anything about her life there, but concentrates on the opportunity to travel around

⁸⁰ The events Anna tells about are also described by Erastus Shamena (Shamena and Shamena 1980: 176-180).

⁸¹ For an analysis of the process of maturation and the ethos of mature commitment, see chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

Europe that arose with living in Ireland. After my prompting, she tells of her encounters with Irish culture and then goes on to analyze that period of her life ‘from a political point of view’. It appears as a fruitful period as she has the opportunity to campaign for Swapo and to acquaint herself with the Irish situation, similar to the Namibian one in her view. Her own commitment just grows stronger unlike that of some others who do not want to return to the camps in Angola and Zambia. One of these is her course mate who then, she says, ‘did not want to be associated with us anymore’.⁸² (Appendix 1, p. 17-18, lines 465-524.)

The narrative of commitment continues after Anna returns from her studies in Ireland and Great Britain, this time to Kwanza Sul. She is surprised at how big and yet well organized the settlement is. The conditions are demanding but with committed hard work, day and night, everything can be handled. Anna even takes care of her friend’s baby while working at the same time. She sums up: ‘I loved [the work]...It was your people, you felt at home, you were doing something worthwhile, participating in the struggle.’ Social life, like having parties, attending weddings or meeting the Angolans in the vicinity, is mentioned only briefly. (Appendix 1, pp. 18-19, lines 524-529 and 541-590.)

The narrative of working hard and trying to take care of the exiles as well as possible, of a demanding but happy life, recurs again when Anna tells of her life in Lubango where she moves from Kwanza Sul to work in the maternity ward. For the last few years in exile Anna lives and works in Lusaka and Luanda. Her narrative of this period is a relatively brief description of events: working, getting married and having a baby. (Appendix 1, pp. 19, lines 591-628.)

In her initial narrative, Anna briefly mentions her return in 1989 and stops at starting to work soon after the elections. In our subsequent discussion, return gains more significance and emotionality. It is told about vividly, including the fear and tension of the transition period and her emotional reunion with her family. She sums up that the election victory was ‘one of the greatest moments’ in her life, a reward for the hard work of the years before. The motif of commitment to a collective mission recurs once more after independence when Anna speaks about the need to make ‘independence a reality to each and every Namibian’ through a ‘development programme’, and asserts that she is willing to contribute to this task. (Appendix 1, p. 19-21, lines 628-662 and 670-697.)

⁸² By contrast, Gideon, one of the dissidents, says that it was the Swapo loyalists who did not want, or dare, to have contact with him after he had indicated that he was not going to return to the Swapo camps after his studies.

Like many other narratives of life after return, Anna's narrative is dual. Apart from being happy to achieve the victory of return and independence and to rejoin her family, the distance between 'then' and 'now' is made clear by the disappearance of her old home and her not necessarily unproblematic relationship with her grown-up daughters, whom she had not met in fifteen years. It is evident also in the self-reflective act of reclaiming space through a kind of a 'pilgrimage' to the school that she attended in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She also tells of having nothing in common with old friends anymore, because of having had different experiences. Thus, she mostly spends her spare time with other exiles because, in her words, they constitute a community who discuss things that happened in exile and like to do different things than the remainers. Additionally, the national project of development is threatened by pervasive social divisions, carryovers of colonial mentality. (Appendix 1, p. 10 and 20-21, lines 61-63, 663-669 and 698-745.)

Let us sum up the main characteristics of Anna's narrative. In it, childhood appears as a contrastive background to colonialism, which in turn acts as a context for politicization. The narrative becomes more livelier and more detailed when Anna proceeds to getting involved in politics and supporting the workers during the 1971-72 strike, the first major 'turning point' of her story. The narrative of another turning point, namely of leaving and being incorporated into Swapo in exile, is even more detailed. It is dotted with assertions of militancy that is gradually transformed into more mature commitment, evident in working for the collective good in the camps by building and taking care of one's 'comrades'. All of this is very similar to John's narrative.

Anna's narrative of her life after she left to Ireland is much more cursory. This is a characteristic that can be found in many other stories too. To my mind, it is indicative of seeing stays and studies abroad as subordinate to being part of the liberation movement. However, in her case, the different emphases given to different parts of her life also reflect the immediate circumstances in which her story was produced. I interrupted her initial presentation at the point when she told of leaving to Ireland (appendix 1, p. 17, line 465) to ask questions about what she had told so far, and when I let her continue she completed the story much more hastily than initially.⁸³

⁸³ I realized that this interruption had been a gross mistake immediately when I let Anna continue her story. This realization greatly contributed to my decision to let the interviewees carry their initial narratives right to what they themselves considered as 'the end', without any interruptions.

Still, it is notable that Anna chooses to stop her ‘voluntary’ presentation at the point of ‘starting to work in the government’ soon after her return and Swapo’s victory in the Constituent Assembly elections. This is yet one confirmation of the close connection between national liberation and what she sees as ‘her life’, as the climax of the former also appears as the climax of the latter.

As John’s and Anna’s narratives exemplify, most of the life stories of former exiles, men’s and women’s alike, are variants of the liberation narrative. Anna’s story is similar to John’s in important respects. It is dominated by the ethos of mature and enduring commitment to the liberation struggle. Also, fierce militancy is presented as the primary reason for leaving into exile. The similarities are confirmed by having a brief look at the locating of agency in Anna’s narrative. In childhood, things happen to ‘I’. When Anna tells of colonialism and politicization, ‘we’ increasingly emerges as the subject, which marks the joining of a collective that embodies a particular nationalist ethos. Her narrative of leaving and living in the camps in exile is also dominated by ‘we’-narration, which is reflective of both practical conditions, like during the trip to Zambia, and identification, like in the assertions of the militancy of the newcomers. Studies abroad and living in towns in Zambia and Angola are again narrated predominantly in the I-mode. Return and elections are again a collective affair marked by ‘we’ narration, after which things happen to or are done by ‘I’.

However, there are also overall differences between (‘intellectual’) men’s and women’s narratives. John’s story is an exemplary male narrative that closely follows the liberation narrative in entailing a strong identification with Swapo as the collective agent of the liberation struggle and a portrayal of the subject in heroic terms. Strong individual agency emanates from such stories, but remains firmly in the service of collective ends. The resulting figure is the classic brave and strong hero character termed by Propp (1968: 36) as the seeker. A similar sense of individual subjectivity can be found in Anna’s story to a large degree. In this respect, her narrative is at one end of a continuum of women’s narrated subjectivity. Mostly, their stories manifest belonging and commitment to the liberation struggle but differ from the straightforward heroism and militancy of male narratives in several respects.

Firstly, the women usually cite other reasons for leaving into exile than the militant wish to get involved in the armed struggle that features so prominently in men’s stories (see chapter 5.1.4). Secondly, although the stories of most women are dominated by their belonging to the liberation movement, they lay considerably more emphasis on personal relations and

reproductive activities than the men. Aspects of Emma's narrative illustrate both of these points.⁸⁴ She establishes the general colonial context right from the start of her narrative, without an 'introductory' childhood narrative:

I was born in the northern part of the country. And by that time political and social life was characterized by the colonial era and...you did not need anybody to brief you as to what was going on...I'm talking about political issues...because [they dominated] the whole social life in the country. We had no opportunity to develop ourselves fully as citizens...Wealth, development, social issues were based on...the colour of your skin.

She then proceeds to tell about her personal experiences of the colonial condition. In this narrative, what happens to her personally is merely an instance of a collective predicament. She tells of the politicization of everyday life, which sets the scene for her narrative of her subsequent politicization and participation in the liberation struggle. Throughout her story, the liberation narrative lends it coherence. However, when telling about the colonial condition, Emma introduces another major thread running through her story, namely the importance of family:

I grew up in a big family and I realized the political situation, the system, through...experiences like [that] my father had been working as a contract labourer and we had not had much time together, to grow up with him. We saw him maybe after [every] one and a half years when he got a holiday and came to see us...Later on...my brothers...got the same job as my father...So they underwent the same process...Another question was of education...Schools were not enough and they were quite far. So I did not have an opportunity to be at home until I was a grown up. I left my family when I was nine years old.

This theme recurs in Emma's narrative of leaving, as she tells how difficult it was to leave her family behind. Her stance is contrary to the dominant tones of how leaving is narrated, which she recognizes:

Some people felt...that they were leaving the country because they wanted to be independent from their parents or to be on their own. This was not the case in my case. I had a very terrible time, it took me time before I could really think about what it would [be] like to live without your parents, without your relatives, without anybody, because...you were leaving on your own and you didn't know anybody...They were all Namibians but it makes a difference if you are joining people whom you know or go to totally new people...I was rather young...And it was not easy...But you had courage or hope that one of the days...Namibia would become independent and you would have a chance to go back home...I was always optimistic that independence would come one of the days.

Emma's account of leaving also differs from the militancy of John's and Anna's narratives. She tells that she wanted to have education. However, she places her possible individual advancement firmly in the context of the collective project of national liberation:

⁸⁴ She was born and raised in Ovamboland. She had already finished school and started working as a teacher when she left Namibia in 1974. In exile, she first lived at a 'health and education centre', but was soon sent to study in Europe where she stayed until her return to Namibia. I interviewed her twice at her work place in a ministry in Windhoek.

I thought I would have an opportunity to get a better education...But motive number one was liberation. I knew I would be used to do something which would bring liberation closer although I didn't know...what type of work one could do there. I knew I might have a possibility to go for further training...and then work better, helping other Namibians who did not have that possibility of going through the school system.

The importance of family recurs when Emma pores over what carried her through the time she lived in exile. She tells of the anguish of being separated from one's family and home in Namibia. She overcomes her longing with the help of her family in exile and the 'familiarity' of exiled Namibians as well as her commitment to the liberation struggle:

Namibia was the home country where I had all my relatives, and everybody tends to love the place of [his or her] birth because that is where you have spent your childhood, you remember...how you have been taken care of...by your mother and father or brothers and sisters and...that is unforgettable despite...the political situation that prevailed at that time...You had your own background. Most of the time you felt like you were losing it and you felt like going back where you came from...I was thinking about my parents, my brothers, relatives and friends that I left in Namibia but I never came to a point where I felt that 'today I want to go' because I just took it for granted that I had no going back...[Namibians in exile] formed a sort of a family...You had a sense of sharing the same background, sharing the same hardships, sharing the same feelings and [being] bound by the same goal...[Otherwise] most of the people would have come back because of the hardships or because...you felt that 'I would like to live in a nice house'...What helped me quite a lot was the friends that I acquired...I felt that I'm not alone, and secondly [there] was my family, we shared what we could share. Most of the time you felt that 'I'm far from home but let them be there because there is nothing I can do'...At least I had a family on which I could rely, I had a responsibility, what I was trying to achieve with this family in a foreign country and with the future which was dim. All this helped me to stand the long period that I was in exile.

The side narrative of family relations and their importance is focused into a tragedy of separations and loss, when Emma loses his husband at the eve of independence, while awaiting the happy redemption of rejoining her family and friends in Namibia. The climax of the heroic narrative of liberation is bought at the price of the climax of this 'victim' narrative. Yet, the tragic is subsumed within the heroic, as Emma deals with her loss by understanding it as a meaningful sacrifice for the cause of the liberation struggle: even though her husband did not live to 'enjoy the fruits of independence' he 'was able to contribute towards' it. Her sacrifice is similar to the sacrifices of many others and teaches her 'what it really means to be a freedom fighter':

[When] we heard about the possibility that Namibia may become independent, it was first a confusion... 'can it really be true?' although you...had taken it for granted that one of the days Namibia would have to be independent...You had a lot of things to think about, trying to remember [your] background, how I had come from Namibia, what I had gained through all those years, what I could do for Namibia after independence and that type of things...How that day would be like, going back to Namibia again, meeting my parents and friends and all the people that I knew before. And what the place would be like, because it was such a long time...[But then] I had a time of sorrow...My husband died and I realized what it really means to be a freedom fighter. You may fight for [your] country but in the end you won't taste any fruit of that independence. I also think about those who fell during the liberation war. We were all hoping to get back to enjoy and to see what it means to be independent...It took me time to appreciate the fact that the country had become independent because I had to try to

comfort myself, try to think what the future would be like for me in Namibia alone with the children...I knew that...although he can't taste the fruit of independence...he was able to contribute towards [it...Still] I was a little bit confused. I knew this is my home-country, I have relatives here and parents but I...had hoped that there would be a day when we all would be back, my husband and children and myself, going to see our relatives and...be happy...You came here and what you saw was just the grave...It was terrible.

Despite its considerable militancy, Anna's story also includes narratives of personal relations and reproduction, unlike John's story. She tells of her family relations even after the point where she got involved in politics — about having children before she left and of having to think whether she could leave them and her mother behind; about her relations with her daughters after her return; and about getting married and having a child in exile. However brief, this is more than in male stories. Overall, her story concentrates more on the reproductive aspects of social life than those of the men, like taking care of the sick and the expecting mothers, or of her friend's baby. Here, a narrative emphasis intermingles with actual social roles of exile life (see chapter 4.2.1).

Thirdly, women's stories have more room for admissions of hesitation, sorrow, regret and guilt than men's stories, as Anna's and Emma's narratives of leaving exemplify. However, it is Lucia's story that provides a more consistent example of this.⁸⁵

The nationalist motif frames her story almost from the start and dominates it until Namibian independence. However, it is complemented by a Christian identity, which also is established right from the start and lends support to the nationalist cause. In her initial narrative, she first briefly tells about where she was born and grew up, about her schooling, about her work as a teacher in Ovamboland and her voluntary activities in her congregation, and about her marriage. Basically, what is portrayed here is a hard-working good Christian. Then the picture is suddenly refocused as nationalist politics is brought in:

Our country was in a critical situation. As a Christian and [having been] educated from the beginning to know the will of God, to know the Bible, I was really concerned for my people because I knew that everybody has been given the human rights by God and every nation has been given its place in this world to be free and to enjoy what they have been given by God. Therefore I started to ask for the human rights of the Namibian people and my husband and I got involved in those kind of politics...I was really annoyed because I knew that Namibia was not really a colony of South Africa. It was a mandate, it was in the hands of the United Nations...That is why I wrote a letter to the General Secretary of the United Nations, doctor Waldheim, pointing out that 'you, the United Nations, you are our Moses to lead us to the independence of Namibia. We, the mothers here in Namibia are tired of giving birth to children who are going to be treated like slaves in their motherland.'

⁸⁵ Lucia was considerably older than the majority of former exiles. At the time when she left Namibia in 1974, she already had a family and was working as a teacher. In exile, she worked among the women and students in Swapo and studied in various countries. After returning to Namibia, she was employed by a major NGO. I interviewed her three times at her work place.

Here, Lucia refers to ‘the will of God’ and speaks of the United Nations as the ‘Moses’ who would lead Namibians from the yoke of colonialism. As I mentioned in connection with analyzing John’s story, the liberation narrative entails a teleological view of history, so that independence is seen as inevitable. Lucia’s narrative is similar in this regard. However, whereas in most of the stories the teleology is understood secularly, Lucia refers to divine influence. Soon after the events related in the above narrative, Lucia left into exile. She tells of hesitating whether to leave or not, a dilemma that is resolved by a triggering event:

In [19]74 my husband left because the government wanted to rearrest him. He left via Angola and joined Swapo in Zambia. I decided to [remain] with my children...— we have six children — and...with our property...Then a few days after my husband had left, one security police came to me...and told me that ‘we are going to arrest you tomorrow because of the letter you have written to the United Nations and in your file I have seen six years in prison’. Then I decided to leave the country. I left everything, my children, our property, in the hands of my brother who has been with our children for 15 years. I left my youngest son...at the age of five and found him at the age of 20.

Later in the course of our interview, she explained this decision:

I wanted to take [him] but there was no time. [I thought that] I was going to be followed by the government...I took just a few things with me and ran away...I was not afraid of being put in prison because what I had done was really what I was supposed to do...[But] my children...had had bad experiences. Their father had been in prison in Pretoria, he was tortured, he was beaten, and the children knew about it and they were really fed up with all this...When they heard that my husband had crossed the border to join Swapo they [said:] ‘Our father is going to rest from all this.’ Thinking of them seeing me arrested and having the idea that mama is tortured like [their] father, that would have destroyed...the minds of my children...I prayed because it was very difficult for me to decide and leave those children. I got the decision and felt easy just before going, I said: ‘My Lord, these are my children. I leave them in your hands. You can help those who are going to help them.’...I left them alone but...I decided I had to...gain knowledge so that I can help the people in Namibia, not losing my children and losing education...I thank God for what I have got even though I couldn’t be with my children, I couldn’t feed them with the motherly love which has to be given by every mother to the children so that th[ey] can grow up having a reasonable...mind...I can’t really tell you the pain I had...Having children is the decision of somebody who likes children...And if you have them according to your will and you can’t educate them as you wish, that is very difficult...Myself and my husband had a plan for those children, [what] we would have liked our children to be like and that we would have tried for their education...We could help them when they were small...but all this time passed without anything. This is really a pain to us and sometimes we feel guilty...Maybe they would have done better if they had been with us, helped by us...It was our decision to have those children, and it was our decision to participate in the independence of Namibia. Both are really big things. We are Namibians and we had to do something and we opened our mouth demanding the independence of Namibia, which made us leave the country. We were in such a dilemma but we thank God because our six children are still alive and even [though] they are not highly educated they can live, all of them have got something to do...they have got the papers...they can have a job.

In this narrative, pride and commitment related to the liberation struggle are mixed with feelings of guilt and regret about the sacrifices which participation in the struggle demanded. Lucia portrays leaving as a hard choice which she makes only when there are no alternatives and which is justified not only by the nationalist cause but also by the negative consequences for the family that would have resulted from staying. Notably, the feelings of guilt did not surface in the initial life narrative but only in the ensuing discussion.

Apart from committing herself to the ‘independence of Namibia’ and to getting education in order to ‘help the people in Namibia’, Lucia also ‘makes up’ for her separation from her children by assuming the role of a ‘mother’ in exile:

We had a lot of women coming to Zambia...We had...women participating at the front. Some were just in our settlements and also small children. Those women needed somebody to look after them. Therefore...I was appointed...to be the head of the Women’s Department...The work was very interesting and very tough because you had to plan and organize all the things which were needed by the women, food for small children, milk for those who couldn't give milk to the children and all the things which were needed in the bush...I was very busy. I had to travel a lot, to visit all those places where the women were and to [arrange] meetings with [them]...Especially at the front I was working very hard to encourage those girls, because...usually young people, when they are away from their parents they miss something. I was not just working as the head of department but I was also trying to solve the psychological problems as a mother, to let them feel at home and let them feel that they were not just with an officer but with a mother who could understand their problems...In the struggle it is not easy, sometimes someone could be fed up...and longing to go back home or thinking that ‘I really don’t know what to do, I can’t see my future’. I used just to tell these people that ‘you know, this situation is not hidden from the eyes of our Lord. He knows why we are here and he knows our needs and therefore...let us just give everything in the hands of God, he will see how to help us.’...I did [the same] also with the civilian women in our settlements.

This is a role that recurs throughout her story — first in relation to young people in her congregation, then to her own children, then to the young girls in exile, and finally in being active in the girl-guides association after her return. As Anna’s story exemplifies, such reproductive form of self-representation is by no means restricted to Lucia, but emerges in many other women’s stories as well. Overall, women’s stories are often less ‘agentive’ than those of the men in the sense that they present things happening to them rather than being brought about actively by them. In this respect, Anna’s story is exceptional, and even Emma’s and Lucia’s stories portray stronger individual agency than most other women’s stories.⁸⁶

Let Raina’s narrative serve as an example of a more clearly ‘non-agentive’ and non-heroic woman’s story.⁸⁷

She does not deny her ongoing loyalty to Swapo, but her story does not follow the vein of heroic commitment like those presented above. The clearest example of this is how she tells of her reasons for leaving Namibia and being incorporated to Swapo in exile, avoiding the

⁸⁶ This may be related to their educational background and relative success in life; cf. chapter 4.3.

⁸⁷ I interviewed her twice, once at her workplace and once at my residence. She was born and raised in Ovamboland until she left Namibia in 1976 at the age of 16 or 17. In exile, she first spent several years in the Swapo settlements in Angola and Zambia, where she also had nurse training and worked as a nurse. She was trained also in Tanzania. From 1983 to 1989 she studied nursing in Europe, where she stayed until 1991. She was working as a nurse in Windhoek.

tone of committed militancy and stressing her ignorance about life in exile and the objectives and methods of the liberation struggle. Leaving appears more as drifting along circumstances than as a firmly made decision based on nationalist commitment. She also mentions a wish to get education but does not justify it by claiming that it was fuelled by a hope of making a contribution to the liberation struggle. Rather, she says, she was ignorant of the wider context and had to be 'taught' the basics of the liberation struggle by the movement in exile:

When I grew up I saw so many things...which hadn't happened before. When I was in standard three I went to Ohangwena school. On the way there were always soldiers...stopping their cars and asking. I was not big but I could see there was something which I didn't like. My sister was at the Odibo school where there were always soldiers asking and coming to the school. [It] disturbed us. And something happened where I was studying...and the soldiers came and settled there, just next to where I was staying...[We thought that] 'something will happen, maybe we just have to follow other people'. There were people who were telling us that there was another way, to go. My sister was at Odibo and there were people who were telling them. And people had gone already in 1974 and we heard the people went there to follow the others because there were already some leaders. There was a lot of people going that time...You heard the people talking around, and then you decided, 'ah, maybe I can go and get some education somewhere'...We didn't think of going for war, we were only thinking that maybe you get a better education somewhere, then you come back...The main reason was better education and nothing interrupting you. You know, when you didn't know where you were going you thought [that] that side was maybe heaven. You didn't know what was really happening there...So we decided to go. We were only three, I was 17 and one 18 and [one] 13. We just crossed the border, because we were next to [it]...[In] Angola we found soldiers and they took us to the camps a bit deeper in Angola. They tried to make us understand how we should be there, because they were soldiers and we were just ordinary...children...We also had lectures concerning politics...what they were doing and so on, because we really didn't know what was happening. So they had to tell us what it was, who was the leader and so on. As time went on you would understand some of the things which you didn't understand [at first]...We were just following...They told us so many things which we had not been aware of, [to make us] understand what was the aim of them to be there and have guns and so on.

Likewise, her narrative of life in the Swapo settlements does not contain any expressions of individual will or agency. Everything is done and experienced by the collective subject, 'we'. Although her narrative is devoid of the commitment that dominates Anna's story, she tells approvingly of the unity and familyhood of the social relations in exile, and gazes at them with nostalgia:

I stayed somewhere in Angola not far away from the border...It was near to the border so you were not [allowed] to make too much noise. You did jobs daily, things like fetching water...I went to Kwanza Sul around April [19]79 [and then] they sent me for an enrolled nursing [course]...It was just a normal life, except that you were in a camp and, what were we doing there anyway? We didn't have any other [accommodation] there except the tents from the UN...We were close to each [other]...working together all the time, although there were some difficulties there...I think that [it would be good] if we could be like those days when we were just like brothers and sisters...We were just like a family, different people from every part of the country. You tended to learn so many things you hadn't known before from each person, because this one was from Ovamboland, one was Damara and one was Herero. You camped together and people talked how we do our things. When you were here you didn't know about other people's tradition. There you learned a lot...It was fun, we ate, we didn't have...to go and buy...you didn't have money. You just went to the kitchen and got what there was. And...you could go to school if you wanted to, even [if] you were an adult...We also had social evenings...Some people maybe made songs, then they sang there and maybe some dancing, so you looked and clapped your hands and laughed. That was the only way you could live there...And most of the time we were friends, almost brothers and sisters...You didn't do anything to anybody, we didn't quarrel too much or fight. You

couldn't do that, they would just say that 'nobody is allowed to fight, nobody is allowed to insult each other, you are brothers and sisters'. You could quarrel but you had to be forgiving, you had to forget those things. Why can't it happen now these days? You quarrel with somebody and you say: 'I don't [ever] want to see her.'

At the other end of the exile passage, return appears as an unemotional event: 'I was just feeling at home, "I'm back" and nothing else.' This may be connected to the fact that she only returned in 1991. Thus, the tension of the tumultuous transition period had already evaporated and she had also had more time to get used to the idea of return. However, the laconic narrative of return may also be connected to the overall lack of heroism in her story; it does not require a climactic redemption in the same way as the more heroic stories do. The demands of daily survival and the problems related to being a 'returnee' may also feed back to a laconic presentation of return. She was clearly discontented, although she did not want to complain:

I started [working] on the first of August [1991]. I have got children, one small one, [so] most of the time I'm just at home after work, doing housework, otherwise maybe visiting my friends around. Nothing special, I have never visited a club in Namibia. Only once when we had this get-together, those people who were in [the same country in Europe].

LM: Are you content with your present life, is everything ok?

Raina: You find some people who still have no place [to stay] or no job. I'm not really satisfied but I'm a little bit happy, more than others because I have [a job]. Even my brother doesn't have a job. I'm lucky and I'm the only [one] who is feeding also my sisters and so on, because I'm the only one who's working. I have to, although there are so many difficulties. You can't say you are not satisfied because you have got work, you can buy your bread and so on. Everybody has a problem in this country. I really cannot [complain] because I can see there are people who have even got degrees and don't have work...they are struggling.

Unlike in most other stories, there is also more open discontent in Raina's story about not being able to get the education she had hoped for, and this is the only point in her narrative where she speaks in a clearly 'agentive' voice, expressing her own will. This discontent can be read as an indirect criticism of the control that Swapo exercised over the exiles' lives. More importantly, this excerpt shows what her whole story pivots on; she emerges as a martyr who wanted to 'become somebody' but had to endure hardships and was prevented from achieving her goal. Yet, despite the powerlessness associated with exile life, she also cherished the memory of exile unity (see above). This seems to be related to her experience of continuing powerlessness coupled with a new sense of insecurity, created by the erasure of collective subjectivity:⁸⁸

I really tried to get [the] education I wanted but I was all along in Angola in the camps and I didn't have

⁸⁸ For an example of more radical deviations from the liberation narrative, see the analysis of Maria's story in chapter 6.2.

a chance except [later when] I went to Tanzania...I didn't get a chance to go to secondary school and to further [my] studies like other people, I didn't have that chance at all...What I got is not what I wanted, because halfway my education was interrupted. I was supposed to go through all the education. Those days when I was outside, sometimes you would say: 'Ah, maybe if I didn't go I could have done something.'...I did something [but] it is not what I really wanted. What I wanted, what I expected, to get independence, it's fine, but I wanted something good, [so that] when I came back I would have been somebody...We are free now, but we are still looking forward to see the future.

It is not my intention to claim that the narrative portrayal of agency in the narratives could not be related to the real conditions of the narrators' lives. For example, Raina may have good grounds for her feelings of powerlessness. However, some of the men, especially those without much formal education, were also arguably powerless in many respects, both in exile and after it. Yet they attempted to cast their lives within the heroic mould in narrative, although the agency they presented was usually of a more collective kind than that portrayed by 'intellectual' male narrators. One way of approaching this issue is in terms of the different narrative models available to different narrators. It may be easier for the men than for the women to resort to emplotments of the 'seeker' type, because for them, they are prescribed both by nationalist mythology and by gender mythology. This model provides the men with a model of closely linked individual and collective agency. By contrast, the women are drawn between two models: that of the seeker, prescribed by the dominant narrative of nationalist mythology, and that of the (virtuous) 'victim' (Propp 1968: 36), prescribed by gender mythology as compatible with a woman's subordinate and reproductive ideal role. For sure, these narrative models were supported by the actual social positions of men and women in exile (see chapter 4.2.1).

Therefore, the men's stories are more uniformly of the seeker-type, whereas both types, and even stories with both plots in succession,⁸⁹ can be found among the women. Of the above stories, Anna's narrative follows the seeker model quite closely. Emma's and Lucia's stories follow the basic plot of participating in the heroic collective effort of national liberation and achieving education as a part of it, but they also contain side-narratives of being at the mercy of unfavourable circumstances to which the subject merely reacts rather than acts. Also, the 'seeking' in women's stories more often takes the form of working one's way committedly through 'difficult tasks' than of outright militancy and 'struggle'.

The extent of these differences should not be exaggerated. The liberationist motif is clearly dominant in both men's and women's stories, and personal relations are largely sidelined in both. Also, voices of militant heroism can arise in women's stories too, as Anna's story

⁸⁹ For an example, see Maria's story.

demonstrates. It is more common, however, that the militancy in women's stories is based on a conception of 'the struggle' that is extended to cover also other activities than direct participation in combat, such as nursing, logistics or education 'for the benefit of the people', because these are the activities that women were mostly involved with.⁹⁰ Such liberationist commitment is a collectivist attitude that is not related to any particular activity. Its acceptance or rejection is not directly connected to the acceptance or rejection of women's 'traditional' social role; militancy as well as its rejection may be combined with 'soft', reproductive activities that largely remained the women's domain in exile. Such a role is adopted in almost all of the women's stories but there are differences in how harmoniously it is seen to have coexisted with the collectivist militancy of 'the struggle'.⁹¹

4.2.1 The role of women in exile

The above narrative differences were supported by concrete differences between women's and men's roles in exile, although one of Swapo's stated objectives during the liberation struggle was to eradicate gender inequality. The movement claimed that towards this end it worked to facilitate equal participation of the men and the women in all spheres of the struggle, including the military (e.g. Swapo 1981: 262; cf. pp. 289, 292; Hishongwa 1983: 55-57; Katjavivi 1988: 91). However, neither the material at hand nor the critical secondary literature confirm that this actually happened.⁹²

Many of the women whom I interviewed had undergone military training, but proportionally their number appears to have been considerably smaller than that of the men. When it comes to participating in military activities proper, the difference between men's and women's duties grows even bigger. Only Maria and Ella tell of having been 'fighters' or 'combatants', although some others too had served in the military. Even in Maria's case it is not clear what actually was involved in being 'a fighter'. In her initial narrative, she says that she served 'sometimes as an auxiliary nurse [and] sometimes as a Swapo fighter, PLAN combatant'. However, she later tells that she had been an auxiliary nurse for the

⁹⁰ Apart from the stories presented above, see chapters 5.1.4, 5.2 and 5.3.

⁹¹ In this regard, compare Anna's and Emma's stories (chapter 4.2) with those of Maria and Hilma (chapter 6.2).

⁹² Shikola (1998) is one of the few women who tells of having been 'fighting at the front', in the early 1980s. However, she specifies that her 'duties were to check that all the women were okay, that they had sanitary pads and soap. I used to travel from one base to another, and I also had to go back and forth to Luanda, to look for...supplies.' She estimates that there were about two to four hundred women at the front and claims that '[a]t the beginning, they were sending hundreds of women but later they decided not to send so many because the situation at the front was really bad'. Shikola 1998: 141-142.

whole time before being transferred to Lubango. Probably this should be taken to mean that she moved with guerrilla units as an auxiliary nurse but also had to be ready to participate in combat if necessary. (Appendix 1, p. 43, lines 173-179.)

In Ella's case, having served as 'a combatant' means that after a six-month military training in Lubango she served at the front as a secretary for her company. After four years she was transferred to Kwanza Sul because she was expecting a baby. Later she received further training in logistics and worked in Lubango as a logistics officer. All the other women who told of having served at the front told that they either did logistic work, transferring supplies to the guerrillas, or worked as field nurses (see for example Martha's narrative in appendix 1, p. 23, lines 94-99).

Thus, it appears that even if both men and women underwent basic military training it was men who actually waged war. Those women who served in the military seem to have very rarely taken part in actual combat. Mostly they seem to have been involved in nursing, logistics, and other supportive tasks.⁹³ It is not clear whether this was simply a matter of durability of traditional social roles or also a preventive measure intended to minimize the problems women could face in the military.⁹⁴

⁹³ Groth (1995: 80) quotes a former exile woman who claims that Swapo used women 'for military purposes' in the mid-1970s but later stopped this. However, it is not specified what 'military purposes' means here. According to another former exile woman whom Groth quotes, 'women...were fighting alongside the men'. However, this woman apparently had not herself been at the front. (*Ibid.*: 97.) According to yet another former exile woman, she and many other 'Namibian girls' were trained but 'weren't right at the front and...didn't fight' (*ibid.*: 96-97). In Soiri's view, women mainly worked at the front as nurses (1996: 76-77) and according to Preston (1997: 458), as radio officers, health assistants and caterers.

Also some of my male interviewees referred to the differential treatment of men and women. For example, Erkki told that after the newcomers had arrived to Swapo's ranks in Angola, only the men were sent to military training (see p. 139).

⁹⁴ Swapo itself admitted during the struggle that there were problems with the involvement of women in the military. These are specified as lack of respect for women commanders' authority among some male guerrillas. There is no reference to sexual abuse, which remains a matter of contention. Gideon, one of the dissident interviewees, claimed that at least in the mid-1970s, after the 'exodus', young women were abused by the commanders of the training camps. This is an established part of the dissident narrative of the history of the liberation struggle, included for example in Shipanga (1989: 103-104). It is referred to also by Leys and Saul (Saul and Leys 1995a: 60 note 32) A similar accusation is made by a former exile woman quoted by Groth (1995:97). She later resigned from Swapo. Another former exile who was an officer, tells of trying 'to protect the young girls when they were harassed by their male comrades' (*ibid.*). Magdalena Shamena tells of doing the same (Shamena and Shamena 1980: 174). Shikola (1998: 143), also a former exile, does not know of any instances of direct (sexual) violence against women within PLAN but she admits that there may have been less direct forms of pressure.

Among the women whom I interviewed, only Maria refers to abuses of power in the military (appendix 1, p. 43, lines 207-209). However, she does not specify what she means by abuses. Neither did she nor any other woman I interviewed tell about any personal experiences of abuse. This may either indicate that such instances were relatively rare or result from the delicate nature of the issue so that possible instances of abuse were not told about.

In any case, a proportionally smaller number of women than of men was ever involved in military activities in exile and those who were fulfilled different duties than men. Overall, military personnel were a minority among the exiles. Thus, women in the military were a minority within a minority. A considerable majority of exile women lived elsewhere, most of them in the ‘health and education centres’.

Swapo paid attention to the women’s question by establishing a women’s council and programmes intended to increase their well-being and empower them.⁹⁵ The Swapo Women’s Council was founded at the 1969-70 Consultative Congress in Tanga (Hishongwa 1983: 53). However, it seems to have existed in name only until the mid-1970s when a large number of women joined the movement’s exile structures. According to Hishongwa, ‘it was not until in 1976 at SWAPO’s enlarged Central Committe[e] meeting in Zambia that SWAPO decided that the Namibian women should take a more active part in the struggle for national liberation and social justice’ and it was only in 1980 that the Women’s Council held its first congress at Kwanza Sul in Angola (*ibid.*: 53-54).

The above quotation is instructive of the relation between the activities of women and the overall leadership of Swapo. According to Soiri (1996: 84):

The SWAPO Women’s Council was in the beginning predominantly an organization for women to forward the aim of national liberation, and to mobilize and organize women under its wing...SWC’s analysis on the position of women in Namibia was that of inferiority: women were oppressed by the traditional structures and by the colonial system. Only later was the concept of ‘triple oppression’ applied: women were not only oppressed by their race and class but also by gender.

Despite the concept of ‘triple oppression’, mentioned above, women’s liberation was, in practice, primarily seen as an adjunct of national liberation and it was accepted that women’s problems should be solved as part of the overall liberation struggle. During the struggle, women’s representation in Swapo’s administration remained low, and one is tempted to conclude that the existence of a women’s council was considered as a sufficient gesture of ‘political correctness’ and as the proper channel for the women’s influence; otherwise, power in the movement remained in male hands.

In sum, women’s roles remained ‘softer’ than those of men even in a situation of war, more confined to the reproductive sphere of social activities, which included taking care of children, nursing and teaching. Women rarely occupied positions of authority. Many of the

⁹⁵ Lucia was involved in this work after coming into exile in the mid-1970s; see also Hishongwa 1983: 60-66.

patriarchal attitudes and practices of colonial Namibia were carried over from colonial Namibia into exile, despite the official rhetoric of equality.⁹⁶ These practices seem to have had their counterpart in the self-understanding of those Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle in exile. They largely understood their participation in terms of the idiom of familiness and their traditional reproductive roles.⁹⁷

4.3 Collectivist loyalism: Martha, David and Joseph

In addition to the differences between men's and women's narratives, significant distinctions also appear between the 'intellectuals' and the rank and file of the liberation movement. All those whose stories have been analyzed so far belong to the former category. Let us now have a look at what kind of stories were produced by the latter, who lived 'in the bush' in Angola and Zambia and did not obtain a high level of formal education. Because of one of the major characteristics of these stories, namely their brevity and matter-of-factness, I have decided to analyze three of them, all of which are included in appendix 1. This also facilitates comparison between women's and men's narratives, as one of the stories is by a woman and two by men.

Their initial narratives are notably short chronicles of a few major events in their lives, without explicit assessment of their meaning. With very minor variations, they mention similar things. They start with their birth and attending school. Joseph⁹⁸ proceeds to working in the 'south' and then to leaving Namibia 'to join Swapo', while Martha and David jump directly to the point of leaving into exile, which also in Martha's words

⁹⁶ Of course one should not forget the considerable changes and opportunities that exile introduced in the life of the women. Many of them took care of tasks and learned skills that were not traditionally considered as their domain. However, after independence even the amount of equality that did develop has largely been overlooked (Gawanas 1993). I could observe this myself. In Ovamboland I noticed that women who had spent years 'in the bush' as PLAN members had obediently returned to their age- and gender-specific (subordinate) roles in the Ovambo society — an indication of the fact that what they did in 'the struggle' was built upon and extended those roles more than broke them.

⁹⁷ Soiri (1996: 85-92) arrives at a similar conclusion. One can also find a parallel in Zimbabwe's liberation war, in which the idiom of traditional 'motherhood' was also used to rally the support of women. See Staunton ed. 1990.

Among the minority of women who received a high level of education such idioms and roles were complemented by a more self-consciously and confidently feminist discourse, which is probably reflective of their education and contacts to various cultural environments and ideologies.

⁹⁸ Joseph was interviewed once near his home at Oshakati's Omashaka location, with the help of a translator. He was originally from Ovamboland and had left Namibia in 1977 in his early twenties, after working for some time on a farm in 'the south'. He had had rudimentary schooling in Namibia and received some additional education in exile. He served in PLAN until 1981 when he was captured on a mission. He was released in 1989 when the transition to independence started. Since then he had lived in Oshakati without formal employment.

happened in order ‘to join Swapo’. They then mention their duties at various times in exile. From here, both Martha⁹⁹ and David¹⁰⁰ proceed directly to their return to Namibia, which is the end point of their narratives. Joseph’s narrative follows a different path because of the untypical trajectory of what actually happened. He tells of becoming a fighter, being captured and jailed, and being released. Exceptionally, he also mentions that he got married while in jail. The only expression of subjective experience in these narratives is Martha’s assessment that she had a vague picture about Swapo when she left Namibia and learned only in exile ‘what Swapo was fighting for’. (Appendix 1, p. 22, lines 1-11, p. 25, lines 1-7, and p. 27, lines 1-7.)

Similarities of the narratives continue in what was told in the subsequent course of the interviews. Martha tells briefly about her childhood, seeing it as a happy time and mentioning personal relations and the small chores she used to perform. However, it is when she turns to describe the colonial situation and political atmosphere that the narrative grows longer and more detailed. In it, Swapo appears as a community into which one gradually grows (see also chapter 5.1.3). In the Walvis Bay of her childhood, politics equal Swapo: ‘[T]here was only Swapo.’ Like in many other stories, coming to secondary school in Windhoek means the beginning of political involvement in earnest. However, even here politics appears as a collective affair rather than individual activism: It is ‘we’ who were taught about Swapo, sang Swapo songs, attended SYL meetings, talked about problems, demonstrated, used to be arrested, and finally, decided to go into exile. (Appendix 1, pp. 22-23, lines 12-66.)

Likewise, David and Joseph shortly outline the conditions of their childhood, and move on to describe at greater length their life as contract labourers ‘in the south’. These descriptions provide a background of colonial evil that motivate their decision to leave into exile. As Joseph puts it: ‘I left Namibia because I was colonized and I had seen it myself’.

⁹⁹ I interviewed Martha once near her home in a squatter area of Katutura, Windhoek’s formerly blacks-only location. I already knew her before through mutual acquaintances. Of Ovambo origin, she had grown in Walvis Bay and attended secondary school in Windhoek. She left Namibia in 1978 at the age of 15 or 16, before completing her secondary education. In exile, she lived in southern Angola, first in Lubango where she was trained as an enrolled nurse, and then in the Cunene and Huila provinces where she worked as a nurse. She returned to Namibia in July 1989, cultivating her family’s land in Ovamboland for two years before coming to Windhoek to look for work. She was still unemployed and survived on self-employment and assistance from friends.

¹⁰⁰ David was interviewed once in front of his home at a former blacks-only ‘location’ in Oshakati. Originally from Ovamboland, he had left Namibia in 1975 in his twenties, after having worked in ‘the south’ for a few years. Apart from a few years of school in Namibia and a short building course in exile, he had not obtained formal education. In exile, he served in PLAN for most of the time. After returning to Namibia in July 1989 he had found only temporary employment. His interview was conducted with the help of a translator.

(Appendix 1, pp. 25-26, lines 8-38 and p. 27, lines 8-23.) In its careful portrayal of the hard conditions of contract labour and the brutality of colonial whites David's and Joseph's narration converges with the standard version of the liberation narrative. It has become commonly accepted that the contract system played a major part in the formation of modern Namibian nationalism, particularly of Swapo's predecessors Ovamboland People's Congress and Ovamboland People's Organization. In nationalist historiography, the contract system came to emblemize the inhumanity and illegitimacy of colonialism and thereby to legitimize the nationalist struggle.¹⁰¹ It is difficult to draw the line between one's own experiences and the influences of a shared discourse in the narratives of contract work. The overall similarity of the accounts is striking. Similar things, such as food, living conditions, the amount of work, the poor pay, the cruelty of whites and even some particular incidents are told in a similar way. One such anecdote was related by Hidipo, an exile of the first generation, who had worked as a contract labourer before getting involved in the politics of OPO and Swapo and leaving the country in the early 1960's. After a detailed description of his personal experiences of contract labour, he ended with a general assessment, telling for example that 'many of our people were killed. For example near Grootfontein and near Tsumeb two people were killed and the white men cut them in pieces, put in a drum and cooked for pigs.' This particular anecdote is mentioned also by Shityuwete (1990: 13). In general, for example Soggot's (1986: 6-8) examples of settler atrocities in the German colonial period sound much the same as those in the narratives at hand. It is possible, of course, that the experiences of working on contract really did not vary much from place to place and over time, but the narrated similarity in what and how is told is so startling that it is likely to also reflect a shared discourse that aims to demonstrate the inhumanity of colonialism.

Adherence to the liberation narrative continues in Martha's, David's and Joseph's presentation of leaving into exile. Martha says that when she left she 'wanted to be a soldier' and 'come back and fight'. However, militancy emerges more as a part of the widely shared 'fever' of leaving than as a well-considered individual choice. This atmosphere appears as a response to bad education and colonial harassment, and involves a vaguely defined urge to fight against colonialism. Martha stresses that she was ignorant about the true substance of nationalist politics before leaving and learned it only in exile. (Appendix 1, p. 23, lines 62-90.) Likewise, joining the current of narrated militancy, which we already encountered in the stories of the 'intellectuals' like Anna and John, Joseph says

¹⁰¹ See Ndadi 1989: 17-66; Angula 1990: 18-29, 43-44, 68-70; Shityuwete 1990: 13-26; Swapo 1981: 74-91; Hishongwa 1992: 49-75.

that he left in order to join the armed struggle against colonialism that denied all opportunities from blacks. However, because his narrative is in contrast to theirs in its brevity and fragmentary character, the adoption of Swapo's nationalist discourse for the interpretation of one's own experiences shows extremely well; in Joseph's words, he 'went outside to fight the colony — not to fight a person or a colour, but to make people understand each other'. (Appendix 1, p. 27, lines 22-34.) Similarly, David says that he left because of colonialism — defined in the general terms of an established discourse (see chapter 5.1.2), by referring to the wage disparity between the whites and the blacks, to segregated education, and to the separate facilities of whites and blacks — and wanted to fight. However, he also mentions having wished to get education. (Appendix 1, p. 26, lines 39-51.)

Martha's, David's and Joseph's narratives of life in exile concentrate on fulfilling one's tasks as a committed cadre of the liberation movement. Martha tells that, in spite of her professed militancy, she tried 'to pass with a nice mark' when she got the opportunity to get to study through an examination. She also speaks of the sociality and comradeship of exile life and of growing up in exile. (Appendix 1, p. 23-24, lines 90-117.) David was trained in Eastern Angola and remained in the military thereafter until the end of the war, apart from a half year building course in Europe. In his narrative, the hardships of military life are made endurable by commitment, by knowing what one was suffering for, which is in implicit contrast with the suffering associated with contract labour. (Appendix 1, p. 26, lines 51-71.) Joseph lived in various camps, building, digging dugouts and 'not doing anything'. Only after a year did he get to military training in Lubango. Like David, he stresses his militancy and commitment, saying that life was not easy because of material hardships but he knew what he was suffering for and was eager to be trained and get a gun. He then tells of operating in the military and of being captured. His narration remains laconic and unemotional even when he tells about being tortured and fearing death. The only assessment of these events from an 'internal' perspective is his response to my specific question about his 'feelings': he was 'feeling bad' and 'was down'. (Appendix 1, p. 28, lines 34-81.)

As I mentioned above, return to Namibia is the end-point of Martha's and David's initial narratives. Subsequently, both of them tell of return as a dual experience, in which happiness of winning 'the struggle' is mixed with new tensions and demands. Both mention the atmosphere of fear and suspicion that prevailed during the transition period, especially between 'returnees' and 'stayers'. According to Martha, she dared not trust her family until

she saw a photograph of Sam Nujoma on their wall.¹⁰² According to David, and the returnee translator, whom the topic provoked to comment, this tension still prevails. After independence there is a new situation, characterized by their ‘separation’ from Swapo, so that ‘you are just suffering’, either toiling parents’ land or living in towns unemployed, looking for work, depending on the informal networks of friends or selling food and drinks. In spite of the basic freedoms guaranteed by independence, Martha is nostalgic about the security and unity of life in exile and laments the loss of ‘comradeship’ in independent Namibia: ‘I sometimes think if I could go back, if Swapo was still there, because there in Swapo we never suffered like this.’ David points out that he has ‘lost time’ and sacrificed personal advancement to the cause of national liberation. Apart from being a source of personal worth, his participation in the liberation struggle lends moral force to his expectation of getting better work in the future. Likewise, Joseph seems to tie his loyalty with an expectation that Swapo will change things for the better and he will get a job. Despite their difficulties, Marthe, David and Joseph remain loyal to Swapo. David attributes the post-independence problems to the balance of political power in the country, which prevents Swapo from taking care of things properly, while Martha has it that it is hard for Swapo to take care of its ‘children’ as they are not refugees anymore, and accuses the former colonialists of still controlling the economy. (Appendix 1, pp. 24-25, lines 118-203; pp. 26-27, lines 73-99; and pp. 29, lines 85-88.)

These stories are similar with the stories analyzed so far in the sense of being loyalist narratives in conformity with the liberation narrative. Also in them, one’s individual life is tied closely together with the ‘liberation struggle’ and Swapo as its collective subject. However, there are significant differences in how this is done. Firstly, the coherence of the ‘intellectuals’ narratives is greater than that of the ‘non-intellectuals’. Apart from a chronological linkage, the facts and events mentioned are tied together by evaluating their meaning and relations. By contrast, the narratives of the ‘non-intellectuals’ are more loosely structured. Their initial narratives are skeletal as life stories, chronicles rather than full narratives, usually consisting of only a few events that are not linked to each other by any other relation than chronology and, implicitly, their significance in the general liberation narrative. In other words, the structure and meaning of these narratives is to be read in the selection and order of the facts and events that are mentioned. Even in the subsequent narratives, there is very little evaluation of how things relate to each other or of the personal or other ‘meanings’ of the events that are mentioned, apart from joining the

¹⁰² I observed similar photographic depictions of political loyalty in several homes that I visited.

liberation collective and remaining committed to it. For example, in Martha's story things are mentioned rather than evaluated and there is little reflection about their subjective meaning or significance, apart from politicization, leaving, return, and contrasting the comradeship of exile with post-independence individualism and insecurity. In David's and Joseph's stories, the meaning of the things that are mentioned is assessed even less.

Secondly, this narrative structure is closely connected to the ideas of personhood conveyed by the stories. The demand for narrative coherence in a life story presentation implies that the narrator has to tie the remembered aspects of his or her previous experience into a single whole, a 'life'. Yet there is considerable room for variation in the narrated identity. Firstly, either narratives of static, unchanging personhood or narratives of 'personality development' and 'change' can be given. In other words, changes in lived experience are either externalized completely or at least partly internalized as happening in one's own 'identity'. Secondly, there is variation in the extent to which, and how, one's 'life' is demarcated from or related to that of others. The boundaries of what is of 'the self' and what is of something else vary.

In sum, there is considerable variation in the extent to which the stories form detailed narratives of the reasons and motives of individual agency. There is a crucial difference between the 'agentive' and 'reflexive' individuality of the intellectuals and the 'non-agentive' and 'non-reflexive' selves which are submerged within the collectivity in the stories of the rank and file. Charting individual 'progress' alongside a collective one in a detailed linear chronology structures the stories of the intellectuals much more than those of others. Alongside the ideology of nationalist unity and collectivism there runs a self-reflective narrative of individual development. Two different 'agentive' self-images dominate the stories of the intellectuals: firstly, a hero who is always loyal to the collective and ready to sacrifice individual concerns for the common cause; and secondly, a hero whose individual achievement is actively brought to the fore but justified by reference to common good. In practice, the line between the two is often blurred. The third heroic type, the 'self-made man', portrayed as an individual achiever and justified by an ethos of individualism, and abundant in Western self-representation, is almost completely absent. It dominates only one (dissident) story and a few stories have elements of it.¹⁰³ These are, of course, abstract types that appear in various degrees in actual stories. No story is absolutely agentive or non-agentive.

¹⁰³ See Gideon's story in chapter 6.2 and Lucia's story on pp. 73-75.

The stories of the ‘ordinary’ former exiles, in turn, melt the individual more directly within collectivity. ‘Life historical’ and ‘historical’ narration become strongly intertwined.¹⁰⁴ For example, while the stories of intellectual men follow the archetypal ‘seeker’ model most closely, pivoting around committed and militant individual heroism, the ‘ordinary’ men’s stories are often militantly heroic too, but portray a less individual sense of agency. They give an impression of gaining everything from the movement, including their knowledge of and commitment to ‘the struggle’.¹⁰⁵ Construction flows from the movement to them, not the other way around, whereas in the stories of the intellectuals it flows both ways. Martha gives an explicit expression to this view of subjectivity by presenting the relation of Swapo and its members as similar to that of parents and children (appendix 1, p. 25, lines 198-201).

Similarly, as there is no clearly demarcated ‘inner self’ to be portrayed, there is also no ‘personality development’ to order the narrative. Individual changes and transitions are often inseparable from collective stages or phases in the struggle, and marked by their overall character rather than contemplation of ‘inner states’. A self-reflexive, individual person is much less present in these narratives than in those of educated narrators. The narrators tell of accepting things as they come across, without extensive evaluation of their subjective reactions.

Apart from how they emerge from the overall structuration and content of their stories, I also charted ideas of personhood by questions about ‘personality change’ or ‘personality development’. Four major views emerge from the replies: ‘personality change’, ‘maturation’ in the sense of ‘personality development’, ‘maturation’ in the sense of life course transitions, and denial or unintelligibility of ‘personality change’ or ‘development’. The vocabulary of more radical ‘personality change’ than gradual maturation was used by just a few narrators, all of whom can be called intellectuals. For example, Maria spoke of the ‘personality destruction’ brought about by military life and of having later recovered her ‘original’ personality (see chapter 6.2).

¹⁰⁴ This process of submerging a ‘self-narrative’ into a wider historical narrative is by no means unique to the people studied here. On the contrary, it is a general phenomenon. For a stimulating and thorough exposition of a comparable body of historical narration, see Malkki’s (1995b) account of the ‘mythico-history’ of Burundian Hutus in Tanzania.

¹⁰⁵ See also chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

The vocabulary of gradual maturation was the most widespread discourse of ‘personality change’, expressed by intellectuals and the rank and file alike.¹⁰⁶ However, only the intellectuals understood their ‘maturation’ in terms of ‘personality development’. Unlike ‘change’, ‘development’ is a process of building upon earlier experiences without being fundamentally transformed. Furthermore, change does not have a meaningful direction, whereas ‘development’ does. Interestingly, the vocabulary of personal development can be found largely in the same stories as that of economic, social, and political development. The link between the two is both conceptual and practical. Conceptually, both meanings are derived from the enlightenment notion of progress, to which the ‘intellectuals’ adhere strongly. Practically, they are intertwined in the sense that Swapo was and still often is seen as the guarantor and even the provider of both national and personal liberation and development.¹⁰⁷ There are also stories in which either or both processes of development are seen as problematic or having failed but the discourses of ‘development’ (as gradual progress) are used nevertheless (see chapter 6).¹⁰⁸

Some mostly not academically educated narrators who had spent long periods studying away from Angola and Zambia nevertheless, spoke of maturation as growing up, getting education or gaining ‘experience’, which they either did not analyze further or clearly saw as life course transitions,¹⁰⁹ while, in contrast with the above, the non-intellectuals often did

¹⁰⁶ Maturation usually also connotes reaching adulthood and growing into responsible comradeship by learning to submit individual desires to a common cause and learning the correct interpretation and disciplined practices of the struggle. See chapter 5.2. This theme appears also in the dissidents’ stories in the form of learning to see through propaganda and growing by having tough experiences; see chapter 6.1.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 5.5.4. Also see chapter 5.2. Individual development acquired through education is tied to national development also in the sense that many of those who have received relatively high levels of modern education see themselves as spearheads or pioneers of development in their various professional fields. This, of course, also acts as a source of personal worth and as a legitimation of one’s own social position.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Peter spoke of ‘growing’ and ‘developing’ through his experiences:

[My] personality has maybe not changed but...grown, developed [because of] the number of experiences [I had]. In terms of political thinking,...when you are a young person you think in simple terms, racial terms and simple solutions and so forth. Otherwise [my] personality basically has not changed but just developed on the basis of the experiences [I’ve had].

Also John speaks of ‘personality change’ in the sense of development and maturation.

¹⁰⁹ For example, when I asked Tauno about ‘personality changes’ in exile, he referred to growing up:

When I left I was very young. Coming back now I got my family, married with two kids...But I feel proud [of where I grew] because my basics are there and I was looking after cattle [there]...[When I returned], I was so happy and everybody was so happy that I’m grown up.

Notably, he later linked his individual development inseparably to belonging to and growing up in Swapo, giving expression to the prevalent, and prescribed, collectivist ethos of the liberation movement:

Swapo is my mother and Swapo is my father. I went to exile when I was very young, and all this talent is from Swapo, whatever human relations...whatever bad behaviour I got, I got it through Swapo. Half of my lifetime I have been with Swapo abroad. I was brought up to when I was 15 by my mother and my

not find questions about ‘personality development’ intelligible¹¹⁰ or answered by referring to changes that were ‘external’ rather than ‘internal’, like acquiring freedom of movement and speech and freedom from violence.¹¹¹

Where do these differences in narrated subjectivity and ideas of personhood arise from? First of all, it should be noted that many immediate contextual factors may have pushed the production of intellectuals’ and non-intellectuals’ stories into opposite directions. This can be demonstrated by having a look at how Anna’s (chapter 4.2) and Ella’s stories were

father and from there Swapo took over to bring me up to this stage, educationwise. To me Swapo has been my mother and my father, forgiving me, guidelining us what to do. And I have been respecting the organisation.

¹¹⁰ For example, personality questions did not make sense to Philip at first. Even when he later answered ‘properly’, he did not employ the vocabulary of ‘inner personality’ but referred to getting ‘experience’ in exile:

LM: Do you think that your time in exile had any influence on your personality, I mean what kind of a person you grew up to be?

Philip: I don’t get your question.

LM: I mean that if you think of yourself during the time that you left the country and for example when you returned, were there any changes in how you saw yourself and how you saw the world around you?

Philip: Oh, you mean when I came back to Namibia? Of course there was some changes because there were those opposition people [who] were treating us very bad. They said we are returnees, we have been out from the country and so on.

We then discussed the issue of returnees and remainers for a while and then I tried again with the personality question, with more success:

LM: I was asking about your personality, yourself I mean, did you return to Namibia as the same person who you were when you left the country or did you change during the time in exile?

Philip: Of course I changed, because when I left Namibia I was not trained, when I came back I was trained, I knew what is war.

LM: So would you have been a different person if you would have stayed in Namibia all the time?

Philip: I couldn’t have changed I think, I couldn’t have got such experience.

¹¹¹ For example, Vilho first said that ‘nothing’ had changed him in exile and then referred to the general change in living conditions :

LM: Did the experiences in exile and after being captured...have some effect on your personality or on your thinking?

Vilho: Nothing.

LM: Do you think that you would be just the same kind of a person if you would have stayed in Namibia all the time?

Vilho: No.

LM: What is the difference?

Vilho: The difference is only that in the previous years we were colonized, people were beaten but now [it happens] no more, there is peace now.

produced. By the criteria of western autobiographical tradition Anna's story would definitely be one of 'the best' stories in the material at hand. It is long, coherent and detailed. It has distinct high points and a climax and consists of both description of events and the evaluation of their meaning. What were the forces that led into her story turning out the way it did?

First, she had been personally successful in her life after independence, in a way that could be seen in direct continuation to what she did in exile. Thus, she could conceive her present situation as a meaningful contribution towards the same end as before independence, the well-being of 'her people'. This may have led her to find it easy to narrativize her life. Second, I was a friend of her good friend and had discussed with her informally before we started the interviews. Also, there were no other people present during the interviews and we had plenty of time.¹¹² However, judging from the comparison between the stories of those interviewees with whom I interacted also in other situations than the interview situation and the stories of others, it appears that the influence of familiarity was not deep, especially with the 'intellectuals'. There was perhaps more on family issues in the stories of those whom I knew better, which may be both a matter of being more intimate and of it being more difficult for the narrators to pass by these issues as I knew something about them anyway. The difference between what was told in the 'formal' context of narrating a life story and in informal discussion was far greater than the differences in the life story narratives caused by familiarity.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, her education and long stay in Europe had equipped her with a good command of English and most probably, familiarity with autobiographical conventions. Apart from the direct influences of the autobiographical genre, which I shall return to below, this meant that we could communicate easily in the same language and moved largely on the same discursive terrain so that our presuppositions and expectations were convergent and our utterances mutually sensible. We were better equipped to sustain a meaningful discussion than I was with the 'non-intellectuals'. I could observe this on my own part from a feeling of understanding and emotionally responding to the 'intellectuals' much better than to other interviewees. Indeed, my field notes show clearly that most interviews that I considered 'good', 'interesting' and 'open' immediately when they were conducted, were those of the 'intellectuals'.

¹¹² Portelli (1997: 12) has argued that knowing one's interviewee well may lead into a more devoted and open style of presentation than otherwise. A similar suggestion is made by Linde (1993: 7). Conversely, it has also been claimed that not knowing the interviewer may give the narrator license to distance him- or herself from the role expectations that are normally attached to him or her; Behar 1992: 119, 122.

In contrast to Anna, Ella's interview was perhaps the clearest example of the 'restrictions' placed to narration by various contextual factors. I ended up interviewing her when I went to the Swapo office in Oshakati to get a letter of recommendation for working in Ovamboland and to make a couple of interviews. When my interviewees did not turn up in time — not unusual in Ovamboland — the Regional Administrator who had provided me with the party's approval approached a woman who had come to meet her, explained her what I was after, and asked her to tell her story for me. The woman, Ella, agreed and we started the interview immediately, with the Regional Administrator acting as a translator. Ella seemed reserved and spoke in a quiet voice. In her initial narrative she mentioned when she was born, what had been her main occupation in exile and what level of formal education she had achieved. She clearly expected me and the translator to take the lead and answered questions shortly, without evaluation and without adding anything that was not directly asked.

First of all, traditional Ovambo notions of social hierarchy probably worked against free narrative flow in this situation. Ella was a relatively young woman discussing with two men, one of whom she probably saw as formally senior to her. It is customary for women not to talk extensively in the presence of men, or young in the presence of old, or those of low rank in the presence of those of higher rank. On average, my women interviewees produced shorter narratives than the men and this may well be associated with their less public social role.

Secondly, the interview was conducted at the party office, an institutional space, and not in an environment familiar to Ella. Furthermore, it later occurred to me that the reason why she was there may well have been that she was looking for work. Obviously, this would have been a constraint to what she could say. It is also regrettable because she may have felt obliged to give the interview.¹¹³

However, these factors pertaining to the immediate context of narration, while being important, are hardly sufficient in themselves for explaining the differences between the intellectuals' and non-intellectuals' stories. Many of the immediate factors that were in place in my interviews with Anna, were there also when I interviewed Martha. Although

¹¹³ The possible restrictiveness of institutional space occurred to me also with those returnees whom I interviewed at the Ondangwa Development Brigade Centre. The delegation of the interviewees to me by their superiors, and conducting the interviews in the premises of the brigade, were liable to create an atmosphere of control where intimate narration, let alone critical voices, was unlikely to arise.

she was a rank and file former exile, her command of English was good. I knew her through informal connections already before the interview. And we conducted the interview in a peaceful environment that was familiar to her. Still, the story she told was closer to those of other rank and file narrators than to those of intellectuals.

It has been proposed that unlike in ‘traditional’ societies, in ‘modern’, especially ‘late’ or ‘reflexively’ modern societies people themselves mould their identities, social relations, bonds and beliefs, and by so doing craft their life stories self-reflectively.¹¹⁴ It could be argued that the stories of ‘non-intellectuals’ simply reflect a traditional outlook whereas those with more education have been ‘modernized’ in their self-reflection. However, we can hardly argue that any of the Namibian former exiles have ever lived in a purely ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’ society. Indeed, the ideal ‘Swapo self-representation’, to which I referred above, most probably conformed with traditional Ovambo ontology and ethos of social relations to a large degree,¹¹⁵ but it also grew from the background of colonial authoritarianism, Christian humanism and postcolonial and socialist forms of statism, including African nationalism.¹¹⁶

How, then, should the difference between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘non-intellectuals’ narratives be explained? To my mind, the answer lies in not inferring the self-representations of the stories directly from social structures and ideologies without taking genre into account as a relatively independent force. I remember the uneasiness I had at first with the ‘non-intellectual’ interviewees. I was puzzled by the way they told their stories. Their stories looked superficial to me, and I could not help feeling that there was something wrong with my questions and the way I communicated with them, that I could not get as ‘deep’ into

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Beck 1994: 13-16; Giddens 1991 and 1994.

¹¹⁵ The importance of kinship as an organising principle in ‘traditional’ Ovambo societies is perhaps one precedent to the collectivism manifested by the life stories of former exiles. According to this principle, the public image of personhood is a location in a network of social relations and roles, rather than a self-contained individuality. In the realm of ideology, a precedent could perhaps be seen in the Ovambo belief according to which bad feelings and thoughts were seen as a possible cause of harm to other people and could easily lead to witchcraft accusations (Hiltunen 1986:54-55). The narrated emphasis on ‘unity’ and ‘commitment’ may well be connected to such thinking.

¹¹⁶ Liberal ideals were incorporated in the rhetoric of Swapo, at least for certain purposes, like in the constitutional proposals of 1982 that were to act as a blueprint for the Namibian constitution, but they never gained prominence in practice. The movement’s vision of modernity was much more in line with the Hegelian tradition of continental enlightenment that posits collectivity, the state, as a necessary precondition for individual good, than with the individualist liberalism associated with the Lockean tradition of British enlightenment. With the attainment of Namibian independence the balance of power shifted in favour of the liberal democratic current and Namibia adopted a constitution widely praised in the West for its regard for individual human rights. Without speculating to what extent the constitution would have been different had Swapo won the two-thirds majority necessary for crafting the constitution on its own, it can be noted that many in Swapo, also in the leadership, resented the actual course of events.

their self-representations as into those of others. However, when I had interviewed a few of them I realized that there was a pattern, that they consistently told their lives differently from the ‘intellectuals’ and that there were certain themes on which my questions did not ‘work’, in other words, did not seem to produce ‘relevant’ responses. What these interviews clearly showed was how conditioned I was by the individualist autobiographical genre to understand and favour certain modes of presentation rather than others.

Autobiography is a specific combination of a mode of presentation and of particular ideas of the self. It is a fundamentally individualist genre in which ‘the subject’ has come to be seen to have a complicated ‘inner self’ that has to be constantly taken care of.¹¹⁷ In life stories, the extent to which one finds this ‘inner voice’ may vary even more than in autobiographies produces at the narrator’s own initiative, and indeed they do. The ‘intellectuals’ had ample contact with this genre through both formal education and everyday practices outside Zambia and Angola. By contrast, the ‘western’ literary and other representations of personhood were far more inaccessible to those who remained in the camps of Angola and Zambia, especially if they came from rural Ovambo background with little formal education. Therefore, their stories are more directly reflective of the ethos of unity (see chapter 4.3) that relies on the ‘traditional’ (gender and age-specific) modes of conceptualizing and representing personhood and action.¹¹⁸ In their stories, the link between the ‘personal’ and the ‘collective’ is the strongest. It is there not only in the statements of individual commitment but more profoundly in the narrated subjectivity itself. To my mind, this intertwining does not reflect poverty of expression or of ‘personality development’ but a consistent discourse of history and personhood.

Thus, the ‘intellectuals’ and ‘non-intellectuals’ utilize partly different discursive ‘resources’ in their life narration and arrive at differing self-representations. The differences could be interpreted simply as an indication of different ways of conceiving personal agency and the

¹¹⁷ Again, one should be careful not to equal western autobiography with ‘modernity’ and other forms of self-presentation with ‘tradition’. On one hand, the genre of individuality in autobiography is older than the ‘reflexive modernity’ of Giddens and Beck, as I pointed out in chapter 3.2.1. On the other, while the autobiographical genre and its bourgeois ideal of an evolving and reflectable inner self has gradually become a common interpretation in the modern West, it is not similarly prevalent in all ‘modern’ conditions.

Gagnier (1991: 12, 27) identifies class as a factor that influenced modes of personal narration in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain. The autonomous, introspective self-portrayal of bourgeois writers came to be regarded as the norm, whereas the more directly intersubjective sense of selfhood evident in working-class writing did not gain acceptance as proper autobiography. According to her, most of the latter ‘wrote unselfconsciously, without the introspective or aesthetic end that characterized...literary artists’ (*ibid.*: 40). The parallel with the distinctions in the material at hand is apparent.

¹¹⁸ A related explanation would put emphasis on the very conflict of the explanatory horizons which the ‘intellectuals’ have confronted in different discursive and cultural environments. In this view, this conflict would set the process of self-reflection in motion.

relations between things, events and people, in other words, as ‘real’ variation in how the ‘intellectuals’ and ‘non-intellectuals’ perceive themselves or perhaps even in how they have lived out their lives. However, life stories are not complete descriptions of the narrators’ past and present lives, hardly even complete accounts of their ‘self-representation’. Rather, they are morally charged, ideal descriptions of personhood, context-specific, relatively public and ‘statemental’ presentations of self. What is represented is public personhood, not actual experienced subjectivity. The demand for narrative coherence is always likely to push some aspects of remembered experience outside the represented ‘unity of life’. They are ‘suppressed’ or expressed in other, often less formal forms of discourse. Thus, apart from being an indication of how personhood is fundamentally understood, non-agentiveness may reflect what is understood to be the proper manner of speaking about personhood, in other words, what is the appropriate moral discourse concerning one’s self. In this light, the difference between the ‘intellectuals’ and ‘non-intellectuals’ narratives should not be taken to mean that the latter lacked individuality or did not have any ‘inner life’ or ‘self-consciousness’. Rather, it may result from different ideas of what is a proper self-representation and what is a proper way to represent it.

Additionally, since the autobiographical genre is best suited to articulating an ideology of agentive individualism that pushes aside the social forces behind individual ‘choices’, it is easiest for those with a relatively high social position and strong sense of power over their lives to mould their remembered experiences into a coherent account that fulfills the demands of this genre. It both presents them with and legitimizes a particular model for conceiving agency. Indeed, there were many among the ‘intellectual’ interviewees who told that they wished to write about their experiences.¹¹⁹ This wish clearly reflects the idea of having been involved in something worth recording and sharing with others. It also implies that this something has come to an end so that it is time to sum up. For many, this would mean carving a niche for oneself in the historical process of ‘liberation’ and within the new nation. More fundamentally, autobiographical writing would make sense of and legitimize one’s experiences and existence both to oneself and to others in the post-independence condition.

Sometimes, changes in lived experience or acquiring new discursive resources fundamentally challenge one’s interpretations of things remembered and thereby lead into drastic revisions in the narrative representation of one’s life. These revisions may concern

¹¹⁹ As far as I know, at least one has done so since.

the ‘external’ reality as well as one’s ‘self’. In this process, memories acquire new meaning and some new ones may rise into new significance while some old ones fade into oblivion. The issue of emphasizing or downplaying individual decisions and agency, mentioned above, is one example of this phenomenon. The ‘I wanted to make something out of myself’-motive is mostly put forward by the well-educated, especially men. Isn’t it probable that it is a cause produced by its effects rather than a decision firmly made all those years ago and consistently followed thereafter? It is told by precisely those who did become something, as a justification for their position. Conversely, many others may have dreamed of achievement but forgotten or suppressed these dreams as it turned out that they would not be fulfilled.¹²⁰ Instead, they stress their loyalty, commitment, and sacrifices in the service of the liberation struggle, thereby justifying themselves both existentially and in their present hopes of being recognized and supported by the government (see also chapter 5.5.2).

Indeed, whereas participation in the military struggle was a source of pride to the ‘non-intellectuals’, many of those who had diverted into an educational career after a period in the military did not speak of the military with similar enthusiasm. For example, the following is what Simon told of the time he spent in Angola before getting to study, presumably in the military: ‘I left Namibia, I went to Angola, then I spent about three years in Angola there. Anyway, since it was during the liberation struggle I spent most of my life in the bush.’ Hereafter, he proceeds to a long narrative of his studies in various countries. Erkki’s story is similar in this regard. This is what he tells of his time in the military: ‘After training we used to go for battle in the frontline against South Africa, operating at Katima Mulilo. Later on I was promoted to be a commander on engineering, that means for planting mines underground.’ From here, he goes on to a long narrative of his studies and life in the country where he studied. The most likely reason for this is that the motif of education has grown to dominate these narrators’ understanding of their personal history. The time they spent in the military has become just a detour (Mishler 1992: 25) in the course of their lives, a period that is not of major importance from the perspective of the present.¹²¹

¹²⁰ There are a few narratives in which discontent is admitted. Maria’s story is one of the few in which martyrdom emerges as a major organising principle. In some other stories, like those of Raina and Matthew, different forms of loss or denied opportunities appear but not as major motifs; see pp. 75-78 and chapter 6.1.

¹²¹ Other interesting revisions can be found in the dissidents’ and Maria’s stories. The dissidents revise their relation to the collective after their detention. Maria revises her interpretation of military life, and life in Swapo more generally, a move probably facilitated by her education and long stay in Europe. See chapter 6.

5 The liberation narrative as a journey

In the above chapters I concentrated on highlighting the basic characteristics and main variants of the liberation narrative through individual stories. In the following chapters, I will treat these stories as a single body of material and read it for a more detailed exposition of the major turning points of the liberation narrative. In this reading, the liberation narrative emerges as a journey, in which individual physical movement falls together with both individual and collective narrative progression. I will start with the ways of narrating childhood and move on to relate these to the narratives of politicization. These build up to the major turning point of liberationist life stories, namely leaving into exile and being incorporated into Swapo's organization there. The second major turning point, the climax, of liberationist stories consists of returning to Namibia and winning the elections. In contrast to these turning points, life in exile appears as a relatively stable and uneventful state that is usually narrated through generalizations, in less detail. These generalizations convey an ethos rather than depict events. Apart from describing and analyzing this ethos, after the chapter on arriving into exile, I will also look at its interplay with the present in the narrative imagination of the former exiles.

5.1 Before exile

5.1.1 Images of childhood

The most striking characteristics of the childhood accounts in the stories is how short and plain they are and how soon they lead to the themes of politicization and leaving the country. Matthew's story provides an extreme example. He leaves his early years completely out of his initial narrative (appendix 1, p. 29, lines 1-30). Most stories do not go this far but cursorily, and usually positively, relate some major events and characteristics of one's childhood. These include being born, personal relations, home life, daily activities, and starting school. Festus's and Albertina's narratives are good examples of this pattern:

Festus: I was born in a peasant family. My father was a teacher and my mother was just a peasant, a housewife. I grew up here, I was looking after my parents' cattle sometimes, twice a week, and three days I had to go to school...After classes I went back to assist my parents in cultivating the land. I had some friends, we used to play volleyball and football. And when I was 15 I realized that we were definitely in horrible circumstances...I came to know that the country was under occupation by the South African forces. So, early in my youth we formed a political group, starting telling others that we can come together and do something. We had already heard that some of our leaders were abroad. We were informed that even the president Sam Nujoma and other prominent Swapo figures were not in the country. I joined Swapo when I was 18 years old, I became a full member.

Albertina: I recognized who I was and what I was supposed to do at the age of nine. I did my primary school at Onanama in the north and I continued at Odibo. I finished standard eight. We were aware of politics when we were growing up, we were aware about what was happening here in our country, that we were not equal here, that we blacks had bad bantu education.

After Festus and Albertina have thus introduced the themes of colonialism and politicization right from the beginning of their stories, their narration remains within the liberationist context throughout.¹²²

In some cases there is more, in stories that are the lengthiest and most detailed on the whole. These stories were told by ‘intellectuals’ who with all probability were the most familiar with the autobiographical genre, and thus may have thought that a ‘proper’ story should include a childhood narrative. However, many ‘intellectuals’ give a very short account of their childhood, as the above examples show. Moreover, even in stories in which a longer childhood narrative is given, it does not constitute a major period in its own right and is not told as eagerly and passionately as issues directly related to the ‘liberation narrative’. Rather, even if childhood is set apart from the themes of colonialism and resistance, it is placed in a contrastive relation to colonialism and thus acts as a prelude to the liberation narrative.¹²³ Thus, childhood is usually either passed over quickly and if it is not, which is less frequent, it is portrayed as an age of innocence in contrast with the colonial evil. Either way, the themes of colonial situation, schooling, work and politicization are given more attention than other possible themes.

In my mind, the brevity of childhood narratives can be explained in two ways. The first is that childhood is seen to be irrelevant to the central theme of these life narratives, which is one’s relation to the liberation struggle. Hence, childhood is contextually irrelevant. If the ‘liberation narrative’ did not organize the stories so strongly it would be possible for childhood to emerge as a relevant topic. However, one should also consider another possibility, which is that childhood is considered unimportant from the perspective of what one is now. It is seen as personal prehistory when one was not yet what one was to become but ‘only’ a small kid. Here, its irrelevance is more profound. What supports this latter explanation is that in many stories schooling is given considerable attention right from the start, even if it is not related to colonialism. The reason for this may be that starting school

¹²² A similar pattern can be seen in the stories of Maria, David, Martha, and Joseph, included in appendix 1. Note the difference between what was told on one’s own initiative (bold) and what was told as answers to my questions.

¹²³ See, for example, John’s and Anna’s childhood accounts in appendix 1.

is seen as a start to one's personal career, of transformation from what one just happens to be into somebody more important through one's own effort.¹²⁴

5.1.2 Colonialism: remembering individual experiences or a shared discourse?

In liberationist stories, the brief childhood accounts usually lead to accounts of colonialism. Often these are generalizations, in which things like contract labour, bantu education, the homeland system and police and army brutality are mentioned. In some stories, the accounts of colonialism are more detailed, including accounts of personal experiences.¹²⁵ The imagery of the colonial condition in Namibia before leaving into exile constitutes the background for the 'liberation narrative'. It motivates politicization and ultimately the step of leaving the country and joining the liberation struggle in exile. For example, in many narratives accounts of how the 'colonial evil' was seen through the eyes of a child build a bridge from the age of innocence into politicization and later life as a part of the liberation movement, and they give a backdrop of inevitability to these later events. Festus, cited above, relates an anecdote that serves as a good example of this pattern:

One thing which led me to be politically conscious [happened during] the time when the Ondangwa – Oshakati road was under construction. A certain white man was driving a bulldozer, clearing the road with a black man. During the lunch time I came close [because] I was interested in seeing the bulldozer; it was the first time for me to see such a machine...The white South African had very nice food, well cooked, and fresh water and cups and plates around him. The poor black man didn't even have a cup. I witnessed, I saw, he wanted to drink water, he didn't have [any]. It was spring time, there was no water...He had no cup where the white [man] could put him water to drink. He had a hat on his head, very dirty. The white [man] told him [to]...take off his dirty hat. Then he poured water in it and he drank. So I developed some negative ideas against the white men in this country. This is how my politics started.

LM: Was the colonial situation present otherwise, was it to be seen?

Festus: Of course it was to be seen, especially when it came to hard labour. The workers, especially from this region, were all rushing to Ondangwa to be hired to work down south. But when they went there...they were treated very badly. I remember, my elder brother also was looking for a job and he had to pass through this labour system. He came home beaten...So, all these [things] were educating me to be[come] politically conscious.

In many narratives, childhood is contrasted with the colonial evil but colonialism also appears as something that was not properly understood at the time. To be sure, there are aspects of historical circumstances involved. For those blacks who were living in the 'police zone' in the 1960s and 1970s, the everyday practices of apartheid were something to be negotiated all the time. The state extensively controlled the use of public space and

¹²⁴ See e.g. Maria's narrative; appendix 1, p. 40, lines 4-16 for an example.

¹²⁵ In most stories the most detailed personal accounts of colonialism are either completely or largely inseparable from narratives of becoming politically aware or leaving Namibia.

restricted the movement of the black majority. The repressive machinery of the state could invade also private spaces like homes. Even attacks on physical intimacy were common. By contrast, the majority of the people in Ovamboland had little direct contact with colonial realities in the 1960s and early 1970s, except for those who migrated to work in the south. This was to change drastically in 1972 when the repercussions of the general strike and student activism spread also to these parts of the country and the colonial state introduced new repressive measures. Thereafter Ovamboland was in the eye of the storm whereas the south offered some, even if limited, tranquillity and space for political action. There were also other differences between the north and the south. For example, the southerners were constantly in contact with the different ‘ethnic groups’ of the country, whereas those living in the ‘homeland’ of Ovambo were not. These differences are reflected in the narratives of those who grew up in different parts of the country at different times.

However, the theme of ignorance is an important part of the accounts of colonialism also in the stories of those who tell of having had first-hand experience of it or even of having been involved in political activities before leaving. I propose that there are narrativistic reasons for this. In many narratives, ignorance about colonialism and imposed by it emerges as a backdrop both to narratives of politicization in Namibia and to the narratives of maturing and learning in exile. Thus, Victor tells that he ‘could not quite understand’ why the living conditions of whites were much better than those of blacks, and that ‘one tends to simply accept it as a child’, implying that this was to change later:

You see, when I was a kid...in Swakop[mund], we were living under the system of apartheid. You had whites living in town and blacks were living in...the location...I couldn’t quite understand why whites were living in such nice places and blacks, their conditions were very bad. At the age of 13 I had to go and start working...to supplement the income of my uncle. I used to work in a garden in town after school...And you could see the contrast. When you went to town [there were] all these nice houses and gardens, trees. You came back to the location, it was a totally different environment. So I couldn’t quite understand why the situation was like that but...one tends to simply accept it as a child.

Later, he related an anecdote that marvellously serves as a metonym for colonialism as a whole:

I was working for a German couple, very old...I used to work in the garden, watering [and] cleaning it and sweeping around the house outside...They used to give me food, normally tea and bread, but instead of giving me tea in a cup they used to have a jam tin...And they had a little dog and that dog had a nice little plate and a bowl [for] water. I simply [can]not forget that because [it] was quite striking...I drank tea from a tin but the dog next to me would eat and drink from a nice porcelain plate. That...already shows the system which was in place and shows that you were not of much worth. But even then...it did not come to my mind to start asking these people: ‘Why don’t you give me a cup?’

As Victor himself concludes, this incident serves to reveal the way the system was.¹²⁶ Like in the accounts of contract labour (see chapter 4.3), the selection and telling of personal experiences is motivated by a complete nationalist framework of colonialism — insofar as one can extract the ‘authentically’ personal part of remembrance from the shared discourse in which it is conveyed.

Indeed, the ignorance told about in such passages is not ignorance about one’s own experiences but ignorance about their true meaning, the bigger picture into which the narrators now feel all such events belong. This bigger picture is also referred to more directly by telling about bantu education and especially the way in which it prevented young blacks from learning their ‘own history’ — which of course does not mean one’s personal history but what has come to be included as ‘Namibian history’ in nationalist historiography. In Hilma’s words:

Imagine, when I went to school I didn’t learn my own history. I had to learn the history of Europeans, all these Vasco da Gamas...all these South Africans, how they came and how they were heroes, and if in some small text it came to your own history it was just how they failed, how they were defeated and how they just surrendered. You know, what the hell is that? I’m not saying that they didn’t surrender, probably they did, but there must have also been something more than that...You were ideologically prepared to value a certain system and you had no choice.

The implication is that not only did the narrators’ past selves lack a proper framework for interpreting their experiences before their eyes were opened by nationalist politics but that they were also intentionally bombarded with propaganda that sought to provide them with a false framework and instill a sense of inferiority in them.

However, these narrators also extend a critical relation towards the system right into the time of which they tell about. Hilma says, in direct continuation to the above account: ‘I think there was...a demand for something more than this, and probably that driving force also pushed that if you go [abroad] you are going to get a much better view of things.’ And Martin puts it in this way:

Wherever there is oppression, people will resist...and people try to question the validity of certain policies and regulations and the way they live...I never had experience of living together with a white person or a coloured person or even with other tribes, but my feeling was basically that people...should live together...Although the system of colonial education was designed in such a way that you should not question it there were things like history...lessons [that] were so racist that [even] a primary school kid would caution. [There were] things like...[that] when the whites came here there were no people in this country...and that our...ancestors would sell, say, 25 000 hectares for a bottle of whisky.

¹²⁶ Similar narratives can be found in John’s and Anna’s stories.

So, at the same time as it is hard or even impossible to arrive at a mature and considered analysis of the colonial situation and of possible remedies within the colonial situation, this situation is so contrary to common sense and morality that it necessarily produces an urge to resist. This criticism is a crucial moment, because it establishes the basic dualism of being ignorant, yet feeling that something is wrong and starting to look for the truth. These statements pave the way for accounts of becoming politically aware, of learning to see colonialism in the right perspective ‘as a totality’, as some narrators put it. According to them, the deadlock of ignorance and feeling inferior could not be properly broken in the colonial situation but only in exile.¹²⁷

This does not mean that the narrators did not have any interpretations for their experiences before exile, far from it. Resistance to colonialism certainly developed into a steady force in the country by the early 1970s, with the youth becoming increasingly involved and militant (see e.g. Soggot 1986: 42-49, 56-60, 76-85, 125-130; Leys and Saul 1995b: 70-73, 76-78; Kiljunen 1981: 165-166; Lush 1993: 61-65). In Ovamboland, a ‘culture of the struggle’ gradually developed, as Swapo became deeply ingrained in the very fabric of social relations (see chapter 5.1.3). Rather, the narratives of ignorance refer to not yet having learned the liberation narrative in the form it emerged from Swapo discourse and practices in exile. I believe that, as the narrators themselves suggest, the full picture of colonialism and apartheid within the context of the ‘liberation struggle’ would very much be formed only in exile. This is even more the case with the positive content of ‘liberation’.

Thus, the narrators imply that their experiences of colonialism become truly meaningful only in the framework of the liberation narrative. These experiences also form a background to the narrative of one’s own life in the context of the liberation struggle and legitimize this context. Thus, I suggest that not only does the liberation narrative emerge historically from the personal experiences of colonialism. To the individual narrators, it is likely to be the other way around: the liberation narrative was, to a large extent, learned in exile and as a part of it a shared discourse about colonialism. This discourse, in turn, structures the reinterpreting, recontextualizing and representing of one’s own experiences.¹²⁸ The anecdotes and details that are mentioned appear as significant because they exemplify the dimensions of oppression and resistance, the main forces of the liberation narrative.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Tauno’s, Mary’s and Timothy’s narratives on pp. 135 and 144-145.

¹²⁸ I will return to this issue in subsequent chapters.

5.1.3 Politicization

In most of the stories the subject becomes politicised in one way or another before leaving into exile. The stories that have been analyzed so far serve as good examples of the common pattern whereby the narration gets thicker when the narrators proceed to this issue. It constitutes the crucial moment after which things would never be the same.¹²⁹ Its significance is shown by a marked increase in the amount of detail and evaluation in the narratives. They often come down from the heights of generalization into the minutiae of particular incidents like confrontations with authorities that ‘opened one’s eyes’.¹³⁰ Of course, this does not concern everybody. Quite many, especially of those who left from Ovamboland, do not have extensive narratives of politicization to tell but proceed directly to leaving the country. This is often related to the kinds of reasons they give for leaving. They refer to circumstantial factors such as violence or the general mood among the youth more than those who tell of politicization proper (see chapters 5.1.4 and 5.2).

A major characteristic of the accounts of becoming politically aware or active is that they portray nationalist politics as something that one grows into rather than as an individual choice. There are three different kinds of ‘growing into politics’.¹³¹ First, there are narratives of being influenced by family members or through other close relationships.¹³² The first stirrings of politicization within the family are usually seen as a first step into the wider arena of politics, something that led one to adopt a more conscious relation to the liberation struggle. Second, many stories convey a general atmosphere in which it was natural to grow into a supporter of nationalist politics or, more specifically, of Swapo. The generally politicized atmosphere emerges as the background for one’s later individual involvement. For example, Jesaya tells of becoming politicized through an incident:

I can’t say exactly when I became politically oriented, but probably before I was 13...One time my father and my brother came home on bicycles and told me that they had seen policemen shooting a boy who was defecating in the bush...You know, people don’t have many toilets in the rural areas. These guys didn’t talk to the boy, they merely shot at [him] and laughed and...left. So I couldn’t understand...how somebody could just come and shoot somebody and laugh, there’s no questions, no reasons...That

¹²⁹ This is how Anna describes the general strike of 1971-72 in both Namibian and her personal history; see appendix 1, p. 11, lines 129-147.

¹³⁰ This is the case especially with the narratives of secondary school politics and the narratives of leaving Namibia.

¹³¹ The following three ways of politicization by no means exclude each other; in many stories one can find more than one of them.

¹³² See for example Anna’s and Matthew’s narratives in appendix 1.

occupied my mind most of the time, and these were white police. And slowly I got aware of what was going on around me, although usually people in the rural area were not confronted with it immediately, not by then.

Later he continued on this theme, nicely bringing together the various influences that intertwined into 'growing up with politics' in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

[In 19]71 a lot of things were happening, there were migrant workers' strikes. Even before that we met people who came from the town and told us how they were treated by the white people, how they had had...physical confrontation with the police, fighting...And there was an incident...[in 19]70 or [19]71...actual fighting between the police and some people...in Ovambo. They were cutting the border between Angola and Namibia.¹³³ People...tried to remove [it] because they said: 'The people on the other side are our brothers and we don't like this control.' They were shooting with bows and arrows and the police of course shot them with guns...It happened in my area and all this was getting to my head...Another incident happened in 1966. By that time I had gone to live with my father in Ongandjera, he was a school supervisor there...The police came to arrest one guerrilla, not far from our house and I saw the confrontation from a distance, the fight, or I heard, I didn't see. And Omgulumbashe¹³⁴ was not...very far from us, so this story always came to my head that 'people are fighting, we have to fight for our country'. And ultimately when I came to secondary school, they had white people there teaching us and we knew that the education is bullshit, the facility is a very bad one and food is horrible. There were no white [students] because apartheid means that blacks should study in their own school but we knew that the white kids ate better in their secondary school because the people who were working there were blacks and they told us...So you can't say exactly when politics [came to my life], I sort of grew up with it.

Tauno was caught by Swapo's politics of mobilization while attending secondary school at Odibo:

My father...was very influential when it came to political understanding. He...had been working with the Boers for quite some time and he knew the intimidation taking place in Namibia. Whenever we were together he was trying to tell us that 'Namibia is not a free country, Namibia is under South Africa both politically and economically'...So, my political understanding started from my father and also at school...I went to Odibo...secondary school...in 1972...[Swapo] used to hold meetings [there], we were small boys, they were talking about colonialism, how the Boers came to Namibia...We only listened because the people had been called together and somebody was talking on top of a drum, it was cramped there and he was talking, telling the situation, how Namibia should be governed...And we could see it with our eyes how the colonial power was sometimes beating people, arresting people and we were just small guys, we didn't know what was going on...We were there just singing these Swapo songs, we heard that there is Swapo and a lot of Swapo members were from that area...There was no organization apart from Swapo in that area. So in order to participate in political affairs [you] automatically were a member of Swapo. And then you had to sing revolutionary songs of Swapo. We used to have our group...we sang political songs there...They used to be big gatherings. Like early 1972, we had very big gatherings at the school. And whenever there was a gathering, a political rally, you saw white people coming there, the South African police with their police cars and with rifles and loudspeakers saying: 'You are here illegally. If you do not follow orders we are going to shoot you. You must dismiss from this place.'... People sometimes didn't care, they were just speaking...And the South African army...the police...could even start beating people...and you could fight with them, throwing stones and running away.¹³⁵

¹³³ Apparently Jesaya refers to the popular unrest in Ovamboland in early 1972, which included cutting down the Angolan - Namibian border fence over a long distance. See Swapo 1981: 202; Soggot 1986: 49.

¹³⁴ The place of the first confrontation between Swapo guerrillas and South African forces in 1966.

¹³⁵ See also John's narrative in appendix 1, p. 2, lines 78-85.

Jesaya and Tauno lived in Ovamboland, the heartland of Swapo's support. However, the apparent naturalness of politics, channeled through Swapo could, to a large extent, be seen also in the narratives of those who came from Ovambo families in the south. For example, Martha tells how in her childhood the people used to be politically very active and how there were no other parties than Swapo in Walvis Bay; 'there was only Swapo and the Boers' (appendix 1, p. 22, lines 22-25).¹³⁶ Aina lived in Swakopmund, next to Walvis Bay:

LM: Was your family...involved in politics?

Aina: Not those days. Nowadays they are but not those days because they were afraid. If they heard you talking about politics they said 'no no no, please don't talk about those things, we don't want police to come and arrest us' or whatever...As we were small we used to see people going for these Swapo meetings...We just followed the people. We used to see Nathaniel Maxuilili¹³⁷ coming from Walvis Bay to Swakopmund, he came for some meetings and then you saw the South African police there. [The people] were singing songs and talking politics and one day I just said 'what is this, what are the people talking about?'...We used to go there and listen and we learned little by little.

These narratives reflect the role of Swapo, especially in Ovamboland but also among Ovambos elsewhere in the country. The Ovambos have been Swapo's strongest supporters since it was formed. Although it gained relatively wide support from other areas and groups in the country during the struggle for independence it always remained a predominantly Ovambo-led and -supported movement. Even though Swapo's policy has always been consistently nationalist and rejective of political use of ethnicity, it has been eagerly labelled as an 'Ovambo-party' by the colonial administration and by competing political parties. Indeed, Ovambos came to be referred as being 'born-Swapo', which meant that especially in Ovamboland being a Swapo supporter became less an individual 'political choice' than a social fact, the only possibility, something that one grew into as one grew into the membership of the community (cf. Soiri 1996: 55, 59-60, 67-74).

Third, as Tauno's narrative above indicated, the secondary schools emerge as an especially important site of politicization. The other two forms of politicization are still preliminary, the first steps en route to becoming politically conscious. By contrast, the transition from a subject to whom things happen into an active (political) agent begins at secondary school (in those stories in which such a transformation takes place). The proper narrated self, the member of the liberation movement, is born only here. This may well be connected to the great transformative power of such schools. They were usually boarding schools,

¹³⁶ Admittedly, Walvis Bay may have been a special case, a Swapo stronghold with a large population of Ovambo contract workers.

¹³⁷ Maxuilili was the president of Swapo's internal wing and became something of a legend already during his lifetime. His reputation and popularity is reflected in the stories. He is certainly the most often mentioned public figure in them.

constituting a complete social world to those who attended them. All ‘total institutions’ perform such a transformative function but in this case it was specifically connected to the missionary origins of the schools. Writes Soggot (1986: 15):

Boarding schools were proposed to provide an antiseptic atmosphere freed from the influence of African home life; it was axiomatic that scholars be taught industriousness and obedience — inseparable companions to productivity and servility.¹³⁸

However, at the same time that the schools brought about these transformations, they produced the first stirrings of nationalist consciousness. Early Namibian nationalism drew motivation and justification from the ‘spirit of pan-racial Christian brotherhood’ (*ibid.*: 15) that inspired at least a part of the missionaries. Later the boarding schools acted as seedbeds for the reproduction of nationalism in yet new generations that passed through the system. As John’s, Anna’s, Martha’s and Matthew’s stories demonstrate, accounts of getting involved in, or at least of being inspired by, student politics while in secondary school abound in the stories.¹³⁹ However, it is Victor whose narrative best demonstrates the various aspects of secondary school experience. Immediately after he had told how one ‘could not quite understand’ the colonial situation as a child (chapter 5.1.2) he tells about living at a boarding school in an exceptionally analytical tone, explicitly referring to their formative influence, both political and otherwise:

We were living at the school. I think the first two or three years we were six in a room...So of course you built up a close relationship with the people with whom you lived...but more importantly, also your classmates. Because you were always together, you tended to be very attached to them...There was a time when there were about a thousand students...but literally we used to know each other, the faces. We met in the morning, we used to come together, sing a song and pray. And of course you met in the corridors...You had people from all parts of Namibia, whereas for example in Swakop[mund] or even...in Katutura you had a location for Ovambo, Damara, Herero and so on. We were mixed...The secondary school [was] where one’s eyes started opening because...you started questioning certain things, you listened to the news, talked to people, you read papers, and you started forming opinions. That’s really where the political influence started coming in...We used to discuss among ourselves and that’s how I gradually started understanding how the world was operating, how Namibia was linked to the outer world. And even in school you learned...about the United Nations, the mandate system and so on. And sometimes we used to come to Katutura at weekends...You met many people [there]. Sometimes they used to have political rallies...and after that you started discussing things. And...you saw things around you, for example the living conditions...the way you were treated as a black person...All these things built up...Of course there was no freedom for political association. If you were found to be engaging in political activities you could be thrown out of school...Nonetheless the days in secondary school were an eye-opener to many of us...and I think this is a tradition in secondary schools. When you go there you become much more aware of issues.

¹³⁸ The rules, routines and other practices of the boarding schools are described, for example, by Matthew and Maria. See appendix 1, pp. 29-30, lines 36-64 and p. 40, lines 17-35. See also Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, chapter 9, for an instructive analysis of missionary ‘domestication’ of the Tswana in South Africa.

¹³⁹ Appendix 1, pp. 2-3, lines 94-124; p. 10-11, lines 96-143; pp. 22-23, lines 40-66; p. 29, lines 36-51 and 75-101.

The secondary schools were a site of getting better introduced to nationalist politics and, in some cases, of getting actively involved. However, also another fundamental transformation took place: the schools introduced those who went through them to living in a peer group and to a modern time and space economy on a completely new scale. As a mode of controlling and reproducing social relations and practices, the boarding schools thus unintendedly prepared young Namibians to their future life in exile. Having gone through that system may have been conducive to learning the discipline required in exile, especially in the military.

The above narratives shed light on the various aspects of politicization before leaving into exile. In them, politicization performs a similar function in relation to leaving as colonialism did in relation to politicization: it constitutes the background that gives a rationale for the subject's decision to leave and join the liberation struggle in exile, lending it a sense of necessity and inevitability. However, it should be borne in mind that not all narrators told of being politicized. Consequently, also their narrated reasons for leaving Namibia vary. It is to these that I now turn.

5.1.4 Leaving Namibia

Leaving into exile was generally seen by the narrators as a major turning point in their life.¹⁴⁰ It was a decision that would bring major changes to the course of their lives.¹⁴¹ However, there are differences in the narrated reasons for leaving and in the way its significance is evaluated. As I shall show, these differences are not random but related to various factors, such as one's background in Namibia, gender, one's later relation to Swapo, and most importantly, the plotting of one's life story as a whole. As leaving was

¹⁴⁰ This is indicated by the considerable detail with which leaving is narrated. This can be easily seen from the stories in appendix 1 where accounts of leaving can be read in the context of complete stories and therefore I have omitted descriptions of actually leaving the country from the narratives below. See appendix 1, esp. pp. 3-4, lines 120-177; pp. 11-14, lines 137-299; p. 22-23, lines 3-7 and 62-90; p. 26, lines 37-38 and 51-54; p. 28, lines 30-35; p. 31, lines 128-161; pp. 40-41, lines 36-90.

For narratives of leaving in secondary literature, see Shipanga 1989: 55-65; Shityuwete 1990: 77-86; Ndadi 1989: 121-129; Angula 1990: 82-92; Shamenas and Shamenas 1980: 137-182; Ya-Otto 1982: 146-151. Shipanga left in 1963, Shityuwete and Ndadi in 1964. Angula's, the Shamenas' and Ya-Otto's accounts tell about the 1974 exodus. Groth 1995 recounts many narratives of leaving into exile.

¹⁴¹ The former exiles were not the only ones to attach a glorious aura to leaving and having been in exile. My host, Bob, told that his father had left into exile in 1974 and thereafter served as one of PLAN's senior commanders. According to him, they had intended to meet in Walvis Bay and leave the country together. However, Bob was late and his father had already gone. Also one of those few interviewees who were not former exiles told that he had wanted to leave in the late 1970s but decided not to because of the danger posed by the 'fake Swapos', that is, members of the colonial military or paramilitary forces dressed up as Swapo guerrillas. In both of these cases, leaving into exile appears as something that one should, and would, have done if the circumstances did not prevent it.

seen as a crucial turning point by all the narrators — whether liberationist or non-liberationist, militant or non-militant — its narrativizations cut through all of the variants of the liberation narrative as well as its alternatives. I will concentrate on describing and analyzing the reasons the narrators give for leaving. I will link the narrated motives for leaving both to historical context and to the context of the stories of which they form an important part.

Before Namibia's independence the standard explanation of Swapo and its associates for why Namibians left into exile was that they wanted to join the armed liberation struggle or, at least, to contribute to national liberation in some other way.¹⁴² This idea dominates also in the former exiles' life stories. However, many other reasons are given too. The militant wish to fight against 'the Boers', hoping to get educational opportunities abroad, and oppressive and unsafe conditions in Namibia appear most often. Other reasons that are mentioned include lack of opportunities in Namibia; Swapo's propaganda from abroad, first transmitted on the radio and later also carried by the guerrillas; friends and relatives who had already left or were leaving at the same time. I will start the exposition of the narratives from the clearly militant accounts and move towards the non-militant ones. I will then analyze some major issues in them.

5.1.4.1 Young militants?

Namibia of the early 1970s was a country of increasing colonial pressure and of accordingly increasing politicization and militancy, especially among the workers and the youth. Among the latter, secondary school students were at the forefront of activism. The Swapo Youth League, established in 1969, was gaining ground. The 1974 coup in Portugal led to Portugal's gradual withdrawal from its colonies, including Angola. Combined with growing militarization and harassment in the northern part of Namibia, and Swapo broadcasts from abroad, these events led to an exodus of thousands of young Namibians to

¹⁴² Swapo stated that the 'PLAN ... forces have been strengthened by a steady flow of volunteers dedicated to the liberation of their nation from the stranglehold of colonialism and imperialist exploitation' (Swapo 1981: 253). Hishongwa (1983: 55) writes: 'The majority of the people left the country with the aim of joining the liberation army of SWAPO and of fighting against the illegal occupation troops of South Africa in Namibia.' And according to Katjavivi (1988: 91):

The fighters are ordinary members of SWAPO who volunteer to join PLAN. They are Namibians who feel they cannot any longer put up with conditions under South African rule. They leave their jobs, their villages, their schools, to seek better opportunities outside the country. Some are already committed to partaking in the armed struggle; others join in after they have left the country.

Even after independence, this explanation is accepted in some studies. See e.g. Soiri 1996: 74. On the other hand, there are Swapo accounts that give a more varied picture. See e.g. Angula 1990: 83, 86, 91-92.

Zambia via Angola during the latter half of 1974, mostly from Ovamboland.¹⁴³ The following years saw increasing militarization in Ovamboland as well as increasing repression of Swapo activities in the south. Over two thirds of the people I interviewed were part of the exodus of 1974 and almost all the others left during the following six years.¹⁴⁴

First, in some stories, militancy in the sense of wanting to join the armed struggle emerges as the primary motive for leaving. For example, Timothy was a political activist already before he left into exile in 1974 from Walvis Bay. He soon diverted to a career of education, which he had continued up to university level. Overall, his story is one of heroic commitment and in keeping with this, the decision to leave, in his story, basically stems from militancy in the sense of wanting to join the armed liberation struggle.¹⁴⁵ There are also more immediate reasons that trigger the decision just at that particular moment:

When I was in my first year at secondary school I left Namibia for political reasons...When I was growing up...we were always talking politics at home, my mother talking about her brothers who [had] left the country...They left quite early, in the early sixties. He (shows a photograph) left together with the president. And then he followed later in [19]64...They were legends during those days, people who had left for liberation and their names were a taboo...because the Special Branch were always looking out, listening to what people were saying...I used to go to public meetings of Swapo to listen to what the people were saying at the age of ten. When I was twelve was the first time I was arrested because I addressed a public rally. I was a pioneer in the pioneer group of the party, one of the leaders, and I wanted to say something...to mobilize the young ones to join the party pioneer organization...There were times that I was locked up and [my parents] didn't know where I was...I was beaten up every now and then. It never stopped me...In 1973...when I was 14 there was a very big demonstration which we organized...with some of my colleagues who are now in big positions in the government...Some of my friends were arrested and they also came to pick me up with about 18 military cars, 18 for a single person...They had been hearing all the time about this Timothy, 'it is this Timothy'...So the others from Windhoek, the big chiefs, they were really surprised when I walked out of our house that 'all the trouble that the Walvis Bay branch has been reporting is just this small thing'...They felt that I'm really a threat because...I was active, organizing meetings and so on...[Then] I was expelled...from school...for organizing a demonstration against bantu education, I was the ring leader...[The authorities] sent a circular letter to all the factories in Walvis Bay so that I couldn't get a job...And I had to report myself every Friday...So that really became frustrating...I decided to leave the country. My brothers had already been expelled...'go to the homelands', you know...So they crossed the borders and then I followed later on...The main reason...was to fight. Nobody wanted school anymore, we thought that we better liberate the country and think about school later...The temptation was also too much that people were now going abroad and [there were] opportunities for studies. But a lot of us were bitter, we wanted first to go to fight. It was tempting to go and get a gun and come back because of this hatred which was there.

Linus left from Ovamboland in 1980 and was also directed to an educational career in exile. His narrative finely catches the experience of militarization and growing into politics in

¹⁴³ Katjavivi (1986: 231), following Cedric Thornberry's 'Report on a visit to Namibia, 30 October-3 November 1974', puts the number of those who left during the exodus at 2500. Brown 1995: 22 cites a South African estimate of 3000. Swapo (1981: 214) speaks of 'several thousand', while Serfontein's (1976: 229) figure is as high as over 6000.

¹⁴⁴ For more detailed information, see appendix 2.

¹⁴⁵ John's, Anna's and Joseph's narratives also belong to this group; appendix 1, pp. 3-4, lines 120-140 and 191-204; pp. 11 and 14-15, lines 139-152 and 300-374; p. 27, lines 23-26.

Ovamboland during the 1970s. It also describes the widely shared ‘culture of resistance’, especially the influence of family members and politicization at secondary schools:

LM: How did you actually get politically conscious or involved?

Linus: It started at the end of [19]73 or the beginning of [19]74.¹⁴⁶ My eldest brother left and I was asking: ‘Why did he leave?’...People went to political rallies, there used to be strikes...I knew that [those who] were striking were black, they were beaten by white police and so on. It was very vague...Gradually I learned. You saw...military trucks going around and people being beaten up for not having an ID or a pass...All these things started to build up...Then in [19]78 things were different. I had seen Swapo guerrillas. Of course I had to be very careful and never say that I had seen them, otherwise you would disappear or something. Then my second eldest brother left. So it was becoming clearer and clearer that people have to go when they grow up. And then I went to school and in the school, Oshigambo, when I went to boarding, I was away from home, only with friends...There things started to be more open, they had little meetings, Swapo Youth League was organized underground. I joined. You began to see and talk things, and the Kassinga massacre had happened in [19]78. By then I was politically ok. So, life changed very quickly and of course as a young boy not at home you are rough at school and it used to be a tendency that if you were rough and you were about to be kicked from the school you didn’t mind because you would say: ‘If you kick me from the school I’ll go and fight.’ It was so common, everybody did it, so it was easy to [leave]...And Oshigambo really used to suffer. There was a [military] camp very near and they used to harass and beat us at night. No matter how small [you were], you couldn’t [avoid thinking:] ‘I want to go and fight, show these guys.’

LM: Did you make the decision to leave alone or were you with some others?

Linus: With lots of colleagues, in a big group...[We] just went, it was so easy. If you are young you know this is this and that is that. It’s always black and white for the young people...Fighting was the only thing and that’s it. I didn’t even [think of] continuing school there.

In these narratives, militancy is emphasized as the primary motive for leaving, a long-considered choice, even if it is combined to immediate reasons that forced one to make the decision just then. It is notable that apart from Joseph, all narrators who refer to this motive can be defined as intellectuals, and apart from Anna, all of them are men.

Second, in many other stories, militancy is asserted but not with similar firmness. This group is a mixed bag. Overall, immediate reasons, such as colonial harassment, the example of others who had left or were leaving, and in a couple of narratives, the prospect of being drafted into the colonial army, gain more weight here than in the above accounts. First, in some accounts, militancy in the sense of wanting to join the armed struggle appears less a well-considered decision of political activism than a response to nationalist propaganda and to the prevalent mood among the young people. Second, leaving may be motivated by ‘wanting to fight’ or ‘to join the liberation struggle’ but it is not clear what exactly is meant by ‘fighting’. In the context of the ‘liberation struggle’, it could mean not only armed struggle but anything that one could do within Swapo’s structures in exile — in

¹⁴⁶ Linus was born in 1967, so he was only six years old at this time.

line with Swapo's vocabulary of multiple 'fronts'. Third, militancy is often combined with the hope of getting education abroad.

Martha's narrative is an example of the first and the third of these points. She tells how the students 'organized each other' and used to listen to Swapo broadcasts from abroad. The spirit of leaving 'was something', and made Martha want 'to be a soldier' and fight 'the Boers'. Yet, she did not know properly 'what Swapo was fighting for'. She also says that the students were fascinated about hearing English in the Swapo broadcasts and left because of education. (Appendix 1, p. 22-23, lines 3-6 and p. 23, lines 62-90). Romanus, who left in 1977 from Ovamboland and went on to an educational career in exile, catches brilliantly this widely shared but vaguely defined nationalist atmosphere by referring to it as 'low politics':

The government was trying to catch the young people's minds to join the fighting group on their side. Mostly young people were not willing to join them. If you stated that you are not interested, you [became a] victim of beating and harassment. So when I saw what was happening I decided to leave the country...[I left] with a few colleagues. We were helped by Swapo fighters who were going around the country and hitting here and there. We managed to find some and they helped us cross the border.

LM: Did you think about independence for Namibia?

Romanus: Yes because we kept listening to radios and elder people were trying to educate young ones that don't join that side, it is a wrong side, the other side is better. So if you cross the border and join those fellows you come back and fight and kick these people out, then you become self-reliant. So that was the kind of low politics we had.

Secilia's narrative is one of many in which this 'low politics' recurs as a characteristic of pre-exile politicization and reasons for leaving Namibia. Overall, her story is one of loyalty and happily subsuming individual agency in the collective one. She cites paramilitary harassment and atrocities, and meeting and listening to the combatants and Swapo broadcasts as the primary reasons for leaving. According to her, these produced a widely shared militant liberationism but not an informed political opinion:

In 1980 I decided to cross the border to go and join the organization, Swapo, to fight for my country...I was 14 years old...It was because of this Koevoet¹⁴⁷ threat...Every day, even though they knew that you were [liv]ing there, they would threaten you, they maybe beat you up and one day...they even broke into our house and started firing, firing, firing all over. I thought that life in Namibia is difficult and they [were] talking in the radio, those news from Angola, that we had to go and fight for our land. I thought life would be better if I crossed the border to Angola and I thought I will safe...We got stories from those combatants from Angola, they used to impress the people that 'when you go there you go to school'...but at least my intention was not to go to school. I wanted to go and get a gun to come and fight against Koevoet...It only came to one's mind like a dream, you didn't know where you were going. You didn't know how good it would be there or how bad but when you are oppressed you can't think of the bad things you will meet. You will only think that maybe it will be better. And listening to those who are

¹⁴⁷ A police counterinsurgency unit.

telling you that you have to fight, even someone telling you that you are going to die, you will not be afraid. You will only think [that] it makes no difference to die here or die there.

LM: And did you have any political objectives or political frame of mind when you left the country?

Secilia: Oh, it was only to get to fight, I didn't have no political what what.

Even though these narrators qualify their militancy with many kinds of immediate reasons for leaving and tell of having had a rather vague idea of national liberation, they still explicitly state that they had the aim of joining the military struggle. However, not everyone does so. In a few narratives the specific meaning of 'wanting to fight' remains unclear or it is clearly understood in a wider sense than joining the armed struggle. In yet others, the narrated motives of expecting to join the armed struggle and wishing to get to study coexist. David's narrative is one of these (appendix 1, p. 26, lines 39-51). Festus's is another. He left from Ovamboland in 1974. In his narrative, militancy gains an upper hand only after leaving:

It was tough in Namibia, especially for a black man...[If] you went [to the south] you would be harassed. Here [in the north] there was no life. So I [thought] that perhaps if I left this country...I would be ok in the future. That was my desire rather than suffering, hiding. If you saw a white man you tried to run away, to hide. It was a tough life in Namibia...[I wanted] to further up my education...That time I didn't have any experience about the war. When I entered Zambia I saw Swapo guerrillas. Then I forgot further education. I just wanted to join the PLAN...We were told that 'all fit boys, men and girls, take up arms, nobody will liberate Namibia except us'. We definitely admitted that...I [became] a platoon commander. Unfortunately I didn't participate physically in the shooting...I was recruited to further my studies, from the front. I was ready and I had my gun, well trained.

There are also many narratives in which leaving is not explained in terms of 'wanting to fight' at all. Yet some of these narratives can be considered militant in another sense, which also happened to be promoted by Swapo in its radio broadcasts and in exile; that of wanting to advance the liberation struggle by other means than fighting with a gun in hand. Emma's (see chapter 4.2), Tauno's and Albertina's narratives are examples of how the educational rationale for leaving is portrayed as a part of the liberation struggle; education would contribute to the common good of national liberation. These narrators resort to a widely accepted interpretation of the role of educational advancement among the exiles. It reflects Swapo's doctrine of 'fighting on multiple fronts' and provides a convenient way of converging the remembered wish of educational advancement with the socially accepted and highly valued commitment to national liberation.

Tauno left from Ovamboland in 1974. In his story, educational advancement plays a significant part and appears as a source of personal worth. In keeping with this, he tells that education was the main reason why he left Namibia. This fits well into However, at the

same time, he connects his personal development firmly to Swapo and, accordingly, places individual achievement to the service of the common good:¹⁴⁸

LM: What were your main motivations for leaving the country?

Tauno: First was to study, because that time it was difficult for me to go to higher schooling as a black person...After study then I would have to do something for Namibia, that was the main motive...to learn something...in order to do something for Namibia...We were thinking that we would go as far as Luanda, and from Luanda we would fly by plane to Zambia. And there were rumours that we would have to be cooked before you really became a Swapo soldier, that was a rumour from the Boers, I think. [So, I thought:] 'Maybe in a week I will be in the pot and I will be cooked', (laughs), 'after being cooked I can maybe come back and do something for Namibia', because education means you have to be cooked a bit. So I was ready for that pot (laughs).

Also Albertina left from Ovamboland in 1974 and went on to obtain education up to academic level in exile. Like in Tauno's narrative, education appears as an important part of her narrated identity. Accordingly, her narrative of leaving conveys a widely shared expectation of better educational opportunities abroad, tied together with the general perspective of national liberation:

In the north there was only one matric school...and the people were selected to go there. Boers, the South Africans...would not take you [in] if they knew that you are involved in politics...Apart from that the only professions you could learn were teaching or nursing, especially if you were a woman...I was not interested in these...so I had a very bad time...I read books from abroad and I saw how students were living there, they had their choice to study, a choice to live, a choice to work...and we didn't have choices...And it was not only me, it covered a lot of Namibians that time, young people...So I tried to apply to go to matric...and they refused me. They told me that...'Odibo people are too much involved in politics, we don't want you here.' So...I came home and became a teacher at my home village. I was helping to teach at the primary school. That was 1974 at the beginning. My life was not settled, I was just thinking what I could do, I didn't sleep and so on. And it was not only me. We met and discussed [with other young people]. [Then]...in April or May or March we heard that...the Caetano regime was overthrown in Portugal and we [could] pass through Angola to go to Zambia so that we could organize ourselves to do something for our country...Not only me but all Namibians had the same feeling that we must organize ourselves to bring about independence. That was the priority...and secondly, to bring independence to this country...you needed to be educated, you needed to be trained in many things and you needed to learn how to organize your country...My personal thinking was only the same as [that of] others, I wanted to be educated in other fields than...teaching and nursing...So we went.

Third, in contrast with the above accounts, some narratives are completely devoid of explicit 'liberationism'. Many of these cite the expectation of getting better education in exile as a major reason for leaving but do not relate it to its assumed liberationist function. For example, Esther, who left in 1974 from Ovamboland, does not affirm nor deny militancy as a motive for leaving. She states that she wanted to get rid of colonial conditions and get better education abroad. She also mentions Swapo's calls that urged the people to join the movement's ranks in exile:

¹⁴⁸ See his narratives also in chapters 4.3 and 5.3.

The situation that time was [bad]...because when we were in the [school] hostel the Boers used to come there and ask us, '[do] you know this one, this one?'...Some started to be beaten up, so it was better to leave the country...We heard it in the radio that there was Swapo abroad, if you wanted to go to join Swapo you could go, there were scholarships and so on. When I left my [idea] was only to go for further study...There were some of my friends, one day we were talking, 'so, eh, you don't want to go to Zambia?' We asked each other: 'Eh, what are you going to do, there is a scholarship there, didn't you hear it in the radio?...We better go abroad so that we can get better education.'

Some other narrators, like Maria and Raina (pp. 75-78 and appendix 1, p. 40-41, lines 36-59), are explicit in denying the motive of 'wanting to fight'. They cite issues like wishing to get education, harassment by the colonial forces and the example of others as their reasons for leaving. Instead of claiming that they hoped to contribute to liberation, they stress their ignorance of politics and the realities of exile life.

Gideon, one of the three dissident interviewees, also stresses that he primarily wanted to get education. He does not completely rule out the idea of joining the liberation struggle at some point after leaving into exile. However, he states outright that he did not intend to join Swapo. This is exceptional, as the incorporation of new exiles into Swapo is not questioned openly in any other narrative. This, of course, should be understood in the context of his story as a whole. It turns around his breakaway from and opposition to Swapo and entails an exceptionally individualist self-representation (see chapter 6.1):

I needed to get education so I decided [to] leave the country in May 1974. There was a big exodus in...June and July...so I was definitely one of the first...who left...[My] aim was to go to look for education in England or at the United Nations because...there were radio broadcasts [saying that] 'the United Nations is offering education for Namibians who are discriminated against under apartheid'...There was also political influence. [And] I felt so bad because when I [grew] up my fellow blacks used to treat me badly. It went so far [that] simply because they hated my family they [wanted]...to have my father eliminated, so they said he was a collaborator...[And] when I went to...Ongwediva High School, I was kicked out...So, there were many factors...but the greatest one was that I needed education. I left in order to get education first, maybe then I could join the liberation struggle...It was not my intention...to go to join Swapo abroad because I knew already what Swapo could be and what people could do to other people...As I found out later...my view was not wrong...My upbringing [taught me] that I must provide for myself and that my future depends on myself, not on anybody else. That includes political organization, so I left with the intention that I must work hard and I must achieve by myself.

In yet other narratives leaving is explained neither by militancy nor by a desire to get better education. Hilma's account is the best example. She left from Ovamboland in 1976. Like Maria, she first deliberates whether she can actually remember the reasons of her leaving into exile. She then proceeds to tell of being forced to go by violent conditions and of knowing very little about what lay ahead. The educational motive is there too, but it is clearly secondary:

Sometimes I say I don't know what I was doing, if I think about it really, what the hell did I leave the country [for]? I think I was very young and I was illusioned and I was confused and so many things were going on and you didn't get any explanation for anything. So the easy solution was that you heard some

ideas that there were countries which were free, where you could do what you wanted, where you could go to school like you wanted and things like that. So we were excited and it was just something that kept knocking over your head that ‘come on, we have to do something about this’. You asked your parents, they gave you cracks, you could not ask the authorities, you would be in trouble, so what could you do?

She then turns to an account of a particular violent incident:

Something like three months before I made the decision that I would go...I got into trouble with... the police or the soldiers...There were some shootings...After this fight, many soldiers started coming to that place and they were really controlling, you know, ‘you can’t go there at this hour’, and they introduced a state of emergency. Just imagine, I was a child and I didn’t really understand what a state of emergency is, and even though [they] told that ‘you don’t move after seven o’clock’...you’ll forget that...when you are playing...So one day I broke this state of emergency. I was playing with my friend after school...and I [went] with her over a...bridge...[When] I was coming back...I heard these military cars coming, and then some shooting...I just [moved on] because I thought that they were shooting birds...I [did] not even think that I had broken the state of emergency. So I just felt heavy, I was shot. They shot me here and here (shows the scars)...It meant a lot to me that time...All these soldiers came...and started asking many questions. I was in hospital for some days. Then I started going to school again but I could never understand why I was shot. And neither my parents nor my uncle¹⁴⁹ even had a right to ask because [the soldiers] beat me up, then they asked where I was staying and dropped me home, they just dropped me there, they didn’t even say: ‘Sorry, we shot her.’

From this triggering event, Hilma proceeds directly to making the decision to leave:

I just felt that there was something wrong. So one day I just made this decision that ‘hey, I don’t stay here’, and I and some other girls [and] boys left...We knew one boy who knew other boys, bigger boys and they planned this...Without those other people we wouldn’t have gone anywhere because we wouldn’t have known [how], so these people planned everything and we just followed...It was more or less running away from a certain situation...But of course...you can’t just go to a place without giving it a thought...‘I’m going there and then what? I’m going to Zambia and then what?’ So, we had heard that they had better schools there and you could do almost what you wanted to, and there was no police — you know I really hate this army thing, I just don’t want to see anybody with a gun around me. So, I’m [coming] back to running away from some control system...[But there was] also this idea of free education...better education.

Just like the narratives of the ‘militants’ or the ‘educationalists’ resemble each other and fit in with other parts of their stories, there are striking similarities in Hilma’s, Maria’s and Raina’s explanations of why they left. All of them present leaving above all as a result of confusion and harsh circumstances, and not as a well-considered political choice. All of them emphasize this by portraying themselves as innocent and unknowing children, although they were about the same age as most of those who left. On the whole their stories are non-heroic narratives of going through hardships and suffering, and the narratives of leaving appear as just one, even if crucial, step in this process (see pp. 75-78 and chapter 6.2).

¹⁴⁹ Hilma was living with her uncle.

5.1.4.2 Analysis

As the above narratives demonstrate, there are considerable differences in the narrated motives of leaving Namibia. Furthermore, these differences seem to be systematic in many respects. Those who tell narratives of ‘wanting to fight’ in the sense of joining the armed struggle are men more often than women, intellectuals more often than non-intellectuals. Less programmatic militancy appears in the narratives of ‘non-intellectual’ men and some of the women. Their decision to leave appears less as an individual choice than a matter of joining a tide. The ‘educationalists’ often justify their wish to get better education by its assumed collective benefit in the context of the liberation struggle. These narratives are told by many women, especially intellectuals. At the other end of the continuum, some narrators, almost all of them women or dissidents, reject the ‘liberationist’ interpretation. They do not justify their leaving by a desire to contribute to the struggle in one way or another, but rather portray it as a result of encountered or anticipated violence, or of being lured by others who were leaving and by invitations on the radio.

Other significant differences are connected to when and from where one left. Those who left from the north tell of a different relation to politics than those who left from the south. A proportionally greater number of those whose narratives tell of political activism before leaving came from the south than from the north. Also, the character of narrated activism is different. In the north, it mainly consists of mass action like striking and boycotting at schools, or organizing demonstrations, whereas in the south there are also party and SYL activities of a more organized kind. Additionally, among those who left from the north, a majority of those who left during the ‘exodus’ of 1974 tell of having participated in some kind of political activities, at least attending meetings, whereas an overwhelming majority of those who left later do not report any open political activity. Those who left in 1974-75 almost always tell of leaving with small groups of people whom they knew and joining bigger groups on the Angolan side of the border. By contrast, those who left from 1976 until the beginning of the 1980s, tell of leaving in small or big groups with the help of the guerrillas.¹⁵⁰

How can these differences and especially the variation from militancy to non-militancy be explained? I propose that a balanced explanation should be grounded in a narrativistic understanding that takes into account the stories of which narratives of leaving are a part as

¹⁵⁰ This was the time when PLAN activity in Namibia was at its peak and Ovamboland was the major theatre of its operations. Brown 1995.

well as the positions from which these stories are constructed. However, such a reading should be coupled with taking the historicity of the accounts seriously. I wish to make two points: first, that going into exile was informed by vague and variably militant images of living in exile; and second, that the narrated motives of leaving are not necessarily reflective of actual reasons of doing so.

Let us start from the historical background and the collective imagery of exile, against which the narratives resonate and which is especially helpful for understanding the differences between northerners and southerners and between different times of leaving. Encounters with colonial practices, and images of Swapo, were different in Ovamboland than in areas south of the Red Line. In the north, a 'culture of resistance' to the colonial power developed during the 1960s and especially the 1970s and Swapo became virtually the only visible and accepted political movement. 'The struggle' became a pervasive condition of the local social relations. It was constantly referred to in everyday life, and acts and rituals of resistance were organized through the church and in the schools. Thus, in 1970s Ovamboland, the struggle was not a matter of politics as a separate sphere but a matter of belonging to the community and making moral statements in everyday action. (chapters 5.1.2 and 5.1.3; Soggot 1986; Cliffe *et al.* 1994.) From 1972 onwards, the repressive presence of military and paramilitary forces was most heavily felt there, especially after 1974. After the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Angola, it was not exceptional to leave and it was also easier to do so than from the south. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of those who left from the north do not tell of intensive individual politicization before leaving.

In the south, people had more contact with the everyday relations and practices of the colonial administration and its representatives, but repression was not as severe as in the north. There was still room for politics. Also, Swapo was not as dominant in the field of liberation politics as in the north. Therefore, supporting Swapo can be considered to have been a political choice more than in the north and, consequently, those who left from the south frequently tell of political activism. The situation would change again in the beginning of the 1980s, when compulsory conscription was introduced in the south. Confronted with the prospect of being drafted into the SWATF, many young men chose to leave the country (Saul and Leys 1995a: 54).

Many narratives, especially of those who left in 1974, portray leaving as a normal step for the young people to take. Often this is stated openly but it is also visible in how almost

everyone tells of planning to leave and leaving in a group. In this light, leaving can be seen as an initiation with an adventurous flavour. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of those who flocked into exile during the exodus, as in other times, were young people. The majority of them were not yet tied and committed to families, to the land, or to occupations like older people were. Rather, they seem to have thought that their opportunities to lead their lives inside the country were severely restricted by the colonial regime and by the war.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, in many narratives the process of becoming an exile involves rising against, lying to or cheating authorities to step into the liminality of the trip to Swapo in exile.¹⁵² Confrontations with the armed forces and police or with teachers serve to trigger the decision to leave, and narratives of the event of leaving abound with incidents of fooling colonial officers or parents, or of nearly being caught. This narrative complication serves a particular function: it underlines the importance and irrevocability of leaving.¹⁵³ It gives additional dramatic force to this step and further marks the almost total break from the world of childhood and youth.

The decline in narrated political activity among those who left from Ovamboland after 1974 probably reflects the increase in military repression there. What appears to have come in place of open political association were clandestine contacts with the guerrillas, which is reflected also in the narratives of crossing the border with them. During the war, it was often alleged that Swapo abducted people from Ovamboland against their will. I also heard this allegation a few times during my stay in Namibia. Notably, none of those who told of having left Namibia with the guerrillas told of having been forced to leave. On the contrary, when I asked whether it was their own independent decision to leave, they answered enthusiastically in the affirmative.¹⁵⁴ Whose version is correct? Are the stories of Swapo abductions merely rumours and propaganda, both of which were abundant at the time of the war?¹⁵⁵ Or is this a significant silence that none of my interviewees dared or wanted to

¹⁵¹ This aspect of the Namibian exile has interesting parallels both in the liberation struggles of neighbouring countries and in Ovambo history. Kriger (1992) argues that in Zimbabwe, the nationalist movement drew support mainly from young unmarried people to whom the 'struggle' provided an opportunity to escape from their elders' authority. Also other local power relations were challenged. McKittrick (1998) draws attention to generational conflict in earlier periods of Ovambo history.

¹⁵² Which was, for many, to continue in the form of military training in exile. From it one would emerge as a 'full cadre' of the liberation community. See chapter 5.2.4.

¹⁵³ Overcoming serious obstacles by cleverness in order to reach a heroic goal is, of course, a fundamental legendary motif.

¹⁵⁴ I asked this question often but not systematically.

¹⁵⁵ One of South Africa's counterinsurgency measures may have contributed here. Its black or blackened white soldiers sometimes used Swapo uniforms to capture guerrillas or their supporters. Indeed, one of those interviewees who had not left into exile told that he would have wanted to leave but did not because of the danger posed by the 'fake Swapos'.

break, or an example of purposeful forgetting. I discussed this issue twice with former exiles outside of a formal interview situation. At the first time, two former exiles who themselves were not from Ovamboland said that the guerrillas ‘took’ whole classes with them from there during the war. On another occasion, one of the interviewees said in a discussion with many other former exiles that Swapo came and ‘took’ students from the secondary school at Odibo. Now, how should ‘taking’ be understood? Certainly young people did leave with the combatants very suddenly, in big groups. This was told by many of the interviewees. For example, Vilho left from near the border in 1978:

We were about 30, other people came from other regions...[We] just joined the soldiers from abroad when we saw them coming...to our village...We crossed the border during the night and we were led by Swapo soldiers.

As I pointed out above, this indicates that leaving was not necessarily a decision that arose out of firm nationalist conviction. Yet it was not necessarily a matter of coercion either. Rather, it should be understood in the context of Ovamboland as a theatre of war during the late 1970s and as Swapo’s main support area with the ‘culture of resistance’, to which I referred above.

Militarily, the balance of power was always too much against Swapo for it to permanently occupy areas inside Namibia and establish so-called liberated areas. Still, from the mid-1970s onwards, the guerrillas operated within Namibia continuously, penetrating as far as to the central parts of the country. From the late 1970s until the beginning of the 1980s, they managed, with the help of the local people, to establish a permanent presence in Ovamboland, operating from bases close to the border on the Angolan side. Between 1978 and 1980 they even prevented the SADF from patrolling in parts of Ovamboland. In the mode of classic guerrilla warfare, they mobilized as well as controlled the local population, depending on civilian support for food, shelter, and information. It was again to become more difficult for the guerrillas to operate at will from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, when South Africa extended its military operations to southern Angola on a more or less permanent basis, attacking PLAN bases and disrupting its logistic network.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Brown 1995: 23-32; Cliffe *et al.* 1994: 25-30; Katjavivi 1986: 264-265, 275, 284-286; Liberation Support Movement 1973: 13-17. Contemporary liberationist accounts often exaggerated the extent of PLAN presence, speaking of relatively large permanent military bases inside Namibia. See Swapo 1981: 259, 262-263; Kiljunen 1981:158-159.

It has been widely claimed that the civilians mainly supported the guerrillas voluntarily.¹⁵⁷ The civilians were willing to help because they considered the mostly Ovambo guerrillas as members of the same community, as their sons (and daughters), brothers (and sisters), and widely shared the idea of the undesirability of colonial occupation with them. Yet, one should remember that Ovamboland did not simply stand unified against colonialism. A segment of Ovambo society, which included the members and families of the ‘homeland’ authorities and the local military and paramilitary units, stood to gain directly from the occupation. Additionally, South African counterintelligence measures sought to persuade and terrorize the civilians from supporting the guerrillas. Thus, the guerrillas always faced the risk of being reported and caught, as Joseph’s narrative testifies (appendix 1, p. 28, lines 63-64). Additionally, the war situation could be used for settling parochial scores, for instance by accusing people of being ‘collaborators’ of the South Africans.¹⁵⁸ Still it seems justified to argue that a considerable majority of the people of Ovamboland supported Swapo for one reason or another. In this context, the boundary between voluntary and involuntary may become much more blurred than one might initially think. It may well be that in the late 1970s when the guerrillas moved extensively in Ovamboland, participation in the struggle in one way or another became something that was expected from the young people, and joining the liberation army a matter of ‘being drafted’. In this atmosphere, it would have been almost unthinkable not to participate in some way, even without direct coercion.

It may have been easier for the young men than for the women to see leaving as a duty and an initiation. Particularly in Ovamboland, leaving can perhaps be understood in the social context of becoming a man in the same way as salt-fetching trips southwards were seen in the precolonial period and contract labour spells during the colonial period.¹⁵⁹ In a similar way as the latter two, leaving into exile was an outward-oriented activity, which were traditionally considered as a male domain. In keeping with this suggestion, men and women tend to tell differently about leaving families behind. While many women speak of how

¹⁵⁷ See e.g. Soggot 1986: 179-180, 219-220; Soiri 1996: 68-69; Brown 1995:29. Those interviewees who had served in the PLAN within Namibia supported this claim.

¹⁵⁸ Groth quotes a northern Namibian churchman who told him in 1985 that ‘we live between two fires. Either you side with the South Africans or with SWAPO. If SWAPO men come at night, asking for help, and you don’t help them, then that means you’re on the South African side, and you may have to pay with your life.’ (Groth 1995: 28.) This quotation points out that even if civilians by and large sympathized with the guerrillas’ cause, they also had to help them to avoid being labeled ‘collaborators’ and ‘traitors’. Cf. Gideon’s narrative on p. 115.

¹⁵⁹ For salt-fetching as initiation, see Hiltunen 1993: 91, 97, 101. For contract labour performing a similar function, see Voipio 1981: 112-113; and L.G. Max (1992) ‘The Workers of Namibia’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, p. 85, quoted in Peltola 1995: 72.

hard and emotionally trying this was (see chapter 4.2), the men invariably portray it as proof of their commitment. For example, Tauno tells of leaving in the following way:

On the weekend I went to see my father and...somebody had leaked the information that I'd be going...So he called me: 'Why are you going, not even telling me?' I said: 'Who told you that? I'm not going anywhere.' 'But you are going to Zambia.' That year people were just going without telling anybody and it was heard that people were going to Zambia...It was Saturday, [we] planned to go [on] Sunday...[And when] I was coming from the main village...to our kiosk I met my grandma...the mother of my father. She was crying, she [asked:] 'Where are you going?' I said: 'I'm going nowhere.' She said: 'But we heard that you are going. You are the firstborn of this family, the backbone of this family and now you want to go.'... I was courageous and determined: 'They can cry, they can do whatever. I'm going tomorrow, that is my belief.'...That spirit of going to Zambia, it was affective. You looked like mad, you didn't give a damn, just went...It was a general feeling for the young people...[In] early 1973...we had no radio...but there was a radio nearby and we could trace radio Lusaka. Somebody was speaking in Oshiwambo...a Swapo member, broadcasting the message to Namibians, how Namibia was...We used to go as a group, the boys of the same area, to that place...and listen to what comrade Ndadi¹⁶⁰ was saying...People turned to think that the best way is just to go and join the organization abroad. Ok, we were already members inside but for [the movement] to have a force you had to go out. And the first group from Odibo...sort of opened the way for everybody to go. At school and in the area you found [that someone] had gone, [someone else] had gone. Where, to Zambia. I said: 'I'm also going tomorrow, I don't want to remain.'...We were mobilized by Swapo outside through the radio.

To sum up, it seems that apart from a few political activists, immediate concerns like the threat of violence or having no study or work opportunities, general atmosphere and the example of others, and vague images of exile played a more important part in motivating the decision to leave than consistent and well-informed nationalist conviction. Vague images? With few exceptions, the narrators — 'militants' and 'non-militants' alike — say they knew very little about what life in exile would be like. It is, of course, impossible to judge the actual level of their knowledge on the basis of this statement without knowing the exact meanings different narrators give to 'very little'. Still, this statement indicates that the narrators themselves feel that their picture of exile life was not sufficient or correct.

From the material at hand it is not possible to tell what kind of expectations the new exiles actually had. In the narratives of those who employ the motif of militancy there emerges an image of a militant guerrilla grabbing a gun to shoot back at the hated 'Boers' who humiliated black Namibians, an image in opposition to the childhood and youth world of state, school, religious and parental authorities. Some other narratives convey an image of exile as a place where people go to school, live in peace and learn English instead of the colonial Afrikaans. Both are caricatures of actual exile conditions and activities that

¹⁶⁰ Vinnia Ndadi is one of the well-known members of Swapo, the author of the autobiography *Breaking Contract* (Ndadi 1989), who was responsible for the Swapo radio programme in Zambia at the time.

The influence of Swapo's broadcasts is a topic that recurs in the narratives. Usually it is recalled that the broadcasts either called the people to join the movement abroad in order to fight for liberation or promised opportunities for better education. 'Liberation songs' played on the radio also emerge as an important vehicle of nationalist consciousness.

probably both result from narrative simplification and reflect what kind of information could filter through from exile in the form of news from the war and through Swapo's propaganda campaign.. It is probable that especially before the latter half of the 1970s Namibians inside the country could only have a vague picture of what actually happened in exile. Many say that those who went were 'like dead' because they were never heard of.¹⁶¹

Even if leaving was a dramatic decision, it may have been made easier for many by not foreseeing the long duration and often harsh reality of exile life. Throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s, many Namibians inside the country believed that the armed struggle waged by Swapo was effective and that independence would be won sooner rather than later (Brown 1995: 29; Leys and Saul 1995b: 77; Soggot 1986: 77). Especially those who narrate leaving in the 'militant' vein tell of the excitement of an anticipated heroic journey into the little known, mythical realm of abroad and soon back, expecting to ride on a wave of messianistic deliverance. Many tell of having believed that they would return as victorious freedom fighters after a short period in exile. For example, Festus told about how a militant mood developed among the leavers and how it was tamed after their arrival to Swapo in exile:

Immediately when I crossed the border into Angola I met a lot of young Namibian boys and girls, we were a group of more than 250...We discussed how [we] go and assist the leaders...There were some radicals who said:... 'They must give us guns. We go and fight and come back home.' You developed [an attitude] that definitely if we are so many [we will succeed]...We had observed the South African army here, they were reluctant, they never knew that there will be hot fire coming from outside the border. That's why we thought...that perhaps it would just take one year or some months, then we would be back home...When they were using planes, these jets and other war tactics I realized that this was a real war, it would take time. I remember, one of our commanders, he has passed away, he told us...that you cannot rush the war, the war takes time.¹⁶²

There were also other rumours and legends connected to leaving, conveying a sense of exile as a little known and exciting negation of life at home. For instance, Tauno mentions a

¹⁶¹ This was an image presumably fuelled by South African propaganda. Some narrators mention the 'rumours' put in circulation by 'the Boers', according to which all who had left into exile had died or were going around naked and eating grass.

The closest part of Angola was known to some, especially those of Kwanyama origin, from stories and even personal visits because they had relatives on the Angolan side of the border. However, Swapo's exile organization could not operate in southern Angola before the latter part of the 1970s. At that time, more information about exile life filtered through with the help of the guerrillas who were having direct contacts with the local people.

¹⁶² Cf. Anna's narrative in appendix 1. Among the 'exodus' generation, the grounding of such beliefs in the imagination and propaganda of student activists has been documented in a letter sent to Sam Nujoma by SYL leaders Nashilongo Taapopi, Joseph Kashea and Shihepo Iimbili. In it they, among other things, write of 1974 as the year of liberation: 'SWAPO's liberation Army must now fight the Boers and free Namibia before June. We promised the people that Namibia is to be free this year and now they are waiting for this freedom to come.' Quoted in Soggot 1986: 90-91.

rumour according to which those who left would be cooked in exile¹⁶³ and, laughingly, he employs this image to describe his anticipated educational transformation. Many of those who left in 1974 refer to a rumour about a jet waiting in Angola to fly them to Zambia.¹⁶⁴ Also, the details of the tough conditions of the journey, such as walking for days, crossing rivers and sleeping in the forest with wild animals, are relished in detail. These rumours and conditions serve to stress one's determination and the contagiousness of the mood to go in a similar way as accounts of defying authorities.

Let us now move on to consider militancy and non-militancy in life-historical and narrative context. Apart from the above imagery that resonates through the narratives of leaving, they also reflect subsequent development in the narrators' lives as well as directly narrativistic factors. Taking these into account is useful especially for making sense of the differences related to gender and 'intellectualism'. The narrated militancy of the intellectual men is in keeping with the generally strong individual agency and heroism of their stories.¹⁶⁵ They have obtained a relatively high level of education and familiarity with the autobiographical genre, and many of them occupy positions in the upper echelons of society. Therefore, the ideal of outward oriented and heroic manhood in the context of national liberation, of which militancy is a part, may be most readily accessible to them for making sense of their past. As exile has paid off, it is easy for them to carve a niche for themselves within the liberation narrative, whereas those whose 'exile career' was not as successful do not find this as easy. However, many of these narrators were involved in student politics and obtained a relatively good educational background already before they left into exile. This suggests that the model of heroic manhood may have played a part in guiding their 'self-action' all along, including their decision to leave into exile. A similar conclusion could be drawn from my suggestion above that leaving could be seen as an initiation especially by young men.

The less programmatic militancy and the more collectivist form of agency in the accounts of the rank and file and many of the women may also result from various factors not connected to actual motives of leaving. In the case of the rank and file, this may be a matter of unfamiliarity with the genre of 'agentive' individualism, as well as of their exile careers and present positions being less successful and less prestigious than those of the

¹⁶³ This image recurs in David's story when he tells about the relations between 'returnees' and 'remainers'; appendix 1, p. 27, lines 86-91.

¹⁶⁴ This rumour is mentioned also in Angola 1990: 86. His account of leaving into exile is largely similar to those of the '1974 generation' also otherwise.

¹⁶⁵ See also chapters 4.3 and 5.3.

‘intellectuals’. For the women, it may be more difficult to fit their remembered experience to the heroic form of this genre than for the men, both because of their expected narrative roles and the actual subsequent courses of their lives.

Many women also resort to the narrated motive of wanting to get education in exile. Notably, those who employ this motive are mainly the ones who actually did get to study in exile. Of course it is possible that many of those who obtained education in exile really left with education in mind and therefore tried harder than others to get it. However, this is definitely not all there is to the matter. The narratives of leaving fit too neatly to the later careers of the narrators and to their stories as a whole to be mere reflections of actual motives for even if living a life has a (pre-)narrative character, the stories that one tries to live out are not necessarily the ones that actually happen (see chapter 2.3). Among the men, the situation is opposite. Those who spent the most time in the military do not give more militant accounts of leaving than those who spent most of their time in exile in educational institutions; on the contrary.

Therefore, one should take into account the roles available to different narrators both in action and in narrative. Heroic individualism is the preferred self-representation of both the liberation narrative and male autobiography; therefore the apparent easiness with which intellectual men slip into militancy as a narrated motive for leaving. By contrast, militant heroism is not available to the same extent for the women as a model for narrativizing their lives. Nor was it as easily available during the actual course of their lives, as women were mostly confined to reproductive and supportive functions in the civilian camps and at the front (see chapter 4.2.1). Yet, as militancy is the preferred form of narration, alternative accounts of leaving seem to require a strong subsequent ‘career’ to back them up. Educational achievement offers such backing. The non-intellectuals, men and women alike, are left to navigate the gulf between the preferred representation and their remembered and subsequent experience as they best can, for example by references to a vaguer and more collective form of militancy. For them, narrated militancy may provide a source of personal worth, whereas the ‘intellectuals’ value their education as a resource that has facilitated their rise into agents in their own lives. Towards this end, many women utilize the ideal of womanhood that involves commitment to collective well-being but in other ways than directly waging war. Therefore, they may narrate a vague form of militancy in which ‘joining the struggle’ is not necessarily defined in terms of waging war with a gun in hand. Also, militancy at leaving often ‘matures’ into responsible and constructive ‘mothering’

within the liberation movement or into education justified by its contribution to the common good (see chapters 4.2.1 and 5.3).

Those who reject militancy altogether and stress the importance of immediate circumstances are mostly women or have been distanced from Swapo in one way or another. This further indicates that the actual social relations — in many ways, the exile was a men's world — and the possible hardships and disappointments of exile life may feed back to narratives of leaving. More importantly, these narratives are systematically connected to stories with a very different overall morale than that of liberationism. Whereas the archetypal liberation narrative calls for militant heroism to motivate the turning point of leaving into exile, stories with alternative emplotments place different demands for motivating it (see the analysis of Gideon's and Maria's stories; chapters 6.1 and 6.2).

As a final issue, let us have a closer look at the relations of the narrated motives of wanting to fight and wanting education. Many of those who mention the militant wish to 'fight against the Boers' as an important or the most important reason to leave Namibia ended up studying in exile. Most often this is presented as something that could not be decided individually. As in other matters, people were chosen and 'sent' to study by the leadership. For example, Peter, who told that he saw fighting as a tempting prospect when he left, continued in the following way:

LM: So you first wanted to become a fighter. What was then the process of changing this attitude?

Peter: Actually I didn't change but...we went to military training and because of my age I was not able to be taken to the guerrilla army. It was only much later that I realized that what had happened was much more fortunate. If I look at what has happened to the others, well, you find yourself fortunate. At that time, if it was left to me, I would have gone into the guerrilla army, but it was not left to me to decide...I remember that guerrilla commander who took me out and said: 'You go to school.' It was as simple as that.

However, Martin, who served in the PLAN until being detained during Swapo's 'spy-drama' of the 1980s, brings up the possibility of turning down an opportunity to study.

[I wanted] to go and take up arms and join the PLAN combatants to come and fight and that's what I did. When I went outside I was offered a scholarship by Swapo. I rejected the scholarship and went to the military camp and was trained as a soldier, a combatant. I was given the option...because I was coming from high school...You filled in some forms and later I was told that 'you should go to Zambia to United Nations Institute for Namibia'. I said: 'No way, I'm going back to the front, I'm going to fight war. I have decided. If I wanted to go to school I would have done that in Namibia. My purpose of coming here was to go and fight the system.' So, I then went straight to the military camp and I was trained, that was my own choice.

If Martin's description is accurate, it raises the question why nobody else refused to get to study (apart from Maria, who tells of having later felt that she had made a mistake; see appendix 1, p. 42, lines 110-119). There are three possible explanations. First, it may be that they did not want to challenge the hierarchical decision-making system of Swapo and oppose the norm of accepting what was decided by the leadership. Second, it may be that the process of 'learning' in and about exile and 'the struggle', described in many stories, made many change their minds about what they should do in exile.¹⁶⁶ Third, it is possible that, as I suggested above, the militancy that is narrated as a motive for leaving is, at least partly, a later emphasis which is brought into the story because it fits prestigiously into the liberation plot and especially into the predominantly male stories of sacrificing heroism.

Furthermore, there is an apparent contradiction, in some stories, between narrated militancy at leaving and other parts of the story. For example, Martha tells that when she left she wanted to fight, yet she also says that she wanted to pass an exam that determined who would get to study with as good a mark as possible (appendix 1, p. 23, lines 89-92). There is a strongly militant tone also in John's narrative of leaving. He says that he was already matured and made a well-considered decision, being ready to die in the struggle, if necessary. However, he passes over the period that he actually spent in the military with a brief mention and the tone of his account of being mobilized in Zambia is devoid of any elated heroism. After this, he says that he was lucky to get to study. (Appendix 1, p. 3-5, lines 132-140, 199-204, 209-217).

Having a look at Secilia's narrative may clarify this issue. She tells that after she had arrived in Angola:

They took us to Lubango. There we found many people in the camp where the people were selected, some to go to training and those who were not grown up enough, they had to go to school...After some days we were taken to the camp for schooling and...short military training, not the real one which the grown people got. We stayed there for almost eight months...You had to do this military training in the morning and in the afternoon we did schooling. Then after eight months they selected people to go to school and I was lucky enough, I was among those whom they selected.

Earlier she had told that when she had left she had not wanted to go to school but to fight (p. 112). I pointed this out to her and she clarified:

LM: Did you change your mind when you were in Angola because you just said to me that you were among those lucky ones to go to school?

¹⁶⁶ See chapter 5.2.

Secilia: You know, it was not my intention to go to school. There in Angola, they selected who are those to go to school and you couldn't complain that 'I'm not going to school, I don't want to go to school'. If you said, 'no, I've just come to get a gun to go back', they might think that you were sent by the Boers. You just had to take whatever you were given, yeah. I didn't change my mind.

LM: You still didn't want to go to school?

Secilia: I didn't want, I wanted a gun.

LM: But nowadays you think it was better to go to school?

Secilia: It was better (laughs).

LM: When did you change your mind?

Secilia: You know, when I left for school, after a year I recognized that 'oh, I'm the luckiest one to come to school', because you read the magazine and you got the situation in Angola, you heard how the others died or how they fought...Then [you] thought for yourself and when you saw the way of the people living in that country you saw that 'oh, we need to live like this, we don't need to fight'.

It seems that 'wanting to fight' and being 'lucky' to get education exclude each other so that only one of them could be accurate. Yet, Secilia explains this apparent contradiction in a perfectly reasonable way. As we shall see, both the conditions of exile and Swapo's efforts to contain the 'young blood' pouring into its exile body could well lead to such a change of mind. However, there are also more narrativistic explanations. First, all the above narrators stress their loyalty to the movement in exile, and this loyalty implies accepting without grudges whatever duties the movement sent them to fulfill. Second, the heroic aura of fighting makes it easy and tempting to remember one's own motivations in its light. At the same time, educational advancement is also a highly esteemed social activity. Therefore, a good and hardworking member of the community should be ready to pursue either course of action, according to what the movement assigns him or her to do. Furthermore, the extension of the concept of 'fighting' to the 'multiple fronts' about which Swapo spoke and the objective differences between the present conditions of those who remained 'in the bush' and of those who went for studies make it easier to evaluate education positively, as both Peter and Secilia point out. Indeed, earlier in the interview, Secilia expressed her gratitude to Swapo for the education she has received: 'If [I had] not...crossed to go to Swapo I think I could not have got this schooling up to [what I got], I could not have finished.'¹⁶⁷

To conclude, because of subsequent narrative interpretation it is not safe to assume that those who narrate militancy would necessarily be the same people to whom it actually was a primary motive. To be more precise, it may be that the actual reasons and motives for leaving were far more complex and many-sided than their subsequent narrativizations

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Tauno's narrative on p. 90.

suggest. Any simplistic presentation of leaving is likely to be an outcome of emplotment that represents one's character from the present point of view, rather than a direct reflection of the actual conditions and states of mind back then. What is notable is how both 'militants' and 'non-militants' mostly give the impression that when they left Namibia they knew very little of the 'liberation struggle' and of what lay ahead of them in exile.¹⁶⁸ Most accounts emphasize the politicization of everyday life and the desire to find solutions to problems of immediate interest. Swapo's politics of mobilization found a captive audience in this context but it is probable that one's political vision rarely extended beyond opposing the colonial regime. Moreover, what went on beyond the border was largely unknown apart from what was heard in Swapo's radio transmissions and later from the guerrillas who moved inside the country. From a more narrativistic perspective, the immature and unknowing youngster is constructed in order to feed the plot of later personal development and 'maturation' in exile. What bridges these two interpretations is Swapo's version of liberation politics which the new exiles confronted in Zambia and Angola, both as a practice and as a doctrine, and to which I will now turn. It presented them with a particular scheme for understanding both everyday interaction and national history.

5.2 Arrival and incorporation into Swapo's exile organization

How does the other end of the liminal passage into exile, namely incorporation into Swapo's structures there, appear in the stories? What are the narrated first impressions of the new exiles and where do they stem from? What is their standing in the stories on the whole? To begin answering these questions, we must start with outlining the social universe of exile as the environment where Swapo strove to harness the various motivations and backgrounds of its new members in exile and counter the various physical and mental hardships that they encountered. In this task, one should pay attention to both the planned and intended practices that Swapo put up in exile and the unintended practices that spontaneously arose among the exile population.¹⁶⁹

In addition to the distinction between intended and unintended practices, the explicitly ideological and verbal discourses of control and its less explicit and non-verbal techniques

¹⁶⁸ For more explicit statements of this sentiment, see chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

¹⁶⁹ The distinction is analytical; in practice, intended practices have also unintended consequences and practices that arise 'spontaneously' may become appropriated as methods of power. Yet this distinction is helpful in making sense of living within Swapo structures in exile.

should be distinguished from each other.¹⁷⁰ By the former I mean the teaching of Swapo's version of the nationalist ideology that was propagated in the movement's military and civilian camps through 'political education' and 'parades' and among those who were studying away from the camps, by regular meetings, bulletins and books. This ideology suggested a unitary vision of history, of the nature of colonialism and the methods and implications of national liberation. It propagated the organic unity, 'comradeship', of all the members of the organization. At the same time, a seemingly contrary process of establishing a strict hierarchy within the movement took place. Those at its apex were elevated beyond mere mundane leadership into a continuum of national heroes that extended from the precolonial period into the present.¹⁷¹ It became an act of dissidence to even bring up openly the possibility of various interests within the movement; to point at the existence of disunity became an act of creating disunity. It seems that it was easier to uphold this arrangement in the camps where Swapo had virtually exclusive control over information than among those Namibians who were studying somewhere else; they could be exposed to various political ideologies and modes of social organization.

By the less explicit, non-verbal and seemingly non-ideological practices I mean a range of arrangements that ordered the activities and social positions of the exiles. Life in exile was, for the most part, strongly communal. Apart from a minority who worked in administrative positions or studied in towns or in other countries, the exiles in Angola and Zambia served in the movement's military wing, PLAN, or lived in refugee settlements called 'health and education centres'. The latter were a considerable majority.¹⁷² The inhabitants of these camps were mainly women and children. First such settlement was established near Lusaka in 1973 and came to be known as the Old Farm. In 1975 it was replaced by the Nyango settlement, near Senanga, as the major settlement in Zambia. In Angola, the majority of Namibians were initially settled at Kassinga and Jamba in the southern part of the country but after the destruction of Kassinga by the South African military in 1978, Kwanza Sul in central Angola became the major centre as Swapo decided to move its civilian population further away from the Namibian border.¹⁷³ The settlement covered a wide area and

¹⁷⁰ Again, the distinction is analytical rather than practical.

¹⁷¹ See, e.g. Saul and Leys 1995a: 43. Cf. Werbner's (1998b: 75-76) distinction between 'popular' and 'monumental, heroic' nationhood in 'postcolonial' southern Africa.

¹⁷² The strength of PLAN has been estimated to have never exceeded 15 000 guerrillas. Brown 1995.

¹⁷³ Estimates of the population of Kwanza Sul vary. After the exiles' return, Swapo's figures turned out to be exaggerated. Leys and Saul put the figure at 35 000, counting from their estimate of little over 50 000 returnees (Saul and Leys 1995a: 54, 63-64). Also one of my interviewees who worked as the chief administrator of the settlement from the mid-1980s until the repatriation of the exiles spoke of a population of 30 000-40 000. On the other hand, Peltola (1995: 146), who worked in Kwanza Sul on several occasions in

consisted of various camps that concentrated on specific duties. Between them, there were uninhabited spaces, for example agricultural land. At the camps, children were raised and schooled up to junior secondary level, adults were given school education and vocational training, and the injured and the sick were taken care of. (Katjavivi 1986: 307-311; Mbamba 1979: 6-8, 11-29; Hishongwa 58-66.)

Both in the civilian settlements and in the military, the exiles lived physically close to each other and were, to a large extent, sealed off from other people than their fellow exiles. Almost everything was done together with other 'comrades': eating, sleeping, working and studying. There was, at least officially, a strict time and space economy in place. The days and weeks passed by according to a planned schedule. Each individual had an assigned position in the social hierarchy, which determined his or her duties. To a large extent, changes in one's social position required approval from those upper in the hierarchy. For instance, although they could express their wishes, the exiles did not make independent decisions concerning their duties; they were always assigned, 'sent' by the movement. Another instructive example is that marriages had to be approved by officials and marriages with others than fellow exiles could be disapproved of, apparently because they were seen as a potential way of getting from Swapo's control and abandoning 'the struggle'. All the above arrangements made it clear that Swapo demanded unquestioning loyalty to the movement and unconditional commitment to what was defined as the collective good, instead of pursuing individual aims.

From the early 1960s onwards, when Sam Nujoma and other first generation Swapo leaders left into exile, the movement was divided into an external and an internal wing. The external wing waged the struggle on the 'multiple fronts' of diplomacy, armed struggle, and education, while the internal wing mobilized and channeled nationalist politics inside Namibia. In principle, there was to be a Congress, convened every five years to decide the general principles of the movement's policies and to elect its functionaries. In practice, the predominance of Nujoma and his closest associates among the 'old guard' of the movement's external leadership was never put to democratic test. Those who attempted this

the early and mid-1980s, gives an estimate as low as 11 000-15 000. In my mind, the estimate of 35 000 seems too large, even if one starts from the estimated total of 60 000 exiles (see p. 9, note 9), as there were about 10 000 serving in the military, a few thousand in Zambia, a few thousand as secondary school students or in further education in Cuba and various other countries and a few thousand elsewhere in Angola, for example in Ndalatando, Viana transit camp, and Luanda. Also, the approximately 10 000 Namibians who died in exile did not, of course, suddenly pass away at the end of the war but gradually during the exile period. Furthermore, there were about 2000 exiled Namibians, mostly SWANU members or defectors from Swapo who lived in Botswana, Zambia and, in smaller numbers, in various other countries. After these deductions, we are probably left with a figure of about 25 000 exiles at Kwanza Sul.

were treated as traitors and troublemakers.¹⁷⁴ Formally, the external leadership acted on behalf of the internal one. In practice, the external leadership was the real locus of power, as became clear at independence when a vast majority of the new government's ministers and highest functionaries were chosen from the returning exile wing.

The organization was divided into different departments, each headed by a secretary who was a member of the Central Committee. The camps were headed by camp commanders and below them in the hierarchy there were commanders or administrators for each camp section. Further, people were divided in units, each of which had an assigned leader. The organization was democratic on paper but democracy was very scantily practiced. Directives flowed from the very top of the movement's leadership, the President and his closest associates, downwards through the layers of hierarchy. The process did not work the other way around; in practice, the leadership was not accountable.¹⁷⁵

It is a matter of contention to what extent this mode of social organization ensued from the condition of being involved in an armed struggle and reflected the spreading of military organization into a prevalent model for the movement as a whole, and to what extent it was based on the example of one-party states, many of which were among Swapo's most important supporters. These included the Eastern European 'socialist' states, Cuba, and in Africa, Angola, Tanzania and Zambia. More directly, Swapo obtained military advice from the socialist bloc, had cooperation with other Southern African liberation movements and, on many occasions, relied on the help of Tanzanian, Zambian and Angolan governments at times of internal crisis.¹⁷⁶ When a security wing was formed in PLAN in 1980 or 1981

¹⁷⁴ Swapo's internal politics have been dealt with in a number of studies that have mostly been published after Namibia's independence and even though many details remain unknown, the general picture is clear. See e.g. Cliffe *et al.* 1994; Groth 1995; Human Rights Watch 1992; Leys and Saul eds. 1995; Leys and Saul 1994; Peltola 1995: 153-161; Trehwela 1990, 1991a and 1991b. Additionally, there are many accounts by Swapo detainees and dissidents themselves. In addition to the narratives of Matthew, Martin, and Gideon in chapter 6.1, see Beukes, Beukes and Beukes 1986; Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement 1996 and 1997; Brown 1989; Shipanga 1989. The best account is the volume edited by Leys and Saul (1995) as it puts these crises in a wide perspective and is based on extensive documentation.

¹⁷⁵ In addition to the interviews and personal communication with people who had personal experience of Swapo in exile, I draw here on Mbamba's (1979: 10) and Peltola's (1995: 150-153) descriptions.

¹⁷⁶ There are examples of military and administrative cooperation between Swapo and the Eastern European communist parties in various stories. Both Martin and Matthew tell of studying in party schools in Eastern Europe and Maria and Matthew tell of Soviet commissars and military instructors in Swapo; appendix 1, pp. 32, line 22; p. 43, lines 187-195. Hidipo tells of receiving 'higher' military training in the Soviet Union in 1978-79. Helao attended a six-month intelligence course there in 1983). Aaron received an 11-month military training in Ukraine in 1974-75:

I left for exile at the age of 21. In exile...I was drafted into military training for the liberation struggle and I had an eleven-month course in Ukraine. When I finished this eleven-month course in 1975 I went back to the Zambian front where I stayed for a few months...We first started as instructors...We were the first group that was trained better...and we could transmit what we learned to others.

(Leys and Saul 1994: 145; Saul and Leys 1995a: 55-56),¹⁷⁷ it was modelled after its Soviet counterpart, on Soviet advice.

5.2.1 The 'exodus' and its aftermath

The first major wave of Namibian exiles, those who left Namibia in 1974-75, entered the ranks of Swapo at a crucial moment. It is widely accepted in both nationalist and critical historiography of Namibia that a major transformation, even a crisis, took place within Swapo in exile from 1974 to 1976.¹⁷⁸ The flow of new exiles into the ranks of the movement caused tremendous strain to its resources and organizational structures. It also found itself faced with the challenges posed by changes in the political relations in Southern Africa. Until then, Swapo's military activities had been confined to the Caprivi strip, which could be entered directly from Zambia. The collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Angola and the influx of thousands of new cadres from Namibia created a possibility to open up a new major front along the border of Namibia and Angola. Swapo's efforts towards this end drew it into closer cooperation with UNITA, MPLA's rival claimant to governmental position in Angola.

However, a development that would run against this cooperation was taking place at the same time. Under military and economic pressure from South Africa and alarmed by the prospect of a Soviet-backed, ostensibly Marxist MPLA government in Angola, the Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda agreed with the South African Prime Minister John Vorster that Zambia would pressurize Swapo to cease its military activities from Zambian soil. At the same time, South Africa started to support UNITA in the Angolan civil war.

Festus told of a leadership course which he attended in Soviet Union:

We were very big people there, representing Swapo as a party on the national level...It means that...all the treatment was equal to the Soviet party members...They invited us to the Kremlin, we attended lectures in the Kremlin...When you entered Soviet Union...they [taught] you to know their history and society. The second time I went there I already knew Soviet Union. I only added something on my second mission...when it came to the structure of the party, the people who were involved in managing the society.

According to a couple of former exiles quoted by Groth (1995: 132-133), who were trained in Tanzania and Zambia in the mid-1970s, their instructors were mainly Chinese and the study of Maoist doctrine was included in the training programme. None of my interviewees mentioned Chinese instructors.

¹⁷⁷ According to Groth (1995: 100) this happened in 1983, which seems unlikely.

¹⁷⁸ Here I draw on the following sources: Dreyer 1994: 78-81, 86-104, 112-116; Serfontein 1976: 157; 342-350; Katjavivi 1986: 288-301 and 396-401; Katjavivi 1988: 105-109; Leys and Saul 1994 *passim*; Saul and Leys 1995a: 46-53; Dobell 1998: 47-51, 53-55; Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan 1989: 258-259, 290; Shipanga 1989: 98-134; Groth 1995: 55-61. Notably, Swapo's 'official' 1981 narrative of the liberation struggle (Swapo 1981) does not even mention this, nor any other, conflict within the movement.

From the point of view of Swapo's leadership, the situation was uncertain and the uncertainty was further aggravated by the fact that, as Saul and Leys (1995a: 47) astutely observe, it was impossible to foretell the outcome of the MPLA-UNITA conflict. On the ground, the situation led into Swapo combatants finding their UNITA allies now collaborating with their enemy, the South Africans.

It was in this context that voices of dissatisfaction arose within the movement. Among the newcomers there were Swapo Youth League activists who, together with a number of combatants, demanded that a Swapo congress be convened, as stipulated by the constitution, and the movement's organization be restructured. There were two sides to their demands: more democracy and more efficiency in waging the war. Military activities were almost dormant and there were complaints about the high-handed and undemocratic practices of the leadership, including rumours about corruption. Instead of giving way to the demands, the exile leadership requested help from the Zambian authorities who intervened. The leaders of the 'rebellion' were detained and many guerrillas 'rehabilitated'.¹⁷⁹

On this issue, the nationalist and critical interpretations differ considerably. Nationalist sources speak of a rebellion and an imperialist conspiracy and accord a major role to the 'machinations' of senior leader Andreas Shipanga who sided with the 'rebels'. The 'rebels' are also accused of being responsible for some South African attacks on Swapo targets. According to the critical sources there was a major democratic current among the exiled membership, fuelled, on one hand, by the democratic culture that the SYL activists carried with them into exile, and on the other, by hard conditions, misconduct and military stagnation. Shipanga's role was not a major one and the 'rebels'' demands were justified as they tried to act along constitutional lines.

After the initial difficulties of the mid-1970s Swapo established an amicable relationship with Angola's MPLA government and moved both its civilian and military headquarters as well as most of its civilian population to Angola. It managed to establish an impressive

¹⁷⁹ According to Leys and Saul (1994: 138) the number of those arrested when the crisis came to a head was almost 2 000, a considerable number of the movement's exiled members at that time. Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan (1989: 258, 290) give similar numbers. Shipanga (1989: 133) speaks of about 1500. Groth's (1995: 57) figure is over a thousand, while Katjavivi (1988: 107), in a nationalist account, speaks of 1000 at most.

According to Groth (1995: 61) and Leys and Saul (*op.cit.*): about 200 of the Mboroma detainees resigned from Swapo, while the rest were 'rehabilitated' in Mboroma and later moved to Nyango and to Angola. Katjavivi (*op.cit.*) speaks of 'a small number' who left Swapo and nearly 600 who were incorporated into Nyango. According to Katjavivi (1986: 300), the Mboroma camp was dissolved by the end of 1977.

infrastructure of civilian and military settlements and logistics in Angola and Zambia, which could provide enough food and shelter to the exiles. It also started to take care of the exiles' health care and education on ever greater scale. These efforts were made easier by the steady flow of people returning from training abroad and putting their newly acquired skills into the service of the movement. Also, by virtue of being a former mandate area of the League of Nations, Namibia and Swapo as the 'sole authentic representative' of its people had a special position on the United Nations agenda. This granted it far more attention and resources than many other liberation movements enjoyed.

Let us now have a look at how those who arrived into Swapo's exile structures tell of having viewed their new position and conditions. Let us start with those who arrived into Swapo in exile in 1974-75.

Anna's narrative is one of those few that openly deal with the conflict between the newcomers and the established leadership (appendix 1, pp. 14-15, lines 300-374). Timothy's is another. Like Anna, he implies that the newcomers did not understand the real demands of participating in the liberation struggle; the leaders knew better:

It was quite a hard struggle with the leadership, because the Old Man¹⁸⁰ always wanted the young people to go to school and we were disagreeing with him. Eventually of course after spending some [time] in the military camps we went to school...[When I left Namibia] the task that I put in front of me was to liberate the country. During that period...even to come to the level of thinking what your role would be was very limited...It's only through basic and good education that you can think of what you really want to do in the future. Going through the bantu education in Namibia...you were taught to believe that you are always going to be below somebody. The job you were going to get wouldn't take you anywhere...When I was active in politics or when I left the country my future never counted. I thought that the country had to be liberated and probably everything would be ok for everyone, then education would be open, people could do whatever they wanted to...That's the reason why we didn't want to go to school when we left. Our task was to liberate the country first and think about education later. But they had the vision, they felt that we couldn't all go to the front, some had to go to school...so that when the country would be free we would have people to manage [it]...[But] when a lot of young people left the country it was totally absurd to tell me to go to school. We were all sort of comparing that 'if we have left school in Namibia what other school are you talking about?'. We just thought it's probably the same schooling...but the school outside Namibia was different.

Even if Anna and Timothy explain that the conflict between the leadership and the newcomers resulted from the ignorance and immaturity of the newcomers, their narratives are exceptional because they mention such conflict. Most narrators do not. They often tell of material hardships and describe their incorporation into Swapo's exile organization as a trying experience. However, they do not mention any disagreement between themselves and the leadership but rather indicate that they took the authority of the leadership as given.

¹⁸⁰ Sam Nujoma.

Instead of blaming the leadership for the difficulties they encountered, these emerge as a test of their loyalty and commitment (see also chapter 5.3). Most of the newly exiled Namibians underwent military training soon after they had arrived in Zambia. Their early impressions are largely from military camps. For example, Victor tells of material difficulties that were overcome by high morale and comradeship. In fact, he says, comradeship was strengthened by the hard conditions and by military discipline:

Finally we reached our destination in Zambia, that's where we were received by Swapo. There was a big camp there...Yuka...They were providing food and there was a clinic and so on...We remained there for a couple of weeks, our group, and [then]...trucks came to collect us to go to the front...[in] the western parts of Zambia...Of course we were not right at the front...We were given initial training there in...Oshatotwa...using weapons and general tactics...Life there was tough in the sense that when we arrived there it was bush. We had to first build our own places, where to live, literally. Swapo provided us with axes, picks and so on, so we had to go to the bush, cut down a few trees and make some omataras, it's a roof...In those days the roof was enough so that when it was raining you didn't get wet...In the morning you used to...do exercises and after that go for breakfast...and then come back to have lessons...Then...you went out in the bush...[and] practiced what you had done in theory in the morning. And of course before you did that...[you were] given a gun and [shown]...how it operates. You took it apart, you [learned] how to clean it...That place had a lot of mosquitoes, man, I don't know how we survived...They really bit...In the night, while you were guarding...if you touched your arm it was literally wetted with blood...[For food] we had maize meal or pap and either beans or kapenta. Kapenta is a little dried fish, it's quite common in Zambia, but when you cook it it's horrible, it's terrible...They were...just dumped in a drum in water, boiled and dished out...It was only when you managed to shoot something that you had meat...You had people coming from different parts of the country. Generally there was a spirit of comradeship...When you are under adverse conditions you tend to be much closer because of that suffering. Of course where you have people you also have friction at times...but that is quite normal. And of course there was a system to deal with this kind of problems, there was camp administration...But this was a military situation and therefore...particularly at the beginning the whole idea was to instill discipline in all the cadres, because it's only when you have disciplined people that you will be able to achieve something.

Likewise, Hilda told that life in military training was difficult but the difficulties could be overcome by having a right attitude:

We reached Zambia, there was one small town...Kalabo...There was a camp there. When you arrived you went to that camp before they took us to the bush...in a remote area...There we started military training. I only stayed there for six months or so in [19]74...It was difficult, so one had to have morale...You would get used to the situation...if you didn't think much about home and what you were eating and the people who you were with...then you could go along with the situation, but the problem was those people who were thinking too much of home, you know, 'maybe I could eat what[ever] or do what[ever]'. I did not have any problem to be in the bush.

Among those whose stories are included in appendix 1, both David and Maria left in 1975, were trained at Okasapa in southeastern Angola and remained in the military after their training. Interestingly, they evaluate their experiences in completely opposite ways. David remains loyal to the prevalent and prescribed stoic ideal: there were material difficulties but they could be overcome by commitment (appendix 1, p. 26, lines 52-64). Maria, by contrast, is one of those very few who adopt a critical and notably, non-heroic, voice. Her narrative is informative of the hardships and confusion in Swapo's military wing at that

time (appendix 1, pp. 41-43, lines 87-172).¹⁸¹ Another critical voice telling of these times is that of Gideon, one of the dissidents. His narrative of this period is in stark contrast with all others in its bitter criticism of Swapo but notably similar to many dissident accounts in secondary literature.¹⁸² In it, the hardships of exile are not merely an unavoidable circumstance but largely caused by mismanagement:

In this refugee camp...outside Lusaka¹⁸³...my [first] impression was very good, it was a well organized community with very friendly ties...I was not alone but with some people that I knew...There were strict rules that nobody should do bad to another, we should all be comrades.....One evening we were picked up...[and] brought deep into southwestern Zambia...Oshatotwa...where we were trained militarily...In the military bases the situation was rather different [from the Old Farm]...We were met by Swapo's military officials who, for example, addressed us: 'Ok, you people left Namibia with certificates, degrees, hoping that you are going to get...a position of leadership, but here you have reached a dead end'...Some others said: 'If there are spies among you, we are going to crush you and kill you.'...The people who said this...looked very dirty, people who had got no education. They looked ignorant and indeed stupid. That provoked a lot of questions in the hearts and minds of a large group of people, many among whom were educated...And there were a lot of young men and young women who came with their boyfriends and girlfriends, some were married. When these guys who had stayed outside...saw these beautiful young ladies...they [would] just take [anyone]...whether married or under-aged or whatever...sleep with her, make her pregnant and nobody could say anything about it. As soon as a person said something about it that person was going to be labelled as a South African spy and prosecuted...There was growing dissatisfaction in Oshatotwa and other military bases...in southwestern Zambia...because the guys who were in charge...abused their position...People who had no education were placed in position of leadership while those who had education were humiliated, it was the rule of thumb there. Many of those people who were accused as enemy agents were people whom one normally would describe as intellectuals...[Also] the quality of training was inferior because...Swapo depended on other countries...so there was not an abundance of resources...We did not have weapons to train to shoot...It was later discovered that quite a great amount of weapons was buried underground and not used for training because the people who were in power were afraid that if these weapons landed into the people's [hands] they might be overthrown. The hygiene was not good and the food was not good, you could hardly get food. One can of course understand that in that situation. But later it was discovered that there was a lot of food stuck somewhere in Lusaka and other places which was not simply delivered to the people for political reasons. When the people started noticing that the training was not a real training...they started making demands...When the leadership saw that there seems to be dissatisfaction or rebellion they cut off food and as a result a lot of people died. I have personally seen people lying under the trees...They started having diarrhoea...and soon after they died...[There was] hunger and starvation.

¹⁸¹ Notably, her portrayal of the relations between UNITA and Swapo contradicts the official Swapo interpretation; For example, Katjavivi writes:

There is a close affinity between the Ovimbundu community in southern Angola, from which UNITA drew substantial support, and the Kwanyama community which straddles the Namibia/Angola border, many of whom were members of SWAPO or UNITA at that time. Together with the fact that both organizations were operating in the same area, this no doubt increased the likelihood of SWAPO and UNITA units interacting. This caused some problems between SWAPO and MPLA. There was, however, no alliance between SWAPO and UNITA as some have claimed. (Katjavivi 1988: 85-86.)

For an account more in line with what Maria says, see Brown 1995: 24-26; see also Saul and Leys 1995a: 47-48, 60 n. 31.

¹⁸² Gideon's description is paralleled by former Swapo leader Andreas Shipanga's and the Swapo-Democrats' (a party established by Shipanga) view (Shipanga 1989; Pütz, von Egidy and Caplan 1990: 290), except that according to them, the arms confiscation, mentioned in Gideon's account, took place on the initiative of the Zambian government in line with the detente policy.

¹⁸³ The Old Farm.

Gideon also tells about an incident in which he was accused of being ‘sent to destroy Swapo’. Clearly, he tells of it because he sees it as indicative of a pattern of, in his words, ‘what Swapo could be and what people could do to other people’ (see p. 115) generally, a pattern that was to gain enormous significance in his later life (see chapter 6.1):

During the training...I and many other people, we were 15, we were picked up one morning...Our colleagues [had] their AK 47s ready, pointed at us, and we were guarded under a tree. I knew there was something terribly wrong but I didn’t know what it was. We were then called one by one, interrogated. When my turn came I was asked about my father, I was accused of having been sent by my father to come and destroy the movement. I totally denied. First...my father died in 1970. This was in 1975, so he could not have possibly resurrected from the grave and said: ‘My son should go there and destroy Swapo.’ Second, when I left [Namibia] I [thought of] going to the United States and Britain in order to get education, not to Zambia...I was then released.

Thus, whereas narratives of incorporation emerge as a test of commitment, a part of their initiation into full cadrehood in the loyalists’ stories, in Maria’s and Gideon’s stories they serve as the starting point of their years of hardships and suffering (see chapters 6.1 and 6.2).

5.2.2 Later arrivals

What about those who came into exile after 1975? Are their accounts different, as one would perhaps expect in the light of the material and organizational changes that took place within Swapo in exile?

Of those whose stories are included in appendix 1, John arrived in Angola in 1976 and Joseph in 1977. In their narratives, the motif of hardships overcome by commitment surfaces again (appendix 1, p. 4, lines 188-204; p. 28, lines 43-46). This is the case also in Martin’s narrative. He came to Angola in 1979 and was taken to the Tobias Hainyeko training centre in Lubango for basic military training:

We were trained in basic skills of military conduct, that’s guerrilla warfare mostly...It was a question of giving you the basic skills that you would need to survive in a war situation, and this included firing, crawling, camouflage concealment, surveillance and that type of things. It was not a question of training full-fledged soldiers. The training facilities, if you compare them to the defence force in any given country, they were inferior but...the people had determination. Determination was the most important thing that kept us going. That’s basically why Swapo was successful in its military struggle, because...we were not paid, we did not gain anything, not a single cent, we survived on maize meal and clothing that came for example from the Scandinavian countries and guns that came from the socialist bloc...I felt homesick for a few months, I longed for those good things that I knew, chocolates, soft drinks and that type of things but as time went by I got used to the situation and I did not have any option.

By contrast, Vilho, who came to Angola in 1978, considers things to have been well enough materially:

I had no problems about the life in Angola. The only problem was that Namibia was a colony. I wanted to free Namibia...In Hainyeko training centre food was enough and other materials...like clothes. We got uniforms to be trained with uniform and other materials...It was not very difficult to stay there.

Like in the '1974 generation', some narrators contrast the ignorance of the newcomers with the established organisation in exile. Romanus is one of them. He came into exile in 1977. According to his narrative, the newcomers were naive and ignorant whereas there was an 'organized structure' in exile:

The [idea] that most Namibians who left had was to get trained as soldiers and come and fight back...That was just imagination, we really didn't know how things were arranged [in exile]. When we went...to those centres in Angola...we found that there is an organized structure, that you don't just go and fight when it's not necessary. So we ended up in schools rather than at war...They had a system that if you were a little bit younger and you had an ability to study they'd better use you for something else than fighting.

This 'organized structure' emerges from Erkki's and Secilia's narratives too. They do not complain about the strict and unquestionable discipline of exile life but portray it as a 'normal condition'. They also tell about the close sociality of military life. By contrast, Matthew supplements his narrated commitment with criticism of mismanagement and authoritarianism, in line with the dissident emplotment of his story (appendix 1, pp. 31-32, lines 161-188). Erkki came into exile in 1977. From Okasapa in Angola, he was sent in a group to Zambia:

You just had to...listen to what the big men were saying...You had no other option, you had to just...follow the system...Once they said that you have to do this, you have to do that, there was no other way...If you didn't follow you got a punishment, you had to obey the orders...It was not difficult...because it was a normal condition and...you just had to work hard...[In Nyango] there were commanders...and the next day they told us that 'now the men are going to go to the frontline, and the women...and the children...will remain'...We were taken to a camp called Oshatotwa...They started to train us as guerrillas...The people were well organized and every day you had to have a kind of a meeting in the morning at eight o'clock...The people were not allowed to fight one another...If you tried to quarrel with somebody then you would be reported to the man in charge.

Secilia came to Angola in 1980 and was first taken to Lubango. From there she proceeded to the Greenwell Matongo¹⁸⁴ training camp:

When we went to that camp we were given a place to stay but even [if] the place [was not] decent you couldn't complain, and you had a mattress, you just had to stay there. And we were given things like...military clothing. And every day you had to wake by four o'clock to go for exercising...There was a big river. After exercises you had to go to wash in that river. And the water could be cold like hell...After that you had to come to the parade to be given orders...People were so many...Some had to go to work, some had to go to training and some had to go to do cooking for the whole camp...Ok, the training, there [were] different [things]: maybe these people went to politics, these people went to manual or what[ever] training, then you returned. You [were] given a time: '[At] this time you all have

¹⁸⁴ Matongo was Political Commissar of PLAN until his death in 1979; Katjavivi 1986: 280, 283.

to be in the parade again before you go to eat.’ The food was there, it could be nice [or] not but you couldn’t complain...unless you were sick. After lunch you were given 30 minutes to rest. After that...you had to go to the parade again and from the parade you went to school...By four thirty you had to return to the...parade. Always when you came from somewhere you had to go to the parade. Then we had free time up to six o’clock when we were going to get our dinner. After dinner everybody had to go to position, his place where he used to [stay], but not so that you had to go to sleep. Life was tough but it was ok...You got a lot of jokes, you made many friends, you got many stories and everybody [was] just explaining how [he or she] came, how we [used to] live at our places, because we were...from different places and with different traditions.

5.2.3 Analysis

Most narrators, both those who came into exile in 1974-75 and those who came later, tell of having experienced their new life in exile as difficult and tough. What little differences there are seem to reflect the material and organizational betterment that took place in the latter part of the 1970s. Those who left in 1974-75 invariably tell of material difficulties whereas those who left later do not always refer to them. Also, many of those who left in the mid-1970s tell elsewhere in their stories that the conditions improved later. Overall, the narratives convey a sense of entering a new world of discipline and strict order that many portray as demanding and different from what they expected but mostly do not question. Against the most often narrated motives for leaving — a militant wish to get to fight and a wish to get to study — the pervasive discipline and authoritarianism of exile emerges as a condition to reconcile with. It is instructive that subjective narration largely disappears from the narratives here — things mostly happen to or are done by a collective subject, ‘we’. The romantic notions of adventure or immediate return as victorious heroes, or the dreams of personal achievement, which many of the former exiles profess having held at the time they left were soon engulfed by the routines of military training, schooling and camp life, and eventually, for many, a seemingly unending uneventfulness of exile life. These narratives reflect very real changes in the social relations and practical environment of the new exiles, but their message of being taught discipline by the movement is also instrumental for the narrative of ‘maturation’, which, in turn, is integral to the liberation narrative.

However, there were also important continuities or carryovers from Namibia into exile. For example, the amount of education that one had upon leaving into exile clearly played a significant part in his or her opportunities for further education (see chapter 5.3). More generally, as most of the exiles came from Ovamboland or from Ovambo families in other parts of Namibia, they carried with them a set of everyday social relations and practices. These greatly contributed to the unofficial, taken-for-granted norms of exile sociality, but they were also openly utilized to justify the social arrangements and power relations of

Swapo in exile, for example through the traditionally important idioms of kinship and seniority. Thus, the departure into exile, while certainly being a big change, did not set the exiles free from various forms of authoritarian control as many of them may have thought. Rather, the authoritarian environment of apartheid, boarding schools and parental authority was replaced by the authoritarian regime of Swapo. The movement abroad demanded unquestioning submission to the leadership and did not tolerate dissidence.

How do the narratives relate to Leys and Saul's (1994; Saul and Leys 1995a) thesis that there was consistent popular pressure for internal democracy within Swapo in exile in the mid-1970s that could have enabled its transformation into a truly democratic (and revolutionary) organization had this not been violently prevented?¹⁸⁵ Certainly there was opposition to the established leadership. What is at question is the extent and consistency of this opposition. Considering the large proportion of Swapo's exiled members who were involved in the 'rebellion',¹⁸⁶ it is interesting that none of those interviewees who came into exile in 1974-75 tell of having been involved so as to be arrested. This may well be just a coincidence but it is also possible that the 'rehabilitated' Swapo members are tempted to leave this issue out of their stories. Only Anna, Timothy and Gideon mention that there was a conflict between the leadership and the newcomers and only Gideon adopts a critical stand towards Swapo.¹⁸⁷ In general, very few criticize Swapo or tell of having been discontented at the way things turned out to be in exile even if life is told to have been strictly ordered and fraught with hardships. The difficulties and discipline appear necessary and as a test of commitment, or are just mentioned matter-of-factly.

What the former exiles tell about the period of 1974-76 can be interpreted in two distinct but not incompatible ways. First, it may indicate that Swapo's internal crisis was not felt as such by the majority of its members in exile. The case put forward by Leys and Saul, Groth and some others may be exaggerated, based on the documents and reminiscences of a tiny but vocal minority and supplemented with what is known of the general confusion and

¹⁸⁵ This proposition is echoed by Dobell, a student of Leys:

The largely uncritical sponsorship...enabled Swapo leaders to silence dissenting voices within the movement...thereby contributing significantly to the lack of democratic procedure and practice in Swapo and to the *suppression of the radical political consciousness that might otherwise have developed among its rank and file membership*. (Dobell 1998: 139, italics mine.)

Tellingly, what was suppressed, according to Dobell's argument, was something that was not yet in existence but might have developed. The basis for assuming that such consciousness would indeed have developed remains unclear.

¹⁸⁶ See p. 134 fn. 179.

¹⁸⁷ He also tells that his brother was arrested and executed for being involved in 'the rebellion'.

difficulties in administering the increased exile population. One should not confuse programmatic dissidence with reactions to the disorganized situation within the movement at the time and to the shock caused by the complete change in one's social and material environment. The stories abound with references to this change; the hard conditions, strict discipline and homesickness.¹⁸⁸

Another line of interpretation stresses the way in which subsequent personal history influences remembrance. According to this interpretation, the way of recalling one's incorporation into Swapo in exile, including the events of 1974-76, is influenced by how one's relationship with the movement developed later. Remembrance is not merely a reflection of what the narrators thought at the time but also an outcome of reconciling that period into the totality of their narrated lives. From this perspective, Swapo's version of nationalist historiography and the dissident or critical version constructed against Swapo's version do not merely arise from the experiences and recollections of those Namibians who participated in the struggle. On the contrary, these versions enter into the very construction of their recollections.

This implies that those who have remained loyal to Swapo would have adopted its scheme of liberation history and the accompanying self-representations and would still employ them in their life narration, which would lead them to 'misremember' the extent and importance of whatever discontent and disagreements there might have been. Hence the stress on having been immature and ignorant before being taught the correct view of the struggle and a more responsible attitude by the movement in exile. Of course, it is also possible that the narrated conformity with the movement's leadership does not even reflect what the narrators actually remember. They may not dare to speak out against the party, or they may find it difficult to admit that, when the conflict within the movement came to a head, they retreated from their previous conviction because of the predictable adverse consequences of not doing so. It would require extra effort to reconcile such admission with the self-justificatory project of crafting a life story. However, the themes of maturation and commitment emerge in the stories so consistently and with such pride and enthusiasm that I find it difficult to believe that they do not reflect a real conviction.

¹⁸⁸ By proposing this interpretation I do not mean to underestimate the importance of the events of this period for the subsequent development of Swapo's style of leadership nor to deny that some members of the movement suffered considerably and unjustly, during that crisis and later. What I am concerned are the meanings attached to the events of that time by those involved, both at the time and subsequently.

By contrast, those who have parted company with Swapo would have more critical remembrances. Indeed, those who only later got into an open conflict with Swapo's leadership express more critical views than others about its actions also during this earlier crisis.¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Maria's critical distance to military life is probably facilitated by the subsequent, fundamentally different, course of her life, by her academic education and experiences of individual freedom in Europe. The latter have led her to view her military life as a detour in her personal history, as a 'vacuum life' that prevented her from being what she really is (see chapter 6.2.1).

However, taking this line of interpretation to the extreme would mean that a considerable number of the former exiles suppress their past discontent so efficiently that they manage to avoid mentioning it at all. Perhaps many of the exiles really were not too concerned about the administrative structures of the movement. They mostly remember having had vague images of exile, including a desire 'to fight' against colonialism and a wish to be educated, and it should be noted that both loyalists and dissidents remember in this way. Even if the way things were in exile was a trying experience, the expectations and initial reactions of the newcomers, including the militant attitude some of them had, seem to have been, in most cases, successfully contained by Swapo's nationalist propaganda and exile practices.

This suggestion leads one to recognize an elitist bent in the historiography of Namibia's liberation struggle. The nationalist version has sought to extend the fundamentally elitist nationalist project into a prevalent interpretation (cf. Tapscott 1995: 155), whereas the newer critical historiography has largely concentrated on arguing directly against the nationalist interpretation and on filling its gaps. In the latter regard, the study edited by Leys and Saul (Leys and Saul eds. 1995), among others, is a timely contribution. However, their short-term — and partly political¹⁹⁰ — objectives lead them to a rather strong dichotomization of nationalist history and 'counter-history' (Leys and Saul 1995a: 4). The advantage of this approach is the consistent focus of the emerging picture. The disadvantage is that, even if the 'liberation movement' is no longer taken as the monolith it was in nationalist historiography, the focus is only extended to cover the machinations of the Swapo leadership and their most vocal critics. The 'non-intellectual' majority remains in the marginal position of 'the masses', without agency and without a voice. Detailed as

¹⁸⁹ I refer especially to Gideon's and Matthew's narratives; see chapter 6.1.

¹⁹⁰ Leys and Saul's judgement of the actual course of Namibian liberation struggle and independence as history that went wrong appears to be motivated by a desire to rescue a 'true' socialist agenda of liberation in 'popular democracy'. See Saul (1997); cf. Portelli's (1990) analysis of a 'uchronic' relation to history.

the exposition of Leys, Saul and their co-writers may be otherwise, it leaves us in the dark when it comes to how the majority of the rank and file of Swapo in exile felt about the situation in the camps.

In this task, the questions of remembering and interpretation in oral history should be taken into account. The processes by which multifold lived experience are negotiated into coherent interpretations disappear from the picture and one loses sight of how and why a given set of facts acquires meaning and significance for those who remember. Above I pointed out how the perceived course of one's subsequent personal history may influence the remembering of particular past experiences, for example those of coming into exile and being incorporated in Swapo's structures there. Such critics of the Swapo narrative of Namibian liberation struggle as Leys and Saul (1994; Saul and Leys 1995a) and Groth (1995), do not differentiate clearly enough between contemporary documents and reminiscences nor interpret individual recollections in the context of the larger narratives and lives of which they are parts. This calls their conclusion of widespread programmatic opposition within Swapo in exile in the mid-1970s into question.

The direction at which the former exile narratives point is that the newcomers' vague images of exile and the liberation struggle, as well as the militant attitudes some of them possibly held, were processed into a particular mould of liberation politics by the propaganda and practices of Swapo.¹⁹¹ Indeed, some of them were explicit in arguing such a point.¹⁹² For example, Tauno said:

When I left this country I believed that any white person coming in front of my face is my enemy, I was made to [believe so]...When you were living in Namibia every white person was just...beating us, you know, they were bosses and what and what...Luckily I joined Swapo abroad, who told me: 'No, you are coming from a wrong system, not all the white people are like that.' Then I realized: 'Aha, that system is wrong.'...It was when I was attending my political lectures in Zambia [that] I came to know that 'the white people are...helping us here...Don't think that any white person coming to you is a bad one.'...Swapo had to give you some lectures because you were coming from a society with very satanic ideas.

Mary told of the mixture of inferiority and hatred caused by living under apartheid and of how political education taught one away from it:

Apartheid taught us many evil things...Whenever you went to...whatever public place there were benches which were written... 'whites only'...We developed [an idea] that 'probably I'm not a normal person, I'm

¹⁹¹ Of course, there was also a considerable number for whom this only happened through 'rehabilitation' at Mboroma camp.

¹⁹² See also Anna's narrative in appendix 1, p. 15, lines 363-374.

not a human being'...So we [developed an atmosphere] of retaliation and hatred towards the white people...We thought that all whites are as cruel as the South African whites, so we said: 'We just want to go and fight for independence...so that we can kick all the whites out of Namibia, because the way they have treated us is inhuman.'...As time went by we learned a lot about forgiveness and realized that not all whites are like the South African whites...And we learned that the South African whites were taught, they were not born like that. Apartheid was injected in their minds by the the government...I didn't have a clear picture [about politics] till I went abroad...We were given some lectures on our political situation, what we were fighting for, our aims and objectives. That's when I learned more.

Likewise, Timothy told of growing and learning about the liberation struggle within 'the party':¹⁹³

Growing up within the party we were always told the importance of freeing the country for everybody, not only for blacks but also for the whites who, even if they didn't see it, were also oppressed by this system. So in a way the political education within the party opened us up. Even if you first developed some personal hatred, eventually you tended to understand the concept of the liberation struggle in its totality.

In this process, accepting Swapo's interpretation of Namibian history and contemporary situation leads into considering the previous interpretations as incomplete or mistaken. For example, the above and many other narrators tell of learning that the system of apartheid was the real oppressor and not individual whites. At the same time, the concept of 'liberation' gets new meanings. The narrators tend to see the adoption of this interpretive scheme as acquiring knowledge, as learning the correct interpretation of history and getting a fuller picture of colonialism and liberation. In order to find the substance of this picture, apart from the reinterpretation of colonialism, we will have to take a look at Swapo's military training and political education.

5.2.4 Technologies of incorporation: military training and political education

Most of the exiles underwent military training after arriving to Swapo in Zambia and Angola.¹⁹⁴ Political lectures were a part of the training. Most of those who were not trained went to school in Swapo's civilian settlements or in other countries. Also they were usually taught 'political' issues and discipline in addition to other things. Apart from the practical functions of building up an armed force and organizing the reproduction of the exile population, military training and political education should be seen as a 'technology of power' necessitated by the variety of backgrounds and motivations of the new exiles. In it, the multiple personal experiences which the new exiles carried with them from Namibia were streamlined and extended into more holistic images and more coherent discourses of

¹⁹³ Cf. his narrative in chapter 5.2.

¹⁹⁴ Most of the interviewees had undergone military training. Almost all of the men and about half of the women had been trained.

colonialism and national liberation. In this way, Swapo sought to solve the problems that arose with thousands of young people suddenly swelling its ranks. Together with the strict hierarchy and practical arrangements of exile life, military training and political education constituted a policy of administering the exile 'population' and of producing loyal 'cadres'.

Swapo started training its cadres militarily already in 1962, four years before the first clashes with the colonial forces. Initially, the training took place in Egypt, Ghana, Algeria, Tanzania and the Soviet Union on a very modest scale. Since 1965 some fighters were also trained in China and North Korea. Still, most were trained in Africa. (Katjavivi 1986: 265; Soggot 1986: 29.) Swapo's first own training camp was also established in the 1960s in Kongwa, Tanzania. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Swapo gradually moved most of its exile organization to Zambia. A new reception and training centre called Oshatotwa was established in southwestern Zambia after the exodus of 1974 and remained the the major site of Swapo's military training until 1978. Thereafter, most of the training took place in camps near Lubango in Angola (where Swapo's Defence Headquarters had been moved), especially at the Tobias Hainyeko training centre. (Saul and Leys 1995a: 46, 54.) The training continued also in Eastern Europe and Tanzania.

Swapo's military training concentrated on the conduct of guerrilla warfare. According to many narrators, it was not a 'proper' training but aimed at giving one basic military skills. Also, especially in the mid-1970s there were shortages of necessities and military materials. Some told of having received better training in the Soviet Union and Tanzania. The first step of the training, as Victor noted on p. 135-136, was to 'instill discipline in the cadres'. This was done, as in any military, by demanding unquestioning obedience and by establishing a strict daily programme to control the activities of the trainees.¹⁹⁵ In addition to physical exercises, handling guns, and tactics, the training also involved political instruction. It had the explicit aim of producing loyalty and cohesion within the movement and, additionally, of enabling the guerrillas to mobilize the local population on their missions inside Namibia. Political education was by no means restricted to military training; in different forms it reached also those who did not participate in military training.

Let us now have a look at what the narrators say about the contents and perceived effects of political instruction and other forms of propaganda. For example, Anna connects political

¹⁹⁵ For descriptions of the contents and conditions military training, see chapter 5.2 and Maria's (appendix 1, p. 41-42, lines 88-109) and Matthew's (appendix 1, pp. 31-32, lines 161-171 and 200-204) narratives. See also Katjavivi 1986: 286; Liberation Support Movement 1978: 44-45.

education directly to curtailing the militancy of the newcomers and transforming their attitude into a more mature one (appendix 1, pp. 15, lines 351-362). Maria is critical about military life otherwise, but tells that the lessons on 'apartheid and colonialism' during military training taught one to understand the Namibian situation and were instrumental in instilling morale among the trainees (appendix 1, p. 41-42, lines 88-109). Linus tells of learning about the reasons of the war and the structure and constitution of Swapo and of how this matured one to give up simple militancy. He also mentions learning from the news and from 'political books':

There were political classes and people were taught...how Swapo was formed, what caused the war...So it matured you, you could begin to understand the...constitution...I didn't know those things when I joined Swapo, [that] there's a constitution of Swapo, there are wings of Swapo. I knew [that] there is Swapo Youth League. That was enough...We knew vaguely about the UN, the resolutions. We didn't follow the news, we only went to fight: 'We will fight and [Namibia] will be free.'...You mature with time if you are in that situation...I doubt [that there is any]body [who was] abroad in the Swapo camps...and doesn't understand these things. Even if you didn't study you just gradually [learned]...You followed the news...and there were many books available. Most of the books in the Swapo camps were political books...So we read these.

Richard is one of those few who tell of having adopted socialist ideology. His account is also a good example of how the context of learning 'politics' and history was broader at the UNIN and abroad than in the camps. Like many others, he speaks of how his perspective was widened in exile and attributes this to his studies there. By contrast, his portrayal of military training and the accompanying political instruction is not particularly enthusiastic:

[When you left] the expectation was that the country should be liberated, kick all the Boers out and then they'd leave us alone and we'd have a better life. But as time went on you gradually studied the situation, you got exposure to schooling, that's when you started thinking seriously, you [learned] that not every Boer was wrong, [that] you were not fighting against Boers [but]...against the administration, the system...So the expectations were focused...with a maturing impact, one, from the politics that you could get there in exile, two, from reading books on your own and three, from the teachings, the constant schooling...My political perspective...matured in Zambia, at the [United Nations] Institute for Namibia...In December...1975...we were taken to what they called the front for training and whatever. There you didn't have much exposure to books, you had exposure to guns and bullets and political commissars who came with whatever they thought you should know. In 1976, August, I joined the Institute, I became a student. I was exposed to the library and to people who had academic knowledge...One very encouraging teacher was from Zimbabwe, he had studied in the States, very good at politics. You [could] see him at any time and discuss and everytime you discussed with him he could recommend a book...I had books from socialism to capitalism to what[ever]. So I was able to compare...I had a serious socialist exposure...And [when I was studying] in Senegal there was...one fellow from Malawi, some kind of a rebel...with very good ideas...We used to be with him and chat a lot on politics...And the events in Africa also forced some of us to rethink. For example Amin in Uganda, what was happening in Malawi...in Ethiopia and the difficulties of countries like Zaire.

Tauno and Secilia cannot be defined as intellectuals as clearly as the above narrators, but they too had left the camps for several years to study. Tauno received political instruction in the civilian camps. According to him, it concentrated on describing and analyzing colonialism in Namibia, on projecting a better future after independence and on stressing

unity as a precondition for freedom. He also tells that news were gathered and disseminated by political commissars at the parades:

In Zambia we...[used to] have a gathering at school before the classes started, and on Saturdays there was a big gathering...for the whole community together. There had to be also a political commissar, a person who was responsible for collecting news worldwide [and]...giving information to the people. Swapo was not only dumping people in the camps...There had to be a political commissar, a politically motivated somebody who could also listen to the news...and gather [them]...Saturdays was the time of the news, everybody had to go to what we called a parade where we were told what had happened in the world. If you were very good at English you could also listen to the radio of Zambia or BBC...And the political consciousness people...dealt all the information about Namibia, about what was going on there. Somebody would come and talk about the history, but history we were also doing at school...We were told how Namibia was colonized and what colonialism is, what oppression is, and there were a lot of things to discuss, because colonialism is a broad term. Why Namibia is not independent, the political situation in Namibia, economical situation in Namibia. And they gave some other examples [from] African countries, and the situation of black people in Namibia...and what changes we wanted to bring as Namibians, and then Namibia would belong to both black and white. Then we would have to just come together, sing one song and march together towards freedom.

In addition to shortly mentioning similar things as Tauno, Secilia also told of having compared her own remembered experiences to the interpretation she heard in exile and having accepted it in their light:

You had to learn the political issues and you had to take that up...They only told you the bad things this regime of Boers...was doing and what we were fighting for and if we liberated our country, how we would live like...And how you had to defend your organization, how you had to be in your organization...And...you had seen the situation [in Namibia, so] you...thought: ‘Oh, these people¹⁹⁶ are doing very bad things to the people, and...maybe it is true [that] if we take this [line it] will do better for the country.’

Erastus, Joseph, David and Amalia were rank and file exiles who spent all their exile years in Angola and Zambia. Erastus tells plainly about learning about Namibian history, colonialism, African countries and the future independent Namibia: ‘We were just told about history, different African countries, what colonial Namibia was, how those countries were doing and what would be done after Namibia got independence.’ Joseph and David stress the role of political education in handling social relations (appendix 1, p. 28, lines 48-51 and p. 26, lines 58-64). They may refer to their fellow exiles but equally to the local people inside Namibia, whom the guerrillas met on their missions. Amalia explicitly refers to the latter: ‘We also had political classes about how you could approach...the stayers inside Namibia.’

Overall, it appears on the basis of the stories and of secondary literature¹⁹⁷ that Swapo’s political education consisted of the basics of Namibian history, colonial economy and

¹⁹⁶ The colonial regime.

¹⁹⁷ The contents and perceived functions of political training are discussed in Liberation Support Movement

society and the activities and programme of Swapo. The instruction seems not to have been theoretically elaborate but rather one that aimed at providing an elementary framework of unity, a discursive common ground where the various individual mentalities of the exiles could be related to each other. It was a policy of minimal politics in the sense of striving for mobilization for liberation without much substantial discussion of what ‘liberation’ was supposed to mean. Still, most of the former exiles themselves feel that their vision was broadened in exile, both through Swapo’s intended policies and through practical engagement in new situations.

There are no major differences between what the ‘intellectuals’ and others tell about political instruction. Some of the ‘intellectuals’ (such as Anna, Linus and Richard above, or Martin and Hilma below) tell of learning history and ‘politics’ also from other sources than political lectures and they explicitly recognize how rudimentary the political instruction in the camps was. Some of them also refer to its ideological character. This is likely to be related to the further education they received at the UNIN and abroad. Yet, even most of them feel that the basic political training of the camps broadened their understanding. Rank and file narrators do not present honed ideological opinions or elaborate visions of development, whether they speak of their expectations before leaving Namibia, of political education, or of post-independence; in their narratives politics more or less equal national liberation (see also chapters 4.3, 5.3 and 5.5.4).

There is a conspicuous absence of any references to socialism in almost all of the accounts of political education despite the fact that in the latter half of the 1970s Swapo adopted a broadly socialist rhetoric¹⁹⁸ and developed closer relationships with the socialist bloc. Was this rhetoric not included in political education or did it just not have influence on the cadres? Matthew and Martin are the only ones to speak about this issue. Both of them were activists in student politics before they left Namibia and went to military training at the Tobias Hainyeko training centre in Lubango, Matthew in 1978 and Martin in 1979. Both proceeded to Eastern European party schools and rejoined the military after returning to Angola, Matthew as a political instructor at Tobias Hainyeko and Martin as a field

1978: 40-45/ n.d.: 18-23; Katjavivi 1986: 282-283; Dobell 1995: 174-175.

¹⁹⁸ This can be seen, for example, in the Political Program adopted by the movement’s Central Committee in 1976, which includes references to ‘scientific socialism’ (Swapo 1976b: 6-7, 12-13). It is also reflected in Mbuende’s classification of Namibian resistance into ‘aristocratic’ nationalism (1946-1959), mass nationalism (1959-1976), and social-revolutionary nationalism (from 1976 onwards). Mbuende 1986: 146-162, esp. 156-162.

commissar of a military unit. Both of them were later detained as alleged spies in Swapo's spy-drama.

According to Matthew, political instruction was an integral part of military training. It consisted of the basics of Swapo's policies and constitution and included socialist rhetoric. After a one-year course in Marxism-Leninism in Bulgaria he became chief political instructor at Tobias Hainyeko. This indicates that Swapo's political education was by that time Marxist-Leninist in orientation. However, it also indicates that this influence could not go very deep; Matthew, who had studied the doctrine for one year, was heading 45 other instructors who probably were not as familiar with it as he was. (Appendix 1, p. 32, lines 189-204.)

Like many others, Martin tells that political education consisted of lessons on Namibian history. Additionally, he speaks of having read Marxist literature. Interestingly, whereas most others stress the importance of political education in increasing their knowledge and commitment, Martin claims that he saw it as propagandist and maintains that it didn't influence him much:¹⁹⁹

We used to get sort of political education. It was basically on the history of Namibia, and even Swapo cannot claim that they have got the correct history. People who wrote Swapo history books also wrote them from their ideological backgrounds, but basically we had history that was more reflective of the Namibian situation [than the colonial one]. That was most of the political education we got, and otherwise we used to read materials on Lenin, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, people like Feuerbach, and all these philosophers, Platos and Aristotles. We had political education but as far as I'm concerned it did not really influence me strongly...so much that I would have forgotten what is the truth and what is propaganda.

Against Martin's background of having studied philosophy and political economy in the GDR for ten months and having then served as a combat commissar, it is probable that he either includes his studies in Germany in 'political education' here or that he, having been relatively well familiarized with these issues, just remembers the contents of political education in the camps better than an average former exile.

On the basis of these narratives, it appears that at least since the mid-1970s, political instruction was modelled in part along socialist lines.²⁰⁰ Those who were entrusted with

¹⁹⁹ I will discuss the possible reasons for this in chapter 6.1.

²⁰⁰ Already in an interview conducted in October 1975, PLAN Political Commissar Kakauru Nganjone employed Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, speaking about Swapo as a 'vanguard party' that wages a 'revolutionary struggle', and about 'progressive forces fighting to end capitalism and imperialism', 'world revolutionary process' and 'proletarian internationalism'. Liberation Support Movement 1978: 42-43/ n.d.: 20-21.

ideological responsibilities, like political commissars, were educated in party schools in Eastern Europe before they started teaching others in the field. According to Matthew, there were also Soviet commissars within the PLAN. Nevertheless, it seems that, by and large, the commitment to socialist ideology remained superficial both among the Swapo leadership and, especially, among the rank and file. Class differences in Namibia closely paralleled 'racial' differences, and these provided the basis for mobilizing mass support in vaguely defined nationalist terms (Bauer 1998; Peltola 1995). This was the consciousness that was nurtured by Swapo among its followers.²⁰¹ However, socialist ideas seem to have been truly adopted by many individuals, especially by the middle generation intellectuals who were radicalized either in the 1970s waves of student activism or during their studies in exile.²⁰²

5.2.5 Conclusion

Ronnie Kasrils, a former Chief of Military Intelligence of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's armed wing, recalled the South African liberation struggle in 1996: 'MK was more than just an army. It was...a social academy which served to raise the consciousness of our people.' (Kasrils 1996: 68.) This is an insider view that captures the significance of 'political' training and other exile military institutions.²⁰³ Although Kasrils refers to the MK, his point can be applied to Swapo and the PLAN. In spite, or perhaps because, of all the difficulties Swapo faced in exile, it strove to provide its members with discursive tools other than those available in colonial Namibia, and their effect should not be underestimated, rudimentary as they may have been. Indeed, it is a widely shared sentiment among the narrators that political education, together with other sources of historical and political information in exile, had been instrumental in 'raising their consciousness' and maturing them.

²⁰¹ Swapo's broadly nationalist stance is reflected also in the apparent easiness with which socialist rhetoric was discarded on the eve of independence. Indeed, it has been claimed that rhetorical adherence to socialism was motivated predominantly by its pragmatic merits during the struggle. Apart from being 'the discourse of the day' at the time, it was aimed at pleasing the socialist bloc and the government of Angola, on whom Swapo relied for military support and an operational base. It may also have been a belated effort, after the movement's internal crisis, to incorporate the radical elements by taking their demands formally into account; Leys and Saul 1994: 143; Saul and Leys 1995a: 52; Harneit-Sievers 1985: 194-195; Strand 1991: 30-44, 65-68; Dobell 1995 and 1998.

²⁰² Richard's narrative above exemplifies the latter form of radicalization, while Matthew's narrative in appendix 1 tells of both. For nationalist literature written by Swapo members and informed by socialist discourse, see Mbuende 1986; Kaakunga 1990; Angula 1990. I will discuss the remnants of this discourse in chapter 5.5.4.

²⁰³ Of course, Kasrils's argument is also an example of the tendency, amply evident also in Namibia, to formulate and preserve a heroic remembrance of the liberation struggle at the cost of any alternative remembrances that those who participated may bear.

Therefore, the coherence of personal accounts with Swapo's 'liberation discourse' should not be seen to follow directly from similar experiences of 'colonial oppression' and 'liberation struggle'. Rather, it is a consciousness that results from welding the various backgrounds and experiences together with the ideology of national liberation in the social setting of the movement abroad. Such crafting of a shared version of 'national liberation' was actively propagated in written and spoken word and in various daily practices. The exiles tell of having done this 'hermeneutic labour' also on their own initiative by discussing about their backgrounds and experiences in Namibia, thus reinterpreting and streamlining their memories into a shared body of historical remembering.

Apart from the learning of 'correct' interpretations of colonialism and 'liberation', this process involves accepting exile as home, as a condition with no immediate end in sight. This brings us back to the process of initiation, which I suggested as a relevant perspective for understanding why young Namibians left into exile (see chapter 5.1.4). Basic military training and adapting to camp life in general appear as an end to the liminality that starts with breaking the connections to the social order in Namibia. By being thus incorporated into the exile community one is transformed from an adolescent in Namibia into an adult in exile and obtains full membership in the movement.²⁰⁴ The social order of exile is accepted as a more or less permanent state of existence. Especially for the militants, accepting that 'the struggle will be long' and adapting to the hierarchy and order of exile life is a move back from the anarchic realm of defying authorities, from the imagery of adventure and the rebellious fervour of 'wanting to fight' to a relatively stable social order, enduring commitment and 'fighting on multiple fronts'. This transition is marked by a new emphasis on enduring commitment and the exile unity of 'comradeship' and on describing how well-organized the camps and exile life in general were.²⁰⁵ Indeed, it is such an ethos of unity and commitment that dominates narratives of life in exile.

²⁰⁴ Helao, a rank and file member of PLAN in exile, gives an explicit expression of seeing military training as a transformation into full cadrehood:

First [I went to] Lubango...I only stayed there for one month. From there I was sent for training...The training was tough...When you finished it you were really a full soldier...I could feel myself that 'I'm not an ordinary one, I'm a full soldier, I can prove that I am a soldier'.

In the field I learned that people who had gone through military training together were thought of as 'brothers' and 'sisters' to each other. This is further confirmation to the idea of military training as an initiation.

²⁰⁵ See e.g. Anna's narrative; appendix 1, pp. 15-17, lines 375-464.

Actually, such stability and permanence was necessarily a relative one, since it remained within the framework of the supposed transitoriness and collective liminality of exile, which made it an object of constant attention and reproduction.

5.3 ‘We were from one mother, one father’ — life in exile and the ethos of the liberation narrative²⁰⁶

In narrative terms, life in exile stands in contrast to leaving and arriving into exile. It emerges as a relatively stable existence, which is largely defined in terms of ‘unity’ and ‘commitment’. The collectivist ethos of the liberation narrative amalgamates in these themes.

In both civilian and military camps, almost everything was done together: eating, sleeping, schooling, military activities and all other major routines. There were regular parades and a strict hierarchy, allocated duties for everyone, and centrally organized cultural and sports activities. These practical arrangements served many purposes simultaneously. Obviously, they were meant to address the people’s day-to-day needs. However, they also worked towards creating obedience to the movement’s existing relations and practices of power, and in focusing the energy and expectations of the rank and file. Intendedly and unintendedly, the exile practices produced a particular collectivist normative order and established an efficient, ‘modern’ time- and space-economy among the exile ‘population’.²⁰⁷

Partly, the characteristics of exile social organisation emerged from the already quoted narratives of military training and political education. Another facet of these characteristics can be found in descriptions of the concrete organisation of Swapo’s civilian camps, the ‘health and education centres’. Let us quote a few of these narratives to see what kinds of issues are usually mentioned in them and how they are assessed.²⁰⁸ Peter lived at the Old

²⁰⁶ This quotation is from Martha’s narrative; appendix 1, p. 25, line 189.

²⁰⁷ Khachig Tölölyan has observed a comparative process of becoming a ‘terrorist’ among Middle Eastern Armenians. According to him, it goes much deeper than being merely a ‘political choice’:

[F]oundations of this cultural reality...are religious, linguistic, rhetorical and mythic. This primarily verbal and narrative reality is maintained through a network of churches, schools, athletic unions and youth and student groups. Obvious, none of these institutions has the production of terrorism as its aim: their purpose is to reproduce and perpetuate a certain culture in a Diaspora under the pressure of assimilation. Of the elements that give the Armenian cultural tradition its cohesion and shape, perhaps the most central is a ubiquitous cluster of stories. (Tölölyan 1989: 105-106.)

In many situations, ‘terrorism’ and ‘liberation struggle’ or ‘terrorist’ and ‘freedom fighter’ can be used interchangeably depending on the perspective. Tölölyan has opted for ‘terrorism’ but the situation and the associated historical imagination are, in many respects, comparable to the Namibian case. Not insignificantly, during the war over Namibia, the colonial administration always spoke of ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorists’ where Swapo spoke of ‘liberation struggle’ waged by ‘freedom fighters’.

²⁰⁸ Apart from the following, see appendix 1, p. 4, lines 182-195; pp. 15-19, lines 375-464, 525-529 and 541-608.

Farm in 1975. In his narrative, camp life emerges as a combination of (northern) Namibian ‘norms and customs’ and of a semi-military organization. His narrative concentrates on work:

The settlements were organized in units...and these units would be given tasks. Each [unit] had a leader who would translate the tasks to the group...I was basically considered as a pupil. And on Saturdays we would go and harvest maize. We would go and offload trucks of food, of clothes, or we would go and dig drainages or collect water...build huts or buildings...That was a Namibian society that was very much living on the basis of the norms and customs that were already known in Namibia. So it was a different situation only in the sense [of] order.

Albertina taught in Swapo’s Zambian settlements, apparently both at the Old Farm and in Nyango, between 1974 and 1976. After describing similar kinds of duties as Peter she tells how the work was organized:

We had a parade...every morning. Everybody in the camp met at a place and you talked [about] the day’s work and the situation and the news...and about how we had to take care of ourselves so that the enemy could not come among us and so on, that’s a parade. And the work, how we divided ourselves in platoons, this would group go to work in a field and another group would go to cut woods and others would go to collect firewood and so on. We who were teachers just went to school...When I came home I just did normal work, cooking, collecting firewood and water and washing.

Aina lived in Nyango in 1975. She, too, stresses that one did not remain idle in the settlements and tells of the ordered way of conducting the daily duties. She also tells of discussing and learning about ‘different cultures’ and of the situation back in Namibia:

I did not just sit there...We were busy...We were [organized in]...platoons...according to age...Everybody was given a task...In the morning you could go and work in the fields, coming back in the afternoon for lunch and then maybe washing your things or cooking...We were from different...tribes...When we left Namibia I never knew a Caprivian. Now there were Hereros, Damaras, all the Namibian nations...Most of the people started talking Oshivambo...and English because they also started adult classes in the evenings...Then we started learning about different cultures, everybody had his own culture...Sometimes we were sitting and talking about the situation at home...because we used to get a bit of information through the radio, or some people were dancing cultural dances, we were curious to see how these tribes are dancing, or singing.

After finishing his secondary schooling in Cameroon, Linus worked as a teacher in Nyango in 1984-1985 and thereafter in Kwanza Sul for some time. He places the activities described in the above accounts into the wider context of different ‘departments’ and tells of both organizational and material improvement by the years:

[Life] got organized as years went by. For example, people went to study agricultural science, they came back. There were lots of fields and they applied this knowledge and suddenly the camp was self-sufficient...My department was education, there were those in agriculture, they were in the farms, finance...then legal guys did all the legal issues, marriages and so on. So it was an organized life...People could start building...[their] own houses, from tents to everything and people were getting married, so they built a house. It was becoming a town, the hospitals got upgraded, they got bigger...It was not a camp [but] a little town in the middle of nowhere.

Romanus lived in Angola from 1981 to 1986, mostly working as a teacher in Kwanza Sul. After describing the settlements' organization into 'departments' or 'sectors', as he calls them, he points out how the exile collectivism was a source of security to the exiles, providing directives and basic welfare:

I cannot say it was difficult, to some people it might have been easier to live in those camps than in Namibia now because there people were taken care of. You didn't have to worry about certain things, there were people who took care of them. But here you are an individual, you have to think of every item that you need...We didn't buy food, the food was provided, clothing, everything. We didn't need money because there were no shops in the camps.

However, also the other side of such collectivism was acknowledged by some of the exiles. Sara, who lived in Kwanza Sul in 1978-79 and again in 1982-87, pointed out explicitly but matter-of-factly the possible negative consequences of not respecting the ideal of unity and the associated hierarchy:

We used to work, apart from school...We were in unity...They told you [what] you had to do...Some people maybe didn't like to work, then your class captain told that 'you have to do this'...If you didn't...you couldn't get a scholarship or something like that.

On the basis of these and other narratives, as well as secondary literature,²⁰⁹ it can be argued that there were many similarities between the physical organization and practices of the military and the 'health and education centres' even though their activities were different and people could lead a more relaxed life and enjoy more freedom of movement in the civilian settlements than in the military. Overall, life was strongly communal. A recurring theme in the narratives is that people were expected to obey orders and work hard for the common good.²¹⁰ There was a strictly hierarchical social organization in which orders flowed from the camp administration down to the individual level in the daily 'parades' and through intermediary levels of organization, such as different departmental 'sectors' or 'sections', 'platoons', or 'units'.²¹¹ Another often mentioned facet of

²⁰⁹ This includes Mbamba 1979; Hishongwa 1983: 62-66; Katjavivi 1986: 307-311; Peltola 1995: 143-146, 150-153, 162.

²¹⁰ This is contradicted by Peltola (1995: 152), according to whom 'the inhabitants of the Kwanza Sul settlement sometimes did not have much meaningful work to do'.

²¹¹ As Mbamba put it:

The Office of the Swapo President makes all decisions concerning the development of the Centre and is responsible for the well-being of its inhabitants. No political meetings, except those called by a member of the Central Committee or the Executive Committee of Swapo, can be held at the Centre without permission from the Office of the President. The President (in consultation with the Executive Committee) appoints the Director and Deputy Director of the Centre to supervise the daily activities there.

The Director is assisted in his duties by his deputy, as well as 12 members of the Centre Council drawn from the representatives of all sections of the community. The Council meets once a month and at any

communality was material security; although the standard of living was far from luxurious everyone received basic necessities free of charge.

Families lived together if their members happened to live in the same camp. Usually this was not the case; family members were separated by their different duties. Furthermore, many of the exiles arrived into exile unmarried or without their families and did not necessarily marry there. Thus, people often lived close to each other without close relatives and, according to many, constituted a large 'family' (see below). Many narrators also find it worth mentioning that there were people from many ethnic groups in the camps. However, an overwhelming majority were of Ovambo origin and therefore Oshivambo became the *lingua franca*.

The standard of housing seems to have been extremely modest in the beginning,²¹² but there was some improvement over the years. People lived in military tents, barracks, self-built huts and later even houses. The standard of living improved also otherwise. The improvements in the standard of housing and nutrition, in health care, in education, and in basic infrastructure naturally had practical importance, but they also have considerable symbolic significance in the narratives. The people's hard work to improve their conditions and to contribute to 'the struggle' constitutes a central motif; we hear about building huts, hospitals, bridges and digging drainages; of cutting trees and cultivating the land; of collecting firewood and water; of studying, teaching, nursing and taking care of children. By contrast, social life, like visiting friends, discussing about traditions, backgrounds and the contemporary situation in Namibia, parties, weddings and meeting the Angolans in the vicinity,²¹³ is mentioned in only a few narratives.

The exile practices arose from a mixture of many factors. First, nationalist ideology and the idioms of 'comradeship' and 'familiness' (see below) were used by the leadership to back up its regime, with touches of socialist rhetoric. Second, and more importantly, the social

other time when the situation demands it. The Director also has a police force under him, the Namibia Police, to maintain law and order in the Centre. The Director communicates with the residents mainly through the morning 'parades', during which he distributes the work to be done during the day and informs them of the news around the Centre. (Mbamba 1979: 10.)

²¹² This is confirmed by Groth (1995: 38) who visited the Old Farm settlement in August 1975.

²¹³ Meeting Angolans is mentioned by Anna. Also Martha and Matthew tell of interacting with locals. See appendix 1, p. 19, lines 587-590; p. 23, lines 108-111; p. 33, lines 237-244. However, I also heard from a close observer that the exiles' relationship with the Angolans, at least in Kwanza Sul, was reserved and mostly concentrated on trading. Peltola (1995: 145-146) confirms these points and adds that trading was officially forbidden.

technologies of military and refugee administration presented a model for running things in exile. Third, the partial reproduction of Namibian, particularly Ovambo, social organization greatly contributed to exile practices and to the salience of collectivist idioms.

From the point of view of Swapo's leadership, the movement's social organization was largely a response to the immediate need to efficiently manage and control the increased exile population. Military training and political education for all laid the foundations for this endeavour but it needed constant practical reinforcement.²¹⁴ In this effort, traditional notions of seniority combined with military hierarchy and with Marxist-Leninist notions of vanguardism and democratic centralism. From the point of view of the rank and file, the ideology and practices of exile offered an environment of close social relationships, security and a sense of purpose. Thus, the power inherent in Swapo's exile practices appears dual in the sense of both restricting and generating individual aspirations and actions.²¹⁵

An important part and consequence of the above practices was the production and reproduction of a historical imagination of the liberation struggle and of its collective subject. The liberation movement was portrayed in heroic terms as an organic community and the exile as a loyal, enduring and committed cadre. However, the ideals of unity and commitment were not only an intended consequence of planned actions. To a large extent, they emerged from more spontaneous exile practices and informal exile discourse. Moreover, this did not happen only in exile, as a 'culture of resistance' had emerged already inside Namibia and most exiles had been influenced by it in one way or another,

²¹⁴ This 'civilizing' mission was an intended one, as is pointed out by the following quotation, according to which the purpose of the 'health and education centres' was:

To germinate a model nuclear community which would form a foundation for the future Namibian society. Not only is Swapo concerned with the material well-being of the Namibians, but also more importantly with inculcating ideas of nationhood and social reconstruction. Through the project...SWAPO envisages to reorient Namibians with different cultural, social, and educational backgrounds towards the ideals of one Namibia, one People and one Nation. (S. Shipanga: 'Development of the Namibia Education and Health Centre', a speech delivered in Oslo, Norway, no date mentioned; quoted in Mbamba 1979: 7. Apparently, 'S. Shipanga' is Andreas Shipanga, because Mbamba mentions him as the former Swapo Secretary for Information and Publicity.)

Katjavivi (1988: 109) restates this commitment:

Both in PLAN and in its health and education centres in Angola and Zambia...SWAPO has created self-reliant communities, where it tries to put into practice what it preaches. The emphasis is on 'social justice and progress for all'.

²¹⁵ There are many possible origins for the physical organization and practices of the camps, such as Ovambo social organization; the general models of refugee and military camp (cf. Malkki's [1995a and 1995b] instructive discussion on the origins of the refugee camp); the rules and practices of the missionary schools in Namibia; and the 'socialist' ideology of collectivism. Of course there is also the purely practical aspect.

most importantly in secondary schools. Thus, collectivism was more than ‘mere’ ideology, something that became rooted in the movement’s social practice. It justified and supported an organic mode of organization within Swapo in exile and came to play an important part in the consciousness and social existence of the exiles, especially the rank and file who were mostly young, not highly educated, and coming from a rural background.

Among the stories that are included in appendix 1, those by Anna, John, Martha, Joseph and David are most clearly organized around collectivist unity and loyal commitment throughout. However, most of the other stories abound with expressions of these themes too. Let us now turn to these expressions, first to those of unity and then to those highlighting commitment.

Many of the narrators speak of exile collectivity in terms of ‘comradeship’. For example, Festus relates comradeship explicitly with loyalty to Swapo: ‘We were just one...We were using one word, comrade. Everybody who was loyal to Swapo [was a comrade]...A comrade was even better than your brother or sister.’ Philip is on similar lines: ‘We had comradeship. We were using the word comrade because...you were suffering for the same purpose...which meant [a comrade] was even more than your family. He treated you well, you treated him well.’ Hannah contrasts the collectivity of exile life with the individuality of post-independent Namibia:

In the camps we used to eat together. If you had maybe a small juice we had to divide so that everybody got something. Life here is not like the life abroad because here everybody has his or her own things. We had just common things...We became close friends and comrades...We had a high morale, that Namibia would be free one day as many other countries.²¹⁶

Another idiom of collectivism is even more widespread than that of comradeship and more directly related to the salience of kinship in traditional Namibian, particularly Ovambo, societies. It is the vocabulary of familiness, that has already cropped up in the narratives of John, Anna, Raina and Martha (p. 75-78 and appendix 1, p. 5, lines 239-254; p. 16, lines 435- 441; p. 25, lines 185-203). Tauno’s narrative below is one of the purest examples of this vocabulary and a reminder of its closeness to the vocabulary of ‘comradeship’. He also speaks approvingly of the collectivist social organization of Swapo:

We developed a tendency of calling one your brother. And in Swapo, we [used the] term... ‘comrades’...It meant you were my friend, you were my brother...But...let’s say I was from the north and you were my friend from the south. If I happened to meet a guy from the same village, I could introduce...[him as] my...brother, because we were from the same area...[In Swapo] we were like a family, even more than

²¹⁶ See also Joseph’s narrative in appendix 1, p. 28, lines 48-50.

brothers...I was taken care of by Swapo and Swapo was like a father to me, Swapo was a brother to me, Swapo was a sister...All was coming from the organization, Swapo...You could eat free of charge, you could go to school free of charge...The church was there, food was there, kitchen was there, and you could work also. We had a very big farm there. So we could enjoy driving tractors...If there was a Namibian there [he or she] was my mother, my father, provided we were under the same umbrella which was Swapo, taking care. So life was fantastic, very smooth and very cheap, because I was not spending anything.

Likewise, Timothy spoke positively about the closeness and sharing inherent in exile relationships:

Namibians [abroad] occupied the place of your brothers and sisters. We became much closer than we are to our blood relatives...Take for instance my two brothers...We knew of each other, where we were, we were in contact.²¹⁷ But our relationship was a distant [one], like just friends. But somebody [I] stayed with for a long time...became closer...We shared many problems, we resolved them together, we were always there for each other...We have that kind of solidarity, a very strong bond between us. Sharing was one of the wonderful things that I experienced during the struggle, that every little thing that one had we were always wholeheartedly willing to share with somebody else.

The above narratives demonstrate the importance of ‘familiarity’ as the moral ideal regarding exile social relations and personhood. However, this ideal was also actually important, as a model and an explanation, in the forging of exile social relations of mutual and hierarchical support and reward. As Martha says, all fellow exiles were comrades, like sisters and brothers, but Swapo was everybody’s mother and father and its relation to the exiles was similar to that of parents and children: it was there to take care of them and their duty was to obey (appendix 1, p. 25, lines 195-203).²¹⁸ In this regard, a distinction already made in connection with exile women (see chapter 4.2) can be extended to the ‘liberation community’ as a whole; namely that apart from a thin layer of radicals and intellectuals, those who participated in the struggle did so largely through idioms and roles drawn from the Ovambo society in which they had grown up.

The narrated emphasis on the familiarity of Swapo members is combined with sidetracking other social relations. I already argued that there are narrativistic reasons for this (see chapter 4.1). However, such emphasis is in all likelihood also reflective of exile practices which propagated, both intentionally and unintentionally, membership in the liberation movement as one’s primary social relation. For example, any individual could always be assigned to new tasks and ‘sent’ elsewhere. Wives and husbands as well as parents and

²¹⁷ Timothy’s brothers were also in exile.

²¹⁸ After independence many felt that this unspoken pact between the movement’s elite and its rank and file, implicit in these relations, had been violated. However, informal, less extensive former exile networks did still work. The post-independence challenges to exile unity and its remaining forms will be addressed in chapter 5.5.

children were often separated because of their different duties.²¹⁹ Marriages to outsiders could be discouraged or outright disapproved of. Likewise, even if one had relatives and friends from Namibia in exile, one did not necessarily meet them there. Many of the exiles did not have contacts to their relatives and friends in Namibia either.²²⁰ The lack of extensive contacts is attributed to practical difficulties and the fear of putting those in Namibia in danger. Apparently, it was recommended by Swapo not to have contacts, on the grounds of the risks involved.

No doubt there were practical reasons for these arrangements, but they also worked towards stressing the importance of loyalty and commitment and discouraging other loyalties and allegiances.²²¹ The idioms of ‘familiarity’ and ‘comradeship’ arose from a carryover of northern Namibian ideas of sociality and personhood into exile but were also actively propagated as a moral ideal through the arrangements of daily life, military practices and political education. Together, these influences worked towards substituting kinship with ‘comradeship’ as the main organising principle of social relations. Additionally, the practical fact of being separated from one’s relatives in Namibia probably enhanced the appeal of conceiving exile relationships in kinship terms. Concepts drawn from nationalist and socialist discourses may have ‘trickled down’ to the rank and file to some degree, but in a greatly simplified form and mixed with the familiarity idiom and ‘traditional’ conceptions of power.²²²

²¹⁹ Although the conditions of exile ‘were not conducive to family life’, as Victor says, most of the interviewees had got married in exile. This is no wonder considering that they left Namibia in their teens and returned ten to fifteen years later. Marriages had mostly taken place with other exiles. A few of the interviewees had married someone from the country where they had been studying. Most — and not only those who were married — had also had children in exile.

²²⁰ It seems to have been most difficult to establish and maintain contacts home from the settlements of Angola and Zambia. By contrast, many of those who had studied abroad or operated as guerrillas inside Namibia told of having had at least occasional contacts with those they had left behind.

²²¹ Furthermore, it appears that breaking away from the movement in exile was a difficult step that meant risking the security provided by the membership of an established liberation movement, the status of a ‘freedom fighter’ and one’s personal relationships, as almost all Namibians in exile were under Swapo and resignation from the movement was considered as a stigmatizing act of dissidence that could even lead to harassment. Gideon, who defected from Swapo in exile, told of such negative consequences; see also Groth 1995: 69-70, 72-73, 88-89, 95, 175.

²²² The deep cultural resonance of the moral ideal of familiarity is reflected in the way it appears as natural in most narratives, as the last stage of explanation in itself rather than something to be explained. However, there are also accounts that derive exile collectivity from various more specific roots. For example, in John’s account collectivism arises from the utilitarian calculations of individuals, from having a common goal and a common enemy; appendix 1, p. 5, lines 244-252. Martha provides a similar explanation; appendix 1, p. 25, lines 189-193. In many accounts, the condition of living separated from those normally considered as relatives and Swapo’s intentional propagation of comradeship in political education are also said to have fed a sense of familiarity.

Before proceeding with the analysis, let us turn to expressions of commitment, with which the stories also abound. Their message is always the same: that one was ready to give up personal gain and comfort, endure hardships and work hard for the collective purpose of national liberation.²²³ Romanus expresses this attitude in a nutshell: ‘You didn’t think of going back as long as what you went for was not achieved. When you become a politician you have some goals to gain, so most of us swore that we would not return until Namibia is free.’ Likewise, Rosa tells of having seen her personal future as a ‘secondary thing’ and Namibia’s independence as primary:

My future as a person has been kind of a secondary thing. The first thing that I have wished for and worked for all along was to see Namibia as an independent country and...to be there to witness this occasion and to live [there] peacefully because during the liberation struggle I was staying where the people were dying.

According to Peter, his commitment did not waver although he did not believe that Namibia would become independent during his lifetime, because he was working ‘for the future generations’:

I thought at one time that maybe the country would not be independent in my lifetime. But we had that belief that our [duty] was to prepare for the future generations. And we thought that if we could bring the struggle at a certain stage then others would carry it forward.

Tauno made the same point:

My life in Zambia was fantastic although I was homesick...I [learned] the language because we were living near the local people...I listened to their music...their daily programs. In that way you became a Zambian although you were there temporarily...I had no contact with my family...because if you wrote to [them]...you brought [them] problems...You better just forget them, ‘I’ll find them one day in Namibia if we get independence. If they are there, they are there, if they are not there, that’s ok, God is there for them.’...That was the determination we had, you know, ‘I must start a new life here...with the Namibians who are here’.

LM: Did you ever lose your confidence in that Namibia would be independent and you would be going back?

Tauno: Angola got its independence, Mozambique got its independence while we [were in exile], why not Namibia. That was the confidence that one day, it might take years...but definitely one day Namibia would be independent. But the question was: ‘Am I going to see it?’...We were facing death...‘Am I going to reach...independence?’ I was asking myself. ‘Maybe Namibia will get independent when I’m 70 years old...but my followers, the young generation, will see that Namibia is independent. We have to work hard for our children or whatever generation is coming behind us, so that they can live in harmony.’...So that was the thing we had in mind...I had no intentions whatsoever to become a Zambian, because I knew one day Namibia would be independent, one day I would go to Namibia.

²²³ Many of the previous chapters have included narratives of commitment. Therefore I shall concentrate here on its most general expressions. See also Anna’s, John’s, David’s and Joseph’s narratives in appendix 1, p. 4, lines 188-204 and p. 9, lines 440-444; p. 15, lines 386-390, pp. 17-18, lines 499-515 and pp. 18-19, lines 571-573; p. 26, line 57; p. 28, lines 43-46.

These and other narratives of commitment describe hardships that are seen as independent from Swapo's actions and are overcome through individual and collective commitment to the cause of national liberation. The hierarchy and discipline associated with life in exile is mostly not portrayed as a problem; rather, loyal participation in 'the struggle' by serving in the military, by working hard in the settlements and by studying elsewhere emerges as a source of pride.²²⁴ Only in a few narratives is it mentioned that people did not always want to work as ordered and that disobedience could have negative consequences.²²⁵

The narrated motifs of unity and commitment may partly arise from historical circumstances. The experiences of colonialism in Namibia, the conditions of everyday life in exile and Swapo's narrative interpretations of Namibian history may have provided the exiles with a background for belonging and comradeship. However, there is much that militates against accepting such an explanation at face value. At an organizational level, Swapo's development into a hierarchical movement that cherished a unitary image of itself sidetracked internal politics but did not finish it.²²⁶ The said politics were factional, non-formal and concealed. To complement the ideal of unity there were practices that arose from far more parochial interests. The movement was authoritarian, and seniority and precedence could not be openly questioned. Officially, there was to be internal democracy and gender equality, but in practice the old preceded over the young and men over women. For example, the conflict that developed within Swapo in 1975-76 was seen, among other things, as generational. Officially, Swapo also downplayed the existence of ethnic divisions. Implicitly, it admitted their salience by taking care of ethnic balance in its leadership. When the 'spy-drama' of the 1980s started, one's ethnic background acquired new significance, as a disproportionately big number of those who were detained were

²²⁴ V.I. Mazorodze's novel, based on his personal experiences in the Zimbabwean war for independence, offers an interesting case of comparison with the narratives of commitment of the former Namibian exiles. Mazorodze addresses exile life and camp conditions with striking plainness; the reader learns of hunger, sickness, fear, and seemingly endless waiting. However, all this serves to underline a heroic story of determined struggle — both individual and collective — for national independence. Military training emerges as the initiation into full cadrehood in a similar way as in the narratives of Namibian former exiles; see chapter 5.2 and Helao's narrative on p. 152, fn. 204. Notably, the hardships described are of an external nature, or even when they are caused by fellow comrades, they are justified. Internal differences are either left out or always resolved. The importance and inevitability of national unity is constantly underlined.

²²⁵ Some informal discussions also conveyed a message opposite to the narratives of commitment, namely that the uneventfulness of exile life and uncertainty concerning how long it would continue could have a negative effect on people's motivation. Cf. Mbamba (1979:40): 'At Nyango school, a large number of Namibians seem to have no desire to go to school or to willingly participate in...collective activities...There is a tendency among many to think in terms of "myself", "my family" or "my tribe"...[O]ne of the pupils said that "there is no reason why we should work in the field since we can get everything free from other countries".'

²²⁶ Politics is here understood not as a separate institution but in the wider sense as everything related to the distribution and exercise of power.

southerners, *mbwitis* (people of Ovambo origin raised outside Ovamboland) and educated people. By contrast, the movement's armed wing and security service were controlled by people of Kwanyama²²⁷ origin.

At the level of the individual experience, the specific exile problems, partly connected to the internal politics mentioned above, were as likely to heighten quarrels and conflict and erode one's motivation as to strengthen unity and commitment. These problems included material shortages, lack of meaningful engagement, instability of close relationships, the danger of enemy attacks or internal persecution, especially after the 'spy-drama' started, and the general frustration of waiting for repatriation without knowing how long the wait would be.²²⁸ Indeed, the existence of these problems may have been a major reason for why Swapo forcefully sanctioned and propagated unity and commitment as the 'proper' attitudes of 'responsible' cadres of the liberation movement.

The challenge of maintaining unity and commitment was all the more acute among those exiles who were studying abroad, away from the rather uniform social fabric and strict control of the settlements. Coupled with the education they received, this provided them with new ideas and practices. Apparently, the stays and studies abroad were a crucial formative influence to those who went through them. On the other hand, education could also lend support to the maintenance of loyalty, as it opened up a vision of individual advancement within the movement and in the future independent Namibia for the students.

Apart from the 'health and education centres' in Angola and Zambia, the exiles obtained education in two kinds of environments. First, there were educational institutions that were intended solely for Namibian exiles. Secondary education, vocational training and some higher education was provided in such institutions in Angola, Cuba, Congo, Zambia, and Tanzania. In these, one would live away from the camp-type conditions of the front or the civilian settlements but still be among other Namibian exiles and under Swapo's relatively

²²⁷ The Kwanyamas are the largest subgroup among the Ovambo. They live on both sides of the border between Namibia and Angola.

²²⁸ Here I rely on personal communication, the 'dissident' interviews and critical secondary sources. The psychological effects of some of such problems were charted by Shisana and Celentano (1985 and 1987). Additionally some of the loyalist interviewees admitted them as a contrast to their own commitment. In Timothy's words:

Not everyone probably expected that the struggle will be long and [that there will be] difficulties abroad. They thought that when you leave Namibia...everything will be smooth. Of course some people got frustrated, they wanted to go back home even before independence and people longed for their parents and eventually it affected them mentally and so on. So it was really a testing period in a way.

direct control. Such institutions included two big secondary schools on the Island of Youth in Cuba, another secondary school in Loudima, Congo, a technical school in Congo, a vocational training centre in Angola and the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia. Romanus went to secondary school in Cuba. His account resembles those of living in the Swapo settlements, as he stresses the communality of living together with other Namibian students:

We were 701 Namibians and in the surroundings there were also Angolan, Ethiopian, Mozambican and Guinea-Bissauan secondary schools...It was very nice, we never had problems at all...You didn't have any homesickness, you didn't think of anything. For example...we were not getting stipends, we didn't have any income. We got everything almost free. We were totally satisfied...On the Island of Youth the towns were located at the coast and the schools were inland, so to see something to buy you had go to town and to go to town was not a free thing. You were not supposed to go to town without a permission. So we were mainly in the school, we didn't see a need to buy things.

The situation of those who were studying at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka was slightly different. UNIN was the major institution of higher education for Namibians in exile. For many the three-year multidisciplinary UNIN course served as the first step in a 'Swapo-career' that would continue in further studies and responsible positions, first in exile and later in independent Namibia. Those who studied at UNIN often contrast life there with camp life. Although one was still among Namibian exiles, one was allowed considerably more individual freedom. According to Maria, this surprised her and took her time to get used to (appendix 1, p. 43-44, lines 210-230). Another aspect of living at UNIN was getting in deeper touch with different political opinions and ideologies.

Second, some exiles were sent as stipendiates to secondary and further education in local institutions in various countries. Secondary education was organized in local schools in Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Sierra Leone, among others, and higher education and vocational training in various countries around the globe. These students faced the widest contrast to camp life as they lived in a social environment where Namibians and, more specifically, Swapo members were not a majority. They mixed with the locals and other people from various backgrounds and were not closely and directly under Swapo's control. Although the experiences of the students varied according to where they studied, a few widely shared themes, related to being a 'foreigner' and a 'refugee', emerge from the narratives of studying abroad. These themes include the difficulties of learning new languages and adapting to new ways of life, loneliness, closeness with other Namibian students and, especially among those who studied in Europe, racism. On the other hand, the positive issues of learning new things and getting local friends are also mentioned often.

Most importantly, the students were inevitably introduced to new social arrangements and new ways of thinking. Jesaya's narrative points this out:

In those camps we...were brought to[gether] by one thing: that Namibia would have to be independent. All our beliefs went around that...question...I didn't see anybody who said (laughs): 'Namibia shouldn't get independent.'...That person couldn't have come there in the first place. And there were efforts towards that direction and all other...ideas were not that important. Now they probably are...but then there was one aim, one goal...When I came [to Europe]...I associated with communists, I associated with conservatives, I had many friends among those groups and...of whom I didn't know whatever party or belief they [supported] and sometimes we had these people together, we drank together...and we were talking politics...sharing information and discussing.

The increased exposure to different social arrangements and ideological currents was prone to making the question of one's relationship to Swapo more acute than before. Swapo attempted to manage this situation through its representatives whose duty it was to coordinate and control the activities of the members situated in their country or area. One of the methods by which this was done was the regular meetings of Namibian students in a particular country or area, as Lucia tells:

We were together, we used to help each other. Of course young people are young people but the leader had to see to it that the Namibians were together because in Britain or in other capitalist countries it would have been easy for the students just to disappear, because the situation in the struggle was not easy...Some of the people just wanted to run away...We had our constitution and we had our representatives in some of the countries who had to see to it that the Namibians...from Swapo were really following the constitution and continuing to be supporters of the movement...They used to organize them, call them for meetings, briefing them about the situation in Zambia and Angola, the progress. And also to tell them what those students had to do, to encourage them to do their work [and to tell] what Swapo was going to do to them if they were not doing their work.²²⁹

Most narratives of studying abroad are in keeping with the 'official' line. The temptation of 'giving up the struggle' is sometimes acknowledged, but only by referring to others who pursued individual well-being and opted out of the struggle. Feelings of loneliness and homesickness are often associated with living abroad and portrayed worse than the material hardships and dangers of Angola and Zambia. In this way, the period of studying abroad is turned into a test and demonstration of personal endurance, commitment, and loyalty.²³⁰ Stays abroad are subordinate to the Namibia-oriented narrative of liberation, merely one step in the trajectory of exile that has its end point at Namibia's independence and the exiles' return there. The narrators may praise the progressive quality of education and the 'positive things' one could adopt from one's country of stay; yet, they say, they were on a

²²⁹ Sara, who studied in the GDR, was even more straightforward about the sanctioning of unity and commitment: 'We had to be in unity because it was the party who sent you to the scholarship. If you did not cope with others they would just say that "maybe you want to go to the other party" or something like that.'

²³⁰ Romanus was exceptionally open in pointing out that not all overcame the problems they encountered: 'In my group we were 18 at the beginning. The group started reducing, one person died, one went crazy and two were thrown away from the university.'

temporary mission after which they would return ‘home’ to the settlements. They also praise the meetings of Namibians abroad for helping to keep up a sense of familiness and belonging.

In spite of narrating the stays abroad as transitory missions, it seems that these periods actually were transformative, at least to those who lived away from the settlements for many years. Some recognize this, stressing how living in different sociocultural environments and having education has influenced what they have become. For example, Linus, who went to secondary school in Cameroon, says: ‘I didn’t grow up as a Namibian, I just grew up as a Cameroonian.’ Yet these narrators tell of having maintained their loyalty to Swapo and their commitment to the liberation struggle. In this emphasis, Linus is not alone. Expressions of commitment and of ‘being on a mission’ are a recurring theme in the narratives of studying abroad. For example, Julia, who went to secondary school in Sierra Leone, says: ‘I had this thought that “I am a Namibian, so I have to go back to my country”. I knew what...brought me abroad, it was to study and fight.’ Similarly, Hilda stresses that the education that she received abroad was from the collective and for the collective: ‘This education which I got is not for me actually. It is to come and help the people, to work for the people...because the people are the ones who sent me to the school, not myself.’ Rosa puts it equally plainly: ‘You accustomed yourself that what you had there was not forever but a temporary thing, you had your goal to achieve and that was Namibia’s independence’,²³¹ while Tauno and Aina establish their commitment in contrast to those who ‘tended to forget their mission’.²³²

Tauno: There were some people who tended to be captured by what was there and forget their mission. Me, no...I was on a mission and I knew Namibia was under South Africa administrationwise and...I knew what was happening there educationwise...A lot of Namibians who stayed behind were underprivileged as far as education is concerned. Without education there is no country, because a country must have educated people. So, [to] acquire your knowledge in a particular country...and after completing your studies [to] just say ‘no, I’m going to stay here, I’m not going back because my house is here, I have got a car here, my wife is here...I will just start a new life, I will forget about Namibia’, that idea was totally far from my belief.

Aina: [When I returned to Angola] the environment was different, you just thought that everything is upside down because you were not used to it. You just had to cope...I was a grown-up already so I just had to accept the situation...The people were talking this and that but...what they told you was just a blatant lie. Somebody could say we wouldn’t get food every day but when you came there there was food...People were lying...because there were some who were sent to schools, they never came back. I wasn’t [like] that, I just had to go back and do whatever I could do because...I was sent to study, not to stay...I got to be myself and I have to appreciate whatever I got, I have to use that knowledge...for my country also.

²³¹ Also John and Anna tell of maintaining commitment while studying abroad; see appendix 1, p. 5, lines 240-242 and 255-258; pp. 17-18, lines 499-515.

²³² For a similar contrast, see Anna’s narrative in appendix 1, p. 17, lines 472-475. For the other side of the picture, see Gideon’s and Erkki’s narratives on pp. 168 and 171.

According to these narratives, the places where one studied were not as important as the Namibian communities in Angola and Zambia. Indeed, some narrators referred to the camps in Angola and Zambia as a home in exile. For instance, Secilia describes her return to Angola as a homecoming. Even if life was much more restricted in Angola than abroad it was better socially:

I was happy to return to Angola...It was just like going back to [your] homeland, because you knew that you [would] meet your friends whom you left behind and you [would] hear much about the country, about Namibia...You [were]...always thinking of going back to Angola. And when you were in Angola you didn't think of going anywhere again...only of working where you were and of whether the country would be free, to return back to Namibia. And sometimes you would not even think of Namibia...[Elsewhere] you were free to move wherever you wanted, to see friends or to enjoy other things like going to a restaurant. When you came to Angola you couldn't find them again (laughs)...In Angola, particularly in this war area, you couldn't move freely. Even if you were in Luanda you were just with Namibians...You would meet Angolans but just say 'hey hey', no discussion...We didn't have time...But life...was ok.

Likewise, Festus told of having preferred the materially modest but socially lively conditions of the settlements to the more comfortable but isolated life in the Soviet Union. He also stressed his commitment that carried him through material hardships and made him work hard:

In Zambia there were a lot of difficulties, sometimes there was no food for two days, three days...We were in war, military situation, so that was not a problem. In the Soviet [Union] you were far away from people. Even if you had enough to eat or to drink or some additional materials you still felt that you were not settled. So when I found myself among thousands and thousands of young kids from home [after my return to Angola] and I was asking them about the country I was very happy...It was very tough but...I was committed. I went to school in the morning hours. Immediately after school I had to go to the magazine to assist people. And after closing the magazine I had to go to make my preparation for the next day.

Back to the question of where the narrated unity and commitment arises from, it may be that many really saw their stays abroad as missions, coming from the camps in Angola or Zambia, having gone through military training and, in many cases, having served for some time as guerrillas. This interpretation is backed by the fact that many of them also tell of having been active in campaigning to raise support for Swapo in the countries where they stayed. As indicated above, such loyalty and obedience to Swapo was sanctioned both positively and negatively. In this scheme of things, the prospect of returning was the likely scenario, according to which one would try to live. On the positive side, there was the prospect of individual advancement through education and achieving positions in the movement; on the negative side, disregarding Swapo's demands was not taken favourably and would in all likelihood have cut one off from the majority of exiled Namibians as well

as possibly led into direct measures of punishment. Gideon tells of having personally experienced this negative side:

Before I went [to the Soviet Union] my brother joined us, came to Swapo in early 1975 and like me he also joined the military. I left him in the military...In 1978 I received a letter from his girlfriend...that he was sentenced to death...I had written him from the Soviet Union because I knew there was a problem in Swapo...informing him that...‘please...do not get involved, do not take a lead, do not stay behind...see what a lot of people are siding with, because our family is hated...and you might be a victim’. Apparently he did not take heed of this. I’ve heard that he was one of the leaders of the rebellion and he was arrested and sentenced to death...I have all reason to believe that he was executed...in southwestern Zambia in 1977. Then in 1977 I met mister ---²³³ in the Soviet Union. He informed me...and other Namibian students there of the problems that had erupted within Swapo in Zambia and I can remember when he told that ‘those who have a chance to study, please study and do not accept to go back to Zambia because some of you are listed and you may be killed’. I took his advice seriously...[During my studies I also] used to come to Finland to [meet] my old teacher²³⁴...I used to stay in the Finnish Missionary Society house in Helsinki. But apparently the Swapo leadership and in particular the representative of Swapo in Scandinavia...did not like that. He had to [make up] a story that I came to Finland, to what he called an imperialist country, in order to give information against Swapo and the Soviet Union. This made me frightened of the events that had befallen my brother...In 1978 I received a letter from a students’ representative who was at the same time a Swapo representative in Moscow...He threatened me that I was going to be recalled...I still have that letter saying that he was advised by the president to give me a serious warning that I was going to be recalled and taken to Angola to be seriously dealt with. This was very frightening. I also attended a [Namibian] students’ meeting in Helsinki...Some students...had a very bad attitude. They saw me the same way as...the representative of Swapo in Scandinavia, so they used to conspire...You had to say bad things against another so that you could be viewed in a favourable way...I decided that I would continue my studies until I finished because I left my country in order to get education...[but] I would not go back to Zambia...or Angola where my life could be in danger...I had friends in Swapo, but as soon as I made known that I was not going back anymore they just disappeared. They didn’t want to have any contact with me. It was because they were afraid...Now a lot of them are coming to me and saying...‘you were brave’, and we can then talk about those old times.

However, treating expressions of commitment as direct reflections of past experience would be simplistic and hardly sufficient, as the contrast between this narrative by a dissident and those of the loyalists reminds. Rather, the narratives should be read in the context of the narrators’ subsequent loyalty, dissidence or indifference to Swapo and its version of history. In the liberationist genre, unity and commitment is the favoured way to interpret one’s life retrospectively. From this perspective, using this idiom is an expression of a moral ideal, the ‘official’ form of discoursing social relations and agency. Adopting it for narrating life in exile implies an attitude of ‘maturity’, of having learned to sacrifice personal pleasure and individual will for the common good, that makes it possible to overcome obstacles and hardships and live as an integral part of the collective.

According to this ethos, a member of the liberation movement should accept things as they come and not question the decisions made by the leadership. Indeed, the constant expressions of the principles and practices of equality and unity stand in contrast to the

²³³ Mentions the name of a senior Swapo leader.

²³⁴ A Finnish former missionary who had taught Gideon in Ovamboland before he left into exile.

silence surrounding internal politics and practices of difference and hierarchy that also were a part of exile experience and feature centrally in dissident stories.²³⁵ In most loyalist stories, Swapo's internal conflicts are not mentioned at all. This is notable, because many of the interviewees had joined the movement in exile at a time when the crisis of 1974-76 was fermenting and because the 'spy-drama' had a pervasive presence in the Swapo settlements in Angola (and, to a smaller extent, Zambia) during the latter half of the 1980s and was certainly known about by the exiled members of the movement also elsewhere. It definitely entered into the considerations of everyone. Arrests were endemic, fear was widespread and rumours abounded.²³⁶ A few stories hint at the possibility of dissent, but play it down as individual weakness or selfishness, as giving way to personal desires and 'giving up the struggle'. In keeping with the attitude of 'maturity', they propose that such problems should be solved internally and without open conflict and stress that any problems would not make them leave Swapo. Thus, they are turned into a test of loyalty. John provides a good example of this line of thought (appendix 1, p. 9, lines 440-454). Similarly, Tauno says:

²³⁵ To cite an example, one of my interviewees, whose interview narrative was in line with the 'official' version of unity and commitment, told in an informal discussion that even though there was AIDS among Swapo members in Zambia, it largely did not spread to Angola, because Angola was seen as a battlefield and those in Zambia tried to avoid getting there. If this argument is correct, it indicates a practical division among the exiles, contrary to the ethos of commitment. Even if it is not, it remains an example of perceived divisions among the exiles.

²³⁶ What has become commonly known as the Swapo 'spy-drama' started in the early 1980s. In 1981 a security wing was formed within the PLAN and soon started to arrest exiles as suspected spies. This development was fed, among other things, by a decrease in Swapo's military success. In 1984, arrests grew from a trickle into a stream, and an atmosphere of fear and suspicion started to spread. In April 1989, with the inception of Namibia's transition to independence, a group of 153 detainees was released. When they returned to Namibia the nasty aspects of the spy-drama were burst into the open, while they had previously been written off as South African propaganda. It turned out that a disproportionately large number of those arrested had been southerners or relatively well-educated people, that 'confessions' had been forced by torture, and that the conditions of detention had been appalling. Estimates of those arrested vary from several hundred up to two thousand, of whom most remain missing.

The 'spy-drama' was far from a unique phenomenon. Many southern African liberation movements, including the ANC of South Africa, encountered largely similar conditions in exile and had their own purges; for critical analyses of the ANC, see Ellis 1994; Ellis and Sechaba 1992. Also, the methods Swapo adopted for dealing with 'spies' may be related to the military advice it received from the socialist bloc, again in common with the ANC. However, where the Namibian situation differs crucially from the South African one is in the way of dealing with this traumatic past. In South Africa, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission publicly dealt with human rights violations perpetrated by the various actors in the conflict; see *TRC Final Report, presented to President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998*; Krog 1999. Also in Namibia, a 'policy of national reconciliation' was adopted at independence but it was interpreted rather differently. Instead of facilitating open discussion about the past, it has been used to suppress any discussion that might be deemed 'divisive'. A good example was provided by President Nujoma's reaction to the publication of Siegfried Groth's book *Namibia: The Wall of Silence* (Groth 1995). He avoided the issue itself and portrayed any open discussion about it as a threat to national reconciliation and unity: '[W]e condemn all types of irresponsible reporting which may easily lead to the disturbance of our social peace and tranquillity.' (*New Era* 14-20 March 1996, p. 10.) Here, national unity overrides democracy. Democracy is only something to be tolerated, a tool for ensuring national unity and development rather than an end in itself. All have to accept national unity and development in the form that it is defined from the political center of the state. Yet, the detainee issue keeps on cropping up in public discourse. For a fuller review of Groth's book and the debate that followed its publication, see Dobell 1997.

Swapo might commit wrong. Then I say that it is wrong, but that will not deviate my way from Swapo...I mean, there is wrongness everywhere. If Swapo did wrong here, I must condemn: 'Listen, this is wrong. Can we accept that we are wrong?'...but still I'm happy with the organization.²³⁷

Indeed, apart from the dissidents only Maria, Lucia and Secilia voice any kind of open criticism of Swapo. Of them, only Secilia's story approaches pure liberationism. In it, the positive aspects of exile unity and her own loyalty to the movement gain much emphasis. Yet she complains about being let down by Swapo after her return to Namibia:

I came to Namibia in 1991, and it was difficult to find jobs because...we must have this reconciliation and you have to find a job on your own...I was disappointed because...we wanted to return in [19]90 while the government was new and while it was easy to get work and we were told to remain²³⁸ and they said that we'll be provided work once we [return]. And when we came there was no work. When we went to the people who said, 'we will find work for you', and asked, 'ok, we are back, we want to get our jobs', they said, 'my dear, it is difficult...to get a job'. You asked: 'Why did you promise? We could have come [earlier],' because in 1990 I searched for a job and I got one. And these people forced me to go back, they said: 'Don't worry, you'll get work.' And I came to ask them why: 'I even got a job here. I told you that I have a job, but you said that I must go, [and] when I come I will be provided with a job.' Then they said: 'There is no way, we can't do anything.' I was very angry to hear that and I went out by myself to search for a job.

Like the 'have-not' narratives, this passage should be read against her positive emphasis on exile unity. It conveys unease about the way in which the former exiles' relationship with Swapo has changed after independence situation. Still, Secilia remains supportive of Swapo and reconciles the above points in the following way: 'Swapo fought for the right...and even now he is doing the right...but management is difficult to Swapo.'

By contrast, Maria's and Lucia's stories depart from pure liberationism. Maria avoids the tone of commitment throughout her story and has been distanced from Swapo (see chapter 6.2). Lucia's story is liberationist but a strong Christian identity emerges to complement and, at times, clash with nationalist commitment. It is the former that gives her licence to challenge aspects of the liberation narrative and tell about internal conflicts and difficulties. However, as Lucia's troubles did not evolve into open dissidence, her criticism is not presented in the initial narrative but only later and even then her conflict with a Swapo representative is portrayed as 'just a small thing' which 'the leadership of Swapo understood':

²³⁷ In addition, a few of the former exiles with whom I took up the detainee issue in informal discussion, vehemently maintained that the arrests were necessary as there really were spies. Also according to Shikola (1998: 144-145), some of the exiles who were captured by the South African military 'were trained as spies...[and] sent back to Angola...to join SWAPO'.

²³⁸ Secilia had to return to Angola after the independence elections to take care of Swapo's remaining property there.

When Namibia was in the hands of South Africa...I just wanted independence...so that Namibians themselves would decide which ideology they were to follow. But when I went abroad and...studied political science...I started to learn the ideologies...'Which kind of ideology are we going to put in [place in] Namibia?', that was the dilemma in my mind...Capitalism is good [on one hand] but not good [on the other] because some people are just suffering...The theory of socialism is very good, because...also poor people can be helped...But I don't like the work of somebody not to be appreciated...There is no competition and I think that a human being was born having such an idea in his mind. If a person is not competing he or she is just going to sulk, not doing anything...And when I went to Romania I saw the life in practice...I was together with the people every day and I saw their suffering and...people did not have freedom...If my country was going to be like that why did I leave Namibia and come into exile? I didn't want my people...to follow this ideology [because] people would suffer again...My people in Namibia...didn't have any freedom. If I was going to bring this ideology to them I would just return them again in the same prison...That is why I said: 'God, you know how to avoid this ideology.' It is for people who haven't [seen it] in practice...I thank God. [I] trusted in him at all difficult times and I used to pray: 'You Lord, you have got the power to remove things which are not good for my nation.' Suddenly God did it and socialism and communism have been removed.

LM: Did your relationship to Swapo...undergo any changes...during the time in exile?

Lucia: Not really, but in the struggle there are many changes...I didn't want to give up my Christianity, that was just the small conflict between, not anyway between me and Swapo, I haven't been attacked straight away...Many of our younger leaders were not interested in Christianity during socialism and some of them haven't been in those socialist countries, just reading the ideology. Then they said: 'There is no God.'...I was against it...When I was in Cuba...our bishop Dumeni sent me and my husband a message that we had to see to it that the young people...were not going to lose their faith. And my husband asked for Bibles to those children who were studying there. [There was a] conflict between us and Swapo because...the representative...was anti-Christian...He brought problems to us, saying that we were trying to convert those children...There was a little dispute between us, not very big, and the leadership of Swapo understood it because we hadn't done anything. We said: 'Yes, we are Christian, we can't deny our Christianity.' But this was just a small thing. I'm happy that...the president of our party, Sam Nujoma, is a born Christian and likes Christianity.

In addition to these few instances of open criticism, there are a few other 'deviant' stories that merely avoid the tone of commitment and criticize some aspects of 'unity'. One of these is Raina's story, analyzed on pp. 75-78. Hilma's story, parts of which can be found in chapter 6.2, is another. Erkki's is third. He did not dramatically defect from Swapo like Gideon, but when Swapo ordered him to return from Europe to Angola he refused and stayed on. His disobedience may be related to the fact that he had married a local woman in his host country. However, lack of commitment is also a narrative characteristic of his story, which is told in a pragmatic tone rather than in through heroic liberationism. This pragmatism comes through his narrative of how he decided first to stay in Europe and, after independence, to return:

We completed our school in [19]87 and then...they suggested that we must go to England for half a year...I said: 'No, I'm not going to England, I'm going to stay here.'...I went to work. I was there for one year and looked for another job and...worked there again for one year...By that time Swapo wanted me to go...to Angola and I told: 'No, I don't go yet.'...Then the Ministry of Internal Affairs...wrote...that I would have to go because...my residence permit was finished. I went to discuss with one lady at the church and she advised me whom I would have to contact at the Ministry. Then I got a permit to stay...I applied for a job...and worked...until [19]90 when I came back to Namibia...Life was going all right...but because I had left the country such a long time ago I just wanted to come and have a look...The country was free now so why not go there and if the situation was bad go back to [Europe].

In sum, the prevalence of the ethos of ‘mature’ commitment and loyalty in the stories may be connected both to the existential need to justify oneself and to the way open disagreements and complaints have been interpreted as irresponsible and illegitimate challenges to ‘unity’. From the latter perspective, the rank and file members of Swapo in exile obtained both material and social security from the movement in return of their loyal support to its leadership. After independence, Swapo had become the ruling party. In Ovamboland it was virtually the only party and its significance extended far beyond formal politics to being a strong component of the social fabric and moral order. In these conditions, it is not surprising that most former exiles found it appropriate to construct loyalist stories. The ruling party has clearly indicated that it is not in favour of open discussion of the detainee issue or Swapo’s internal politics more generally. Furthermore, the discourse of unity and commitment could serve as the basis for claims concerning one’s position and share after independence (see chapter 5.5.2).

From the former perspective, the internal conflicts and detentions do not ‘belong’ to the loyalists’ stories in the same way as those aspects of exile life that validate their status as participants in the heroic process of liberating the country. Thus, although there may be also a factor of more conscious ‘suppression’ involved in this process or remembering and forgetting, the living consciousness of the loyalists simply may not be dominated by the said problems to the same extent as that of the dissidents. Rather, these problems have subsided to the margins of their remembrance, because in them, the ideal representation of the liberation struggle and its reality most violently clash with each other. They are disturbing, even shameful, and not easily reconcilable with the heroic image of Swapo as a unified movement of the Namibian people against their colonial oppressor. The detainee issue, along with the rest of the rethinking of the struggle, seems to be tantamount to trying to suck meaning out of their personal past, of the process to which their lives are tied to and grow from. Thus it amounts to a threat to their identity.²³⁹ From this perspective, the charm of connecting one’s life to the mythical order of national liberation, unity, and development lies as much in the existential meaning and respect that it offers as in its ready availability as a narrative model. Both of these perspectives warn against approaching the discourse of unity and commitment as a direct historical reflection, as it is seen to be influenced by the general demands of life-narration and by its more immediate post-independence context.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ And this is why the dissidents continue to be considered as troublemakers by many. By telling openly about their experiences and demanding to be recognized, they deviate from the ‘official’ ethos of unity and commitment to bring hidden aspects of exile sociality into the open.

²⁴⁰ The discourse of commitment is by no means confined to the ‘public’ life story narratives. It seems to be more pervasive and deeply rooted. For instance, the importance of unity and loyalty emerged clearly in an

There are ‘sub-texts’ in the liberation narrative, things that are systematically left untold. The liberation narrative is not only a frame for representing but also a mode of not representing, of forgetting and not telling. Not everything that is absent is absent by coincidence but systematically. These systematic silences (cf. Gittins 1998; Werbner 1998b: 74) that concern Swapo’s internal politics are as much a part of understanding former exile stories as is the liberation narrative.

5.4 Return: the end of the liberation narrative, the beginning of the present

It was absolutely unimaginable, I was thinking that...it is enough for me to have seen an independent Namibia, even if I die or whatever it’s not a big deal anymore...One was thinking that you have achieved the goal of a lifetime. (Peter)

After the election results came [I] felt [that]...all that I wanted, the thing that I wanted in my life, that’s freedom for my country...had been realized. That feeling in itself overwhelmed or covered everything else. (Timothy)

At the other end of the exile journey, return to Namibia and victory in the constituent assembly elections appears as the second major turning point, the culmination, of the personal versions of the liberation narrative. In most stories, the events and atmosphere of return and of the transition to independence are intermingled, because most of the exiles returned during the transition period. However, this period was clearly significant also to those who only came for the elections and returned later as well as to those few who observed the transition from abroad.

There is a pervasive duality in how return is narrated. The liberation narrative is a story within story: it organizes the stories and forms a major part of them. It has a clear beginning in politicization and leaving, it revolves around the themes of unity and commitment in exile, and it clearly culminates in return, the elections and independence. Indeed, many tie their individual life to the liberation narrative to such an extent that they stop their initial narrative here. However, in practice the transition to independence was not an end of history, a sudden step into a new utopian order. Life continued and could be given narrative representations. Some continued voluntarily, and others were prompted by me to do so. The

informal discussion with one of the interviewees, in connection with many different topics. One of these was a scandal involving a government minister. According to my informant: ‘To us it was not a surprise. We know these politicians from abroad and we know how they are like, who drinks and who does what.’ However, this was clearly not a cause for open criticism. Even if a Swapo leader misbehaves he or she is still one of ‘us’. Another topic was a new political movement in the Ovambo whose spokesman no-one would listen to ‘because he is from the family of a traitor’, a phrasing that reveals the ongoing division of social reality to loyal Swapo members and supporters versus others.

resultant narratives are hybrid. In them, return appears both as the redemptive climax of the liberation narrative and as the beginning of the ‘messier’ present, marked by emerging social divisions and new dilemmas of survival that challenge the script of the liberation narrative. This creates a dynamic tension, as stories of ‘the past’, largely organized by the liberation narrative, have to be negotiated with narrative representations of the present. From this perspective, the line between ‘the past’ and ‘the present’ becomes blurred: the past is open to reinterpretation and the present is lived out and narrativized in relation to it. Indeed, it was this tension, in my mind, that led so many of the narrators to end their initial narratives with brief accounts of return. Thereby they avoided the challenge of reconciling the closed narrative of liberation with the continuing, open-ended present. On the other hand, when they did narrativize the present, usually at my request, they largely interpreted it through the liberationist ethos and attempted to extend the order of the liberation narrative into the present.

Examples of how return is told about in the initial narratives can be found in appendix 1. In the following exposition I mainly draw from subsequent accounts, simply because most of what was told about return and life thereafter was told in them. Although the liberation narrative constitutes the primary subject matter of this study, it would be a mistake to leave narratives of the present aside, since, on one hand, the liberation narrative clearly informs the former exiles’ understanding of the present and, on the other, the present feeds back into their narrativizations of their earlier life. The present enters the stories in two important ways: first, as the context of their construction even when the narratives do not deal with the present explicitly, and second, as explicit discourses about the continuities and discontinuities of unity and commitment after return and independence.

Many narrators speak of the prospect of returning or return itself as ‘a dream’ that, in Victor’s words, was ‘too good to be true’. Largely, this narrated dreamlikeness of return is an acknowledgement of its status as the climax of the liberation narrative and of the long duration of exile. The climax comes dramatically after much suffering and many setbacks. However, the ‘irreality’ of return may also be related to how the exiles’ imagery of Namibia was revived and pushed into motion at that moment. In the shared narrative of liberationist history that developed in exile, Namibia obtained a mythic and fundamentally static character. It was a land waiting for redemption from colonialism, a land in many respects out of time in the consciousness of those in exile. This image was reinforced by the exiles’ almost total separation from Namibian everyday life. When they returned, the liberation narrative climaxed but life went on. The static image of Namibia clashed with a

changed reality. Whereas Namibia-the-idea had motivated the exiles as the prize waiting for them at the end of their ‘mission’, Namibia-the-reality had been changing and it now sucked them within its variety of people, activities, concerns and discourses.

Thus, many tell that the Namibia to which they returned was in many respects very different from that from which they had left. Suddenly they found the supposed unity of liberation struggle undermined by everyday concerns and divisions of many kinds. Three issues, ranging from personal to national belonging, dominate them: the joy and confusion of rejoining family, reclaiming space, and the tension and relieved happiness of the transition period and the elections.²⁴¹ Tauno’s account links all of these aspects:

At the end of 1989 I came back home and my dream came true because I had always been wishing and hoping to come home...I [had] never visited Windhoek [before]...We went to the Döbra centre and there I was met by one of our relatives, he came to pick me up. I went to Katutura. The whole atmosphere was so difficult, and everything changed, I didn’t know where I was and I was even afraid to go to their places because I didn’t know who they were: ‘Are they Swapo members, are they maybe DTAs, are they working for the Boers?’...I was so afraid [that] I couldn’t...sleep. Luckily my mother...was still alive. My father passed away when I was abroad, so the whole family was totally dispersed...One lady took me where I was born. We drove [during the] night and early in the morning we arrived at that place. I’m telling you, it was a big experience for me...I was totally lost. I was born in that area but I was lost...When we...went to another village where my uncle lives everything came out. Now I could recognize the area. [It] was totally changed, the bushes, the trees, everything, it was just like a desert. When I left...there was a lot of bushes. It has changed completely. But I felt proud because my basics are there and I was looking after cattle [there]. I was so happy and everybody was so happy that I’m a grown-up. There was a jubilation of happiness, people were singing and praising. I even cried that day.

In most narratives, the happiness of rejoining relatives and friends and reclaiming local and national space²⁴² is mixed with reactions to the various changes, many of them not pleasing,

²⁴¹ Apart from the following excerpts, see Emma’s, Hilma’s, John’s, Anna’s, Martha’s, David’s, Matthew’s and Maria’s narratives in chapters 4.2 and 6.2; and appendix 1, pp. 5-6, lines 259-318; pp. 19-21, lines 628-745; p. 24-25, lines 118-203; pp. 26-27, lines 72-99; p. 37, lines 471-506; pp. 44-45, lines 267-283 and 292-341.

²⁴² Peter gives one of the most instructive accounts of the motif of reclaiming space. He also tells of confronting the changes brought about by the long duration of exile in how his relatives had grown:

At the airport there were some of my brothers and sisters and I couldn’t believe, you know, I always had the image of these young kids and now they were grown-up...It was unbelievable...That week I went to the area where I was born and I went to see places, I went to see trees, I went to see forests, and to see some of my old teachers and neighbours, just going around and looking...I went through forests where I used to ride my bicycle when I was 12, 11 years old, and I went from Onakayale to Okahao, about 50 kilometres, and watched each and every pond...At the same time I also realized that there was a great environmental change.

While Peter concentrates on personally significant space, Rosa tells of reclaiming national space:

It was probably most exciting to feel free...when one had experienced so much in the past. I even realized that I didn’t know my own country...Even [though] my parents are from the north they could not go there without...a pass, so as children we did not even go there...[One could] feel that a burden had been lifted from the people...It’s nice to feel belonging to a free nation...I just went [around] with friends who had been my classmates, who had [remained] in Namibia...to places that had been restricted [before independence], those places had been strictly for the whites.

that the former exiles encountered.²⁴³ For many, the home to which they expected to return was no longer there, after ten to fifteen years of exile. In some cases, homes had disappeared concretely; some family members had died or the families had moved. People had grown older. Towns had grown bigger. Environment in the north had changed dramatically. People's attitudes seemed to be different. But most importantly, the returnees' relationships with those whom they rejoined were no longer the same.²⁴⁴

The recurring amazement at such self-evident things as changes in the physical environment and the fact that people had grown older seems to embody symbolic significance. Changes of this kind are concrete indicators of how much time had passed in exile, of all the disorientation and reorientation associated with return. The concrete, particular places in which the narrators had lived before their exile had obtained mythical significance as places of origin and markers of an identity rooted somewhere even in the condition of 'diaspora'. The imagery of a Namibia to be liberated could grow as an extension of these concrete images and experiences. By rebuilding their relations to the people and the places that were close to them before they left, the returning exiles were making sense of what it was that they returned to. They were building bridges over the gap between what they remembered and had imagined about Namibia before their return and what they encountered after return. Ultimately, they were also remembering themselves anew, incorporating their memories of their life before they left Namibia and in exile into their renewed relations to people and place. The narratives of (re)claiming the space which they never before knew concretely, places that they were denied either because of living only in one particular part of the country or by the apartheid restrictions, serve the purpose of extending their belonging to the level of national space that, as an imagined entity, was central in their vision of liberation in exile.

While the narratives of rejoining families and friends and reclaiming space deal with the personal aspects of return, the excitement and tension of the transition period was a widely

In contrast to the above narrators who had studied or lived in the civilian settlements in exile, the combatants had often moved in parts of Namibia during the war. Therefore, the reestablishment of connections to the people and places in Namibia was not necessarily as dramatic for them as for the above narrators. Erastus pointed out this difference. Still, return was a moment of pride and happiness in his account too:

LM: How did you feel about coming back after all those years?

Erastus: I felt very proud and happy...Anyhow, I was used to coming here, to being inside the country. [I was] not like those who left the country and didn't [see it before their return].

²⁴³ This duality can be seen, for example, in John's, Anna's, Maria's and Hilma's narratives, referred to above.

²⁴⁴ Narratives of post-independence social relations will be dealt more in the next chapter.

shared, collective phenomenon. This tension was fuelled by, among other things, rumours, the presence of the South African army and police and the April 1989 clashes in northern Namibia. In the above narrative, Tauno pointed out how it could extend even to the level of family relations. A similar point is made by Martha (appendix 1, p. 24, lines 118-139). Even after she had become convinced that her family were Swapo supporters and could therefore be trusted, the general hostility between the 'Swapos' and the 'DTAs' kept her alert. The situation was so tense, she tells, that she and many others were ready to get back over the border in case the DTA won.²⁴⁵ In narrative terms, the tension build towards the election. The campaign appears as the final battle and test of commitment that leads into the climax of election victory and independence. Aina's narrative conveys this and the significance of the election victory. She also establishes the widely shared motif of righteousness in this connection, contrasting the tricks of the opposition with the will of the people:²⁴⁶

There was a little bit of fear. People were told rumours that if you don't elect this opposition party, DTA...you are not going to get work or whatever but we never believed that, we only believed in democracy, that...the election should be free and fair...They were preventing people [from] electing Swapo, they said: 'Swapo are killers and people will get hunger, they will never get education or work, people from Swapo are not educated.' Swapo didn't go to people and say: 'You should elect us.' People just elected them with their own hearts. Now we feel much better because there is no intimidation. You are free as the country itself, there is no fear that if I go to town I have to carry a passport or [that] moving at night would be restricted. Everything is free...If we hadn't gone outside this country wouldn't be like this today. There is quite a big difference, there is freedom of speech...Nobody is going to harass you.

By pointing out the contribution of those who went into exile in bringing independence and freedom about, Aina asserts the meaningfulness of having been in exile. Likewise, Victor tells how he, after giving a detailed narrative of how he, far away in Europe, intently followed the days of vote counting: 'If we had not won those elections it would have seemed as if all the effort, all the years spent in the bush, even studies...all this campaigning, was in vain. But in the end it was worth it.' After this climax, finally, says

²⁴⁵ She was not the only one who told of having feared that violence would erupt after the elections and of having been ready to leave Namibia once again.

²⁴⁶ Also Philip contrasts Swapo's righteousness with the dirty methods of the DTA. By portraying Swapo's victory as undoubtedly the best outcome that would be accepted by all had they not been misled he also brings forth the widely shared ideal of 'unity', according to which it is natural to share collective ideals even on a national level and only 'misguided elements' think differently (I will return to this idea in chapter 5.5.4):

[I was working]...In Eastern Caprivi...to make people understand why we were outside, explaining why we went out, so that they could vote for Swapo...Those opposition people treated us very badly, they said that we are returnees, we have been out from the country and so on...so that you would get angry. But...I knew what I was fighting for, I could not get angry. I was fighting for them but they didn't know what I was fighting for. They were just after money, paid to fight against you, their brothers and sisters who were fighting in the struggle...If somebody is speaking something and you know that this person doesn't know what he's doing...that person needs to be advised so that he can become like other Namibians.

Richard, 'you have an identity...a country you are proud to live in'. The election victory stands as a concrete act of liberation, the last point at which the collective process of liberation falls closely together with that of its loyal members' individual life trajectories.

Even if the 1989 elections and the formal attainment of independence provide the climax of the liberation narrative, the life of the returnees went on. And even if the immediate tension of the transition period was to pass after the elections, the distinction between 'returnees' and 'remainers' did not vanish as easily. Instead it became a crucial aspect of their new life in Namibia, interpreted through and feeding back into their understanding of their previous life.

5.5 The fate of unity and commitment after independence

The central motifs of liberation discourse, that is unity and commitment to collective effort, are problematic after independence. The social relations of the exiles had been greatly transformed, from being united organically within the body of 'the movement' for 'national liberation' to living in a postcolonial situation dominated by an attempt to reconcile the considerably more varied identities and interests within the polity into a single 'nation'. The 'community' of exiles originally became such by forces of circumstance and by adopting the shared ideal of national liberation. After independence, it was no longer unified by the objective of liberation and the conditions of exile life. The social experience of most of the former exiles had become both more varied and more individuated than in exile, as they no longer lived directly under the umbrella of Swapo. They had had to find a place in new social networks, comprising also, and in many cases mostly, of other people than former exiles. At the same time, in trying to make a living, they faced an ethos of individualist competition instead of the collectivist security of Swapo in exile. While the former exiles adhered to the idea of an encompassing (national) 'unity' in their stories, a more restricted unity specific to their group and exclusive of the rest of society also appeared in practice and in their accounts of the present. They were also a group divided within.

A few major 'strategies' of reconciling the present with the liberation narrative emerge from the stories. First, some narrators change their narrative emphasis from collective to individual subjectivity when telling of their life after independence; as their narration until independence is about oneself as a part of the Swapo collective, it is now about oneself individually. The liberation plot has ended in the stable state of independence, which now

appears only as a context for one's individual life. Second, some narrators maintain that the transition to independence had not really been the end it seemed to be. It was important but only as a precondition for deeper socioeconomic change, 'development', which is the true end of liberation. Notably, those who take up this line, were usually working in the civil service or otherwise closely related to 'social administration'. Third, there are some narrators who also expect something better to turn out. However, they do not have a clear vision of how this should happen and, unlike the policymakers and bureaucrats, they do not feel that they will play a part in bringing it about. Hence, their narratives are a mixture of trust in government and nostalgia for pre-independence unity.

5.5.1 Being a 'returnee'

A major theme in narratives of return is the gap that seemed to have opened between the 'returnees' and the 'remainers'. Erika's narrative is the most instructive as regards the difficulties returnees could face in 'adapting' back to Namibian society and best illustrates the connection between political tension and feelings of social alienation:

When the plane landed in Windhoek I was afraid...because we had heard that...those other parties would kill you...if they knew that you had been abroad and that people were poisoning each other here. So when I came to Swakopmund...I was just afraid of...all my friends...Even at home, if my mother cooked food and they said that they were not going to eat then I would not eat too. I was just feeling so terrible...Whenever I was walking in the street they would provoke me, 'returnee', and maybe I wanted to chat with somebody, there was no-one, so I had to go and sit on the beach and remember my friends...Some [of them] were in Windhoek, some in [Ovamboland], so I longed for them...I just sat on the beach up to seven o'clock and then went back home. Back home [I was] just sleeping.

LM: So you didn't mix anymore with your old friends?

Erika: No no no, what I like is not what they like...Maybe I said: 'Let's go to the beach.' Then they said: 'No, we want to go somewhere else.'...We have no secrets, we from Loudima,²⁴⁷ we say if you made a mistake...But those [who stayed here]...say, 'ah, that girl is so rude', [even if] you are telling the truth. They say you are supposed to hide it.

The categories 'returnee' and 'remainder' or 'stayer' had come into use immediately after the return of the exiles to designate the various perceived differences between those who returned from exile and those who had remained in Namibia before independence. Erika's narrative makes explicit what is implicit in many other narratives of return and transition, namely the partial overlap of these categories with those designating political allegiance. For the returnees, the division between the contesting parties, apart from its very real political implications, appears to have served as a way of speaking about their concern over their place in Namibian society. It expressed their feeling of being displaced where they

²⁴⁷ A Swapo secondary school in Congo.

should have felt at home and of being strangers among those to whom they should have had the closest relations. By referring to rumours of poisoning, Erika also indicates the ways in which the ‘psychological’ symptoms caused by these differences may be given a social, visible form.²⁴⁸

Many narrators tell of seeing the term ‘returnee’ as divisive and degrading. They portray themselves as cadres of the liberation movement who had waged the struggle outside the country while others had waged it inside. They emphasize national unity and equality and do not want to be categorized as a specific group that is different from other Namibians or internally differentiated. Interestingly, it seems that this point is stressed most forcefully by those who had not yet returned and confronted the multiple social reality on the ground. In spite of these assertions of unity and equality, the distinction between ‘returnees’ and ‘remainers’ was alive and well in practice. Almost all of the interviewees, especially the well-educated urbanites, claimed that the special bond and mutual solidarity of the former exiles, so forcefully stressed in the narratives of exile (see chapter 5.3), continued also after return. The returnees sought each other’s company because of their shared background, remembering and thereby reproducing their shared past together.²⁴⁹ Another aspect of this ‘familiarity’ were relations of assistance and allegiance; even if the ‘contract’ between the movement’s elite and its rank and file had become less binding, the informal, less extensive former exile networks still mattered.

The other side of this special relationship was an experienced difference from and distance to the ‘remainers.’²⁵⁰ In the narratives, it appears in recurrent claims that the different ‘experiences’ and cultural, social and educational ‘exposures’ of returnees and remainers had caused them to ‘grow apart’ so that, for example, there was ‘nothing to discuss’ between them. The distance could also be seen from the amount and kind of interaction

²⁴⁸ The idiom of witchcraft, widespread in Africa, seems to be one of the main vehicles of understanding these differences. For example, David mentions that the returnees are rumoured to have been cooked in exile, which makes them profoundly different from others; appendix 1, p. 27, lines 84-91. Tellingly, this topic was so exciting to the translator, who was a returnee herself, that she answered my question about the continuation of this attitude before David could answer it. Tauno mentions the same rumour in his narrative of leaving Namibia.

Yet another example is provided by the journalist David Lush (1993: 291-297), who writes about an educated woman who returns from exile, does not find work and ends up dependent on her family, a situation fraught with multiple contradictions. Finally she suffers a mental collapse, which the family interprets as a result of sorcery. She gets better only after visiting a healer. I will return to this issue in chapter 5.5.2.

²⁴⁹ I witnessed this reproduction of memories and ‘familiarity’ in practice on many occasions.

²⁵⁰ See John’s, Anna’s and Maria’s narratives; appendix 1, p. 7, lines 341-361; p. 21, lines 698-711; p. 45, lines 333-341.

between the two groups. Judging both from my own observations and from what the interviewees told me, this interaction seemed to be influenced by one's place of residence and educational background. Well-educated city-dwellers were most likely to spend their time in the company of other educated returnees, or with remainers of the same class position at the most, whereas uneducated rural dwellers with not as much freedom to choose their company often interacted with both 'returnees' and 'remainers'. The distance between returnees and remainers even extended to family relations. Some tell of feeling no longer at home with their remainder families and of having been estranged from the traditionally high valuation of extended family ties.²⁵¹ This seemed to be a dual development, in which the 'family' of exiles had come to overrule 'actual' kinship ties, on one hand, and — for some — the family concept had narrowed to correspond with the nuclear family model, on the other. However, family relations between returnees and remainers still had moral bearing, for instance in matters of social security.²⁵² Thus, in the post-independence situation, the former exiles belonged to two different networks of 'moral economy': that of formerly exiled Swapo members and that of extended families.

5.5.2 The have-nots: narratives of struggling and nostalgia

While there still existed mutual bonds of trust, dependence and assistance among the former exiles, the scope of these bonds was narrowed by the centrifugal tendencies of the post-independence situation. Therefore, a gap opened between the lived and narrated realities of educated, urbanized and formally employed former exiles and those of less educated, rural-based, formally unemployed ones. Even if those who belonged to the former group complained about practical problems, the latter faced them in a different magnitude, in the form of insecurity about daily survival.

Indeed, rank and file narratives of life after return are dominated by the themes of struggling to survive and nostalgia for exile unity. Whereas those who belonged to the new black middle class often praise the intellectual resources — education and experience of living and working in different cultural environments — that exile life had provided them with, arming them with potential to advancement also after independence, the have-nots gaze nostalgically to the material and social resources — food, clothing, housing, social

²⁵¹ For example, Maria said that she does not consider the members of her extended family as close and important as her mother, her father and her siblings from the same mother and father. Appendix 1, p. 45, lines 333-341.

²⁵² See for example Raina's narrative on pp. 75-78.

acceptance and sense of purpose in the service of national liberation — that they remember to have existed in exile but were often lacking after their return to Namibia.²⁵³

To my mind, the themes of struggling and nostalgia arise from the anxiety caused by the fragmentation of the ‘social body’ of which the exiles, especially the rank and file, learned to be a part in exile. A rumour that I was told by an acquaintance one evening, after a few drinks, goes to the heart of the matter. He told about political violence before independence, and we soon proceeded to a widely reported incident that had taken place before the recently held regional and local elections. In Ondangwa, Ovamboland, a number of Development Brigade inmates, former PLAN combatants, had killed a man known as a DTA supporter. To my surprise, my acquaintance, a well-educated middle class urbanite and Swapo loyalist, insisted that the murder had not been politically motivated.

According to him, the incident had been taken seriously by Swapo and immediately investigated. It was found out that the brigade men had used to drink at the DTA man’s *cuca* shop where they were served by his beautiful daughters. Once he left a drum of beer specifically for them. However, one of the daughters told this to the men, who then checked the drum and found two pieces of human flesh in it — a part of a baby’s arm and a woman’s genitals — which clearly showed that this was a sorcery case. According to my acquaintance, the shop owner did this because he had not liked the way the men had approached his daughters. He continued that it was possible that the man had killed somebody in order to get the human parts and that traditionally it was believed that the curse would remain effective unless the culprit was killed. Therefore, the brigade members killed the man and dug his eyes out. They then intended to burn the body but were caught in the process.

If witchcraft and sorcery is understood as a space of ‘informal’ moral discourse that can be applied to ever new social tensions,²⁵⁴ it is perhaps not a coincidence that the above incident was understood in its terms. The rumour shifted the incident outside the realm of

²⁵³ Martha’s story provides the most illuminating narrative of struggling and nostalgia; appendix 1, pp. 24-25, lines 140-150, 162-167 and 185-203. Likewise, David and Joseph tell of ‘suffering’ and of having sacrificed personal advancement to the cause of national liberation; appendix 1, p. 27, lines 92-99 and p. 29, lines 85-88. Also some of those who were better-off contrasted exile unity with the egoism of post-independence and complained about the difficulties of their present life; see, for example Raina’s narrative on pp. 75-78. Still, the vocabulary of struggling and nostalgia characterizes primarily the narratives of the have-nots.

²⁵⁴ See e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff eds. 1993. Cf. Jacobson-Widding’s (1990) distinction between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses of personhood, introduced in chapter. For descriptions of various forms of ‘magic’ among the Ovambo, see Hiltunen 1986 and 1993.

formal politics, where it was an embarrassment to Swapo, and brought it into the realm of private hostility and conventional crime. At the same time, however, the rumour retained the charged character of the incident, as everybody knew that the man who was killed was ‘a DTA’ and the killers were ‘Swapos’. Thus, the rumour actually legitimized the apparent indiscipline of the brigade men by turning the victim into the villain.²⁵⁵ Similarly as David and the translator’s anecdote about witchcraft (see chapter 5.4 and appendix 1, p. 27, lines 85-91), this rumour arose from and attempted to deal with the real social divisions indicated by the partly overlapping categories of ‘Swapo’ versus ‘DTA’ and ‘returnee’ versus ‘remainder’.²⁵⁶

Similarly, the have-not narrators see the various forms of political and social difference, on one hand, and post-independence problems, on the other, as two sides of the same coin. Unity is identified as an ingredient of and precondition for well-being, with a double effect: First, there arises a nostalgia for exile unity that gets idealized in the process. In fact, much of the value accorded to exile collectivity (see chapter 5.3) may emerge from present insecurity in contrast to the material and social security which the exile condition ensured despite all the difficulties involved. Second, this nostalgia does not merely express an escapist wish to get back into the past but a wish to reformulate the present through the past, to correct the history that went wrong (or that has not yet been fulfilled) (cf. Portelli 1990). Thus, the hardships that the ‘have-nots’ face do not lead them to break their links of loyalty to Swapo but rather to hope for an organically unified nation-wide ‘politics of development’ to secure well-being for all under Swapo’s command.²⁵⁷ Many of them seem

²⁵⁵ On Swapo’s side, the need for this conclusion was aggravated by the criticism that was levelled against the Development Brigade project even before the incident. The official purpose of the brigade was to equip former fighters with skills that would help them survive on their own. However, it was criticised of working contrary to this stated objective because of its large-scale and semi-military organization, and of being a potentially dangerous ground for ‘asocializing’ the brigade inmates. From the point of view of the brigade members themselves, the brigade organization may have been experienced as a source of security and identity as a part of the social body of ‘comrades’, as it replicated many forms of the exile social organization.

²⁵⁶ Equally, the case described by David Lush (see fn. 248 on p. 180) is related to the tensions involved in the returnees’ struggle to find a niche in the social and economic relations of the post-independence situation. In this situation, expectations, both one’s own and those of others, clashed with the reality, producing a sense of powerlessness and of being out of place. Through the idiom of witchcraft the unbearable social situation came to be socially diagnosed, accepted as problematic and addressed.

²⁵⁷ Ideas of this kind may well be behind Swapo’s continuing almost 100 per cent electoral support among the Ovambo. Although the returns for their continuing support have been meagre and they have manifested their disappointment on numerous occasions, the rank and file still throw their lot behind Swapo, expecting it to reward their loyalty sooner or later. The latest parliamentary elections, held in late 1999, were a case in point. Swapo’s share of the votes, at 76.3 per cent, was bigger than ever, with its position as virtually the only party in Ovamboland unassailed. Local voters there commented that ‘Swapo now had to develop the North because of the massive support the ruling party received’; *The Namibian* website [www.namibian.com.na], 7 December 1999.

The idea of ‘belonging to’ Swapo also shines through the reaction of a group of northerners who, mistaking

to feel that the authoritarian way of decision-making and administration, practiced in exile, was more just and effective than the present one and they still expect Swapo as government to deliver. In this expectation, the remembered and narrated comradeship, collective effort and one's own sacrifice in the struggle gives them license to demand greater recognition as cadres who had been loyal and remained so (cf. Preston 1997: 458).²⁵⁸ Lack of success in the development task is attributed to lack of unity and discipline, and the lack of unity, in turn, is largely blamed on the opposition and forces beyond Swapo's control. Indeed, even when the former fighters get restless, they still turn to Swapo and expect it to address their grievances.²⁵⁹

5.5.3 The elite and the middle class: varied reactions to differentiation

The narratives of life after independence by those who had become members of the new black elite and middle class are varied. Some of them react to the practical difficulties and social tensions of post-independence life with similar nostalgia as the have-nots.²⁶⁰ Some others express a closely related attitude whereby they identify loyalty to Swapo as a precondition to well-being and attribute problems to 'colonial legacies' and lack of unity. The practical issue through which this attitude most often arises is employment.²⁶¹ For

him for an opposition supporter, threatened a journalist from that newspaper and demanded that he 'should have gone through Swapo if [he] wanted to interview people, because the leaders had warned them there are people going around asking many questions just to confuse the nation.'; *Ibid.*, 3 December 1999.

²⁵⁸ In post-independence Namibia, the image of the former guerrillas has been dual. On one hand, they are portrayed as national heroes who sacrificed for liberation. This image follows directly from the liberation narrative and, as David's and Joseph's stories point out, is often adopted by the former fighters themselves — probably both for existential reasons and as a legitimation of practical demands. On the other hand, they are perceived as a threat. Thomson (1990) has noted a similar duality in how the veterans of the First World War have been remembered in Australia. He reminds that the heroic imagery, utilized in 'pacifying' them, involved silencing of alternative memories:

[I]ntimately connected with the struggle over the memory of the war...[were] memorial celebrations which offered the status of national heroes to alienated ex-servicemen...Rituals of remembrance mapped out what could be publicly recalled and silenced alternative memories. (Thomson 1990: 75-76.)

The emotionally charged character of such remembering is pointed out by how a movie called *Flame*, a story about two women in the liberation struggle and after, was received in Zimbabwe. It includes description of hardships and abuse, like shortage of food and rape by a commander. The director Ingrid Sinclair first wanted to make a document and interviewed women ex-combatants to get their stories. When no-one wanted to speak in front of a camera she turned the stories into a drama. The War Veterans' Society objected the film, because it deconstructed the heroic image of the 'freedom fighter', and a media campaign against it ensued. (Dalby 1996; cf. Kriger 1995: 156-162.)

²⁵⁹ There have been numerous occasions of ex-combatant unrest; Preston 1997: 465-466, 469. To cite an example, in October 1995, 300 former PLAN combatants took Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Deputy Minister Hadino Hishongwa hostage to underline their demand to be granted employment by the government; SAPA news agency, Johannesburg, October 10, 1995, reprinted in *Facts and Reports* 25(U), October 27, 1995, p. 8.

²⁶⁰ See e.g. Raina's narrative on pp. 75-78.

²⁶¹ It arose not only in interviews, but time and again in my informal discussions with the returnees as well

example, many returnees complained that they were discriminated against when posts were filled because of prejudices or because the old civil servants were afraid of losing their positions and power to the better educated returnees. Some also criticized the old civil service of having a hidden agenda and attempting to hinder the reforms the new civil service was trying to initiate. These problems led many of them to wonder whether national reconciliation was really working; they felt that only Swapo and the disadvantaged majority was making sacrifices in the name of reconciliation. On the bench of the accused, ‘the opposition’ could often be found alongside the agents of the old regime in the labour market.²⁶²

However, the members of the new elite and middle class found themselves not only discriminated against by the old elite but also in a privileged position when compared to the black majority. In dealing with this situation, the discourse of unity and gradual progress was useful again. In their comments on post-independence conditions, most of them downplay the significance of class and other differences and stress the continuation of unity in the new form of national unity. To the extent that the existence of differences is admitted, they are, first, seen as a legacy of colonialism that will pass as development proceeds and all are guaranteed similar opportunities or, second, justified by the common good towards which they are supposed to contribute. Thus, the reality of lasting inequality and difference mixes with the ideal of equality and unity to create a state of being ‘almost there’. The narratives in chapter 5.5.4 provide ample examples of the first view (see also Anna’s narrative in appendix 1, p. 21, lines 690-697). Benjamin’s narrative is an example of the second view, according to which education obtained in exile is meant for the

as in their discussions with each other.

²⁶² Instead of attributed problems they faced to restrictions in Swapo’s power, some others were happy about their newly acquired freedom from Swapo. According to them, the present situation was better for their individual agendas than a continuation of exile collectivity would have been. They could now fulfill their life plans freely, without being controlled by the movement. Notably, those who expressed such views had obtained a good educational and career background in exile and therefore had real opportunities for individual advancement. Aaron and Romanus can be quoted as examples of such a view. According to Aaron:

The elections were held and Swapo emerged victorious...and Namibia became an independent republic. After that everybody was free to start looking for a job or building a new life. So an idea came to me that instead of going back into the teaching profession I should perhaps start doing something else.

And Romanus:

In firms like this politics has nothing to do with your life at all. All that you do is for your own satisfaction and benefit, the company's benefit and other people’s benefit too...I just came to a point that [I thought that] I have done enough, I should let others continue. Imagine, you grew up in that system and you want to continue living like that, no, you have to change [your] way of living...That’s mainly the factor why I didn’t want to work for the government. I wanted to concentrate on something that I really do myself, not to be controlled by a certain atmosphere, like political society.

collective purpose of development in independent Namibia (see also chapter 5.3). Here, anxiety about getting a job is justified by a collectivist desire to work for development:

It was always my dream to reach a certain career in my life, to become an engineer or a doctor or a professional in any field...Studies have always been my dream...It's of no use if I don't get employment, hanging around there. I know that I can do something, if I see something is wrong I could offer my help...If I get that chance it is my intention to contribute to the development of the country.²⁶³

In sum, the narrators mostly see the wide socioeconomic differences of the post-independence society as transitory or find different forms of justification for them. In spite of this, these differences were not always easily overcome and therefore cropped up regularly in everyday discourse. This is demonstrated by a rumour that I heard from one of the interviewees after my fieldwork. According to it, one of the former exiles, a woman in a prestigious social position, had suddenly died after visiting her home area in Ovamboland. It was said that she had been poisoned by someone who was jealous of her and her family's achievement and wealth. My source added that such jealousy was common between returnees and remainers. Especially those returnees who were well-educated, employed by the government and wealthy were envied by others, for instance by those whose sons and daughters were in exile but did not 'want to' take up education and advance their careers. It should be noted where the source of this rumour himself stood: having studied in Europe, and a Swapo 'careerist', he was soon about to take up a relatively high and well-paid government position, and it was the same kind of people that he had been gossiping with.

²⁶³ There were also a few well-off returnees who justified the existing divisions by personifying them into results of individual effort. In Timothy's words:

An elite is unavoidable, you have people who had education...I've always believed in doing something for myself and trying to achieve something for myself, not somebody to push me...I don't like to do things the easiest way. I've always felt that you have to fight for something if you want to achieve...it...My political activities probably made it easier because...my mates, people that I grew up with, were not aware...about certain things. It depended on where you grew up and how political...your family was...They saw the suffering but...they didn't want to talk about it or they didn't know how to talk about it. I was always...talking to my friends: 'I know you can understand, see what the South Africans are doing.'...I wouldn't say that the party...paved a way for me, I think it was more through my own efforts. I remember one occasion, for example, when I was supposed to go to Germany. The principal of the school disagreed because...[there] was a group of us teachers and I was the youngest...but the Secretary of Education...felt that 'despite he's young he's capable of doing it.'...Through my own work...in the camps...I just came up and was offered the opportunity to further whatever I was trying to achieve.

Similar arguments were voiced by Erkki and a friend of his, another former exile, when I was passing some time with them at the former's 'shop' in Katutura. The two men had been schoolmates and recalled how they used to walk long distances to school and take care of the cattle at home. Still they were the best in their class. In spite of difficulties they were motivated and pressed on when others dropped out. They concluded that they had earned their positions by their own effort whereas many others in the countryside had not understood the importance of education.

Crime was one of the frequently discussed issues that reflected the worry and uneasiness of the elite and the middle class about the social disparities they witnessed. Apart from posing a concrete danger to them, crime was also an affront to the ideal of the gloriously independent new nation. It positioned the interests of the elite and the unemployed ‘ordinary people’, who migrate to the cities, against each other, revealing the rift between the haves and the have-nots and disturbing elite visions of the nation and development. In this light it is not surprising that many portrayed crime and the Namibian ‘gun culture’ as colonial legacies, together with other bad things that pollute the nation. For example, violent crime was often attributed to ‘former Koevoet’. The origin of pollution could also be placed beyond the borders of the present Namibian nation. For example, we observed a group of gamblers on a street at the centre of Windhoek with one of the former exiles. In his opinion, such gambling should have been stopped. He said that the problem was caused by Zaireans and West Africans who ‘teach bad habits to our people’. On another occasion, he condemned ‘the homos who come from Europe’ to take advantage of Namibian kids as ‘in our society we don’t tolerate homosexuality’.

This kind of discourse is a symptom of a ‘misinterpreted modernity’ thesis,²⁶⁴ evident in what many of the intellectuals say. According to this thesis, modernization is acceptable, as long as it proceeds as planned and thus constitutes development. However, the intentional form of ‘development’ is seen to be threatened by a spontaneous and uncontrolled form of modernization with negative consequences. The contents of this undirected and negative modernization are familiar and by no means specific to Namibia, namely crumbling of ‘the community’ and moral decay (Taylor 1995). The former exiles speak about loosening of family ties, uncontrolled migration, crime, and alcoholism. The youth stands accused of lacking discipline, seriousness, and goals, and of not respecting elders. Maria expresses these concerns by referring to uncritical imitation of western ways, which leads to confusion as social relations and traditional values get broken. In her mind, this can be seen in the disobedience of kids, in excessive drinking and in uncontrolled migration. (Appendix 1, p. 45, lines 302-320.) Other examples of similar concerns can be found in John’s, Anna’s, and Matthew’s stories (appendix 1, p. 6, lines 283-300; p. 21, lines 712-724; and p. 30, lines 52-69). Apart from being connected to the discourses of traditionalism and developmentalism, the ‘misinterpreted modernity’ thesis may stem from the perceived difference between ‘returnees’ and ‘remainers’. Just as the ‘returnees’ were seen to be ‘of the bush’ and wild rumours were spread about them before their return (and to some extent,

²⁶⁴ The term is borrowed from Maria, who speaks about the ‘misinterpretation of modernity and development’. See appendix 1, p. 45, line 305.

after it), they themselves felt that their moral sense was as strong, if not stronger, as that of the remainers, and took pride in the discipline they had learned in exile.

Whatever the origin of the ‘misinterpreted modernity’ thesis, it is backed, in many stories, by a form of traditionalism, in which ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are reified from the flow of lived practice into idealized spheres of fixed custom. The changes for the worse in values and social structure that the advance of modernity has brought about are reflected from this mirror of tradition. Often the blame for such changes is laid at the door of colonialism and Christianity.²⁶⁵ The idea of planned development is then brought in as a better, proper course of modernization. In this way, ideas of tradition, modernity, and development combine into a particular national romantic vision.

This vision comes explicitly to the fore in John’s narrative. As we saw in chapter 4.1, he tells of having grown in a traditional family in an atmosphere of harmony and happiness. He establishes a conflict with Christianity already here, arguing that Christianity forced his parents to divorce and him to give up his traditional name. Overall, it was a plan to conquer and colonize. Later, he returns to the issue of tradition. In his view, this reified Ovambo culture and identity and other similar ‘folk cultures’ should be preserved as customs that can be ‘displayed’ for others to see. Together, they could form a new national culture and identity. (Appendix 1, pp. 1-2, lines 4-71 and pp. 7-8, lines 362-417.) However, cultural differences cannot extend to the political sphere. For example, John is explicit about rejecting an ‘ethnic’ influence in politics. The nation is one political community comprising of various cultural communities, and has a shared task of development to fulfill. In this task, it is threatened by the negative aspects of uncontrolled modernity, for instance by the young people’s lack of goals, moral values, and respect for elders. (Appendix 1, pp. 6-8, lines 283-300, 321-332 and 418-439.)

Notably, those who employ the discourse of traditionalism are, like John, intellectuals who studied away from the Namibian communities of Angola and Zambia. As elsewhere in the world, this discourse is a national romantic mythology of the modernizing elite that seeks to extend political nationalism into a cultural one.²⁶⁶ It may feed back to the lived practice in

²⁶⁵ In contrast to the firm Christianity of many ‘old generation’ members of the liberation movement (see Lucia’s narratives in chapter 4.2), there was a relatively widespread attitude among younger intellectuals that religion is unimportant or even harmful ‘opium to the people’. Those who criticize Christianity are mainly the same people who glorify ‘tradition’, which indicates how this attitude is closely related to traditionalism. In this view, Christianity is directly associated with colonialism and is therefore seen as destructive to ‘authentic’ cultural traditions.

²⁶⁶ The cultural revivalist effort started already in exile, which is indicated, for example, by the ‘cultural

those ‘cultures’ which it celebrates, but it definitely does not accept the ‘impure’ living and changing tradition as its ideal. Rather, as some of the narrators argue, the traditions have been destroyed by colonialism and need to be restored by those who have studied them. In this way, ‘tradition’ becomes a part of the elitist project of development.²⁶⁷

John also returns to the issue of tradition as a source of personal identity. He argues that certain customary things, such as ‘traditional Kwanyama drums’ and ‘traditional dances’ made him ‘as a person, as an Ovambo’, and that colonialism and the church have attempted to destroy this identity. During his studies in exile, he tells, he confronted the question of who he is and where he comes from, learning to be conscious and proud about being ‘an Ovambo’ and of the ‘cultural values’ associated with it, signified by ‘the drums’, the ‘bow and arrow’, ‘the spear’, and ‘mahangu’ and other ‘traditional food’. (Appendix 1, p. 8, lines 390-401.)

Indeed, in addition to stemming from the ‘grand theory’ of national romanticism, traditionalism may arise as a personal reaction to having ‘been exposed’, as many former exiles say, to various cultural environments and discourses. This confrontation both provided those abroad with a reflective distance to their background and created a need to establish a more stable identity for themselves. In other words, it both contributed to the emergence of ‘tradition’ as a discursive entity that was separate from lived practice and created conditions for identifying with this ‘tradition’. In the thinking of the cosmopolitan elite, one finds both nostalgia for the lost or endangered paradise of traditional society, one’s ‘roots’ or ‘origins’, and ‘tradition’ as a part of an ideal of arranging the relationships of modern society and the nation. Paradoxically, the ones who speak the most about tradition (and modernity) are often among those who also speak about having been changed and not being traditional anymore. John captures this condition marvellously in one sentence: ‘I don’t think I’m anymore a traditional man but I’m a believer in tradition’ (appendix 1, p. 8, lines 390-391).

groups’ that were established within Swapo. Their repertoire drew heavily from what were considered as traditional songs and dances; see Haufiku 1997. This emphasis is reflected by some narrators who recall learning about different Namibian cultures in exile — irrespective of whether they had been living in towns and interacting with people from different ethnic backgrounds even before leaving into exile.

²⁶⁷ Jonathan Friedman (1992) has criticized the ‘inventionist’ approach to tradition (see Hobsbawm and Ranger eds. 1983; Vail ed. 1989) for failing to appreciate the existential value that an ‘invented’ practice may have in a culture irrespective of whether it is historically ‘authentic’ or not. This criticism points at a major shortcoming of inventionism. However, what Friedman fails to point out, and what was often a major concern of the inventionists, is precisely whose existence within ‘a culture’ is motivated by certain practices. Furthermore, the fact that ‘a tradition’ is regarded valuable by a group of people should not render this phenomenon unsuitable for analysis, for their beliefs may well be based on quite different criteria than ‘objectivist’ accuracy and therefore more or less immune to an analyst’s intervention.

To sum up the main argument of this chapter, a distinction between various meanings of ‘unity’ can be made. In exile, collectivist practices and ideology prevailed, apparently translating into a high degree of experienced unity that concerned one’s fellow exiles. Ideal unity was, by contrast, imagined to cover all Namibians, apart from the few ‘traitors’ and ‘collaborators’. The realities of the postcolonial condition contradict and contest both this ideal and the exile experience. What is left are some forms of collective identity and solidarity among former exiles and, for most, a longing for the ideal unity of all Namibians. In some cases, particularly in the narratives of the have-nots, this longing takes the form of nostalgia for the social security of exile and the clarity of liberationist imagery. More often, it takes the form of an imagined better future, a history not yet in its logical conclusion. It is this latter issue that will receive a more thorough treatment in the next chapter.

5.5.4 ‘Development’ and the place of politics

Above I quoted Romanus telling that he had become depoliticized. Notably, he was not alone in this assessment: most of the interviewees saw no need to participate in politics any more. Emma went straight to the point as she replaced politics with development:

I have never dreamed to be a politician. My involvement with politics was for the liberation of the country...I just consider that if I have certain goals that I feel like being fulfilled...in terms of the development of this country then I...would like to involve in those...I don’t see myself having changed an inch from what I have been believing in.

In a similar way, Albertina contrasted politics with ‘building our country together’:

How we lived abroad is different from now. Now we are trying to get work in the government...and I don’t see any great political activities anymore here because we are just trying to build our country together, the Namibian society.²⁶⁸

Now, why does such ‘depoliticization’ happen? After all, were not the anticolonial struggles all over the world supposed to politicize and ‘raise the consciousness’ of those who participated in them? I have argued that in exile, Swapo strove to unify its members by both propaganda and practical arrangements (see chapters 5.2 and 5.3). Still, it can be said that politics largely meant national liberation, and a ‘deeper’ political analysis hardly

²⁶⁸ Furthermore, some of the women adopted an ‘I don’t know’ -stance when they were asked about post-independence politics, seemingly regardless of how much they actually knew, or stressed that they had not been ‘politicians’ but just ‘supporters’ even before. By contrast, men seemed to talk about politics quite easily even if they were not experts in it. This is again an indication of gender divisions that did not vanish in exile: traditionally, politics has been seen as a male domain where women have been expected to be inactive.

developed among the majority. Therefore, participation in the ‘liberation struggle’ did not necessarily indicate an elaborate ‘revolutionary’ consciousness.

This is reflected as depoliticization in the post-independence narratives of the former exiles. In most cases, their statements about political participation indicate a tendency to equal liberation with politics and to closely associate Swapo as a liberation movement, Swapo as a political party, and Swapo as government. As has been shown in earlier chapters, an ethos of egalitarian communalism emerges in most of the narratives, in line with what Swapo propagated in exile.

In this ethos, politics is not seen in the liberalist sense as a field where individuals form interest groups to balance various ideas of the common good and various means of its realization. Rather, the common good is taken as a given and politics as a means to its realization through ensuring unity and collective effort.

On the basis of former exile narratives, this collectivist ideal had mostly not vanished but adopted a different form after independence. Before independence, the common good was taken to mean national liberation. The unity and collective effort necessary to bring it about was, generally, that of all Namibian anticolonial forces, and more specifically, that of the community of Namibians waging the struggle in exile. After independence, the ideal is extended to cover ‘the nation’ as a whole. Thus, the unity and collective effort is that of all Namibians, and the common good that is taken as a given is ‘development’. In this view, there is no need for politics after independence but for working together for development.

This attitude is strengthened by Swapo’s authoritarian tradition and by the dominant liberalist doctrine of government, in which politicians form a specific group that takes care of politics. Politics does not form a part of the ordinary citizens’ life, apart from exercising particular rights, most importantly giving a mandate from time to time to a group of politicians to run the affairs of the country. Taken together, the ideal of national unity and the practice of liberalist politics converge into a view according to which the necessary conditions for ‘development’ have been laid down at independence when everybody was given the same set of basic rights, and further divisive ‘politicking’ will not do any good. This, in short, is the main reason for the abrupt end of politics in the narratives of most former exiles.

Like the adoption of the liberation narrative in exile, such depoliticization seems to be connected to transformations in Swapo's policies and rhetorics. After independence, in the name of maintaining political stability, preventing the flight of capital and attracting further investments, the ruling party has been committed to 'moderate' policies that have largely preserved the old social and economic relations, while at the same time attempting to gradually redress the extreme social inequality inherited from the colonial government (see e.g. Tapscott 1995: 162-164; Freeman 1992: 36-45; Bauer 1998: 96-102; Economist Intelligence Unit 1996: 12-22; Hansohm and Mupotola-Sibongo 1998). While widely perceived by policymakers and analysts as the only option to achieve development, this policy walks a thin line between the partly contradictory interests of foreign investors, white farmers, entrepreneurs and civil servants, the new black elite and middle class, and the largely unemployed majority that survives on subsistence agriculture and informal economic activity (as well as on resources distributed through informal, mainly kinship-based, networks of social security). In the attempt to contain these interests, the liberationist imagery of colonialism, resistance, comradeship and familiness, which may have continuing appeal to Swapo's major support base among the Ovambo, has to be supplemented with something that has potential appeal to all sections of society.

Therefore, a policy of 'national reconciliation' was launched at independence, in the hope that it would consolidate a social balance that would, in turn, enable 'development'.²⁶⁹ Here, 'development' is a vague image that both serves as a final societal end and carries within itself the very idea of gradual reformism, thus justifying the continuation of existing social relations. And what 'national reconciliation' reconciles is the definition of 'we' (to which Albertina referred above as the agent of building the country), the national collectivity, rather than the actual social forces and contradictions that have initially created the need for reconciliation. Vague and contradictory as the imageries of 'national reconciliation' and 'development' may be, they serve well in playing down social divisions and muffling demands of immediate societal change. In this sense, they serve a similar function as 'national liberation' did earlier: they project a better future to aspire to and thereby strive to unify all the various perspectives, interests and expectations within the

²⁶⁹ My thinking of Namibian post-independence relations between politics and 'development' have benefited from Ferguson's (1990) study on the ways in which the machinery of 'development' can strip governance of political content. However, whereas Ferguson's focus is on how development interventions can work towards this end unintendedly, I suggest that there is at least partial intentionality to the depoliticizing effects of the rhetorics of 'national reconciliation' and 'development' as they are used by the agents of the state. See also Robertson (1984) on the uses of 'development'.

polity under a shared vision by masking and neutralizing the political choices inherent in governance.²⁷⁰

In spite of their wide acceptance into common usage, the rhetorics of national reconciliation and development primarily emanate from a discourse of the national political elite. This discourse is aimed at incorporating other elites and pacifying the populace, but it does not work by simple determination. Rather, it is understood quite differently by different layers of society. Because ‘development’ and ‘national reconciliation’ have become concepts that are accepted by virtually all, they may work towards hegemonizing governance into apparent neutrality. However, paradoxically there is another side to their ambiguity: They may also become a site of struggle as to what they mean and consist of, and what should be done in their name; in other words, an arena for political arguments. This is evident in the stories of former exiles: no-one questions the importance of development and national reconciliation as such, but there are various meanings given to development and varying views about the role of the ruling party in this task. Furthermore, as I argued above, practical questions, such as those related to finding employment or working in the civil service, may fuel dissatisfaction about ‘reconciliation’.

The variety of views about politics and development in former exile narratives can be made sense of by two criteria. The first is a distinction between ‘properly developmental’ rhetoric, mostly expressed by the ‘intellectuals’, and more concrete, bread-and-butter rhetoric, mostly expressed by the rank and file. The second is a continuum from those who would like to see Swapo having more power through those who are contented with the present political balance to those who worry about the extent of the ruling party’s power.²⁷¹ These criteria combine into five major ways of discoursing politics and development.

Overall, views in which development is associated with what are perceived as Swapo’s objectives dominate. One line of thought, expressed mainly by middle class or elite loyalists, is that *multiparty politics ensures development directed by Swapo*. Multipartyism is approved of because it ensures peace and stability, and ties the various social groups to

²⁷⁰ To cite an example of the pervasiveness of these discourses, just a few days after my arrival in the field, there was a programme titled ‘National reconciliation — myth or reality’ on the national tv. The discussants represented various interest groups and not surprisingly disagreed on many aspects of what reconciliation should mean. Yet none of them questioned its importance as a policy concept.

²⁷¹ I remind that this classification concerns particular narratives and not the narrators who uttered them; some other situations could have produced somewhat different expressions that would have been classified differently. However, I believe that the categorization does tease out some important aspects of the former exiles’ post-independence discourses on politics and development.

the national development project, which is seen to be beyond political concerns. However, criticism towards the ruling party by the opposition is not independent from the shared goals of development and national unity but should, rather, be 'constructive', as Benjamin puts it. In these sentiments, the interviewees closely reflect the dominant views of the ruling party. For example, in Hilda's view, other parties than Swapo are acceptable as long as they stick to 'giving suggestions' and do not attempt to get into power themselves:

I think they are going to die, those other political parties...But we don't [wish] that they should die...we would like everybody to give suggestions, but now the other parties don't give suggestions. They are against, they say Swapo should get away and they should rule. To give suggestions is not bad, it is good...[Not] all that Swapo is doing is correct. They also need some suggestions from the nation.

The project which Swapo should lead with the help of the abovementioned 'suggestions' is 'to do what the nation wants', which is to arrange better housing, jobs and education for all:

Namibia just got independence so we are still waiting, there must be some changes...like everybody to have a house and jobs...more education and so on...Things cannot change rapidly, it's not so easy...One has to try to do what the nation wants...Namibia is such a small country, [with] such a [small] population, I don't know if the government cannot provide all of us at with what we want.

Likewise, Festus stresses the importance of unity and ties it to the project of development, which is defined in egalitarian terms. Unity emerges as a precondition for the final phase of liberation when everybody would 'eat the fruits of independence':

LM: Did you want Namibia to have a socialist system or something else?

Festus: When we were fighting we were preaching of socialism but sometimes...when you find yourself in a certain situation you might change your tactics. So we...changed our tactics...Since the government...is concerned about the Namibian people I just feel happy. If the leadership or the government neglects the interest of their own people then...you think otherwise again. But they are for the people, for everybody in this society...One recognizes the change since independence. The one who was cheating before and the one who is against the society today doesn't see this change...You cannot build Rome in one day...but we expect that in the future each and every member of this society will eat the fruits of independence...I just welcome each and everybody...[whether he or she is] from exile or stayed inside the country...provided of course that the person has a positive rather than negative input...Even those who were misled, they realized that they were misled, they are now among the people...Some have even forgotten what they have been doing before and joined the reality.

There is no doubt about whose vision is 'the reality' and what it is to give a 'positive input' 'among the people'. It means adherence to Swapo's project of national unity and development, just as it earlier meant participating in the liberation struggle. Timothy gives a more sophisticated version of this same view. According to him, the opposition is needed in principle but in practice 'they just oppose for the sake of opposing' and lack credibility. He also speaks of the importance of national unity, which then appears as a precondition for preparing a better life for all, 'social justice'. Towards this end, Timothy outlines a development strategy that is in keeping with what many party leaders said (see e.g. Strand

1991: 49-51; Dobell 1998: 103). His strong identification with Swapo and the government is made all the more clear by the constant use of 'we' in reference to government action:

LM: What do you think about the...changes in Swapo policy, I mean that they somewhat abolished the socialist terms of policy?

Timothy: I still believe that a lot of us, even myself...believe in socialist principles...You can have the country but who controls the means of production, who controls the resources...At the moment you have all these multinational companies in control...and we have started a process of negotiating [for] the government of Namibia to have a bigger role in managing these...We are not going to nationalize...What we want is to work in partnership with the private sector for them to pump more resources in the public sector to uplift the people...Our population is small and if that wealth is well distributed...you won't find a very poor person in Namibia...We want to reach that level where everybody has an income, everybody has a place to sleep, everybody has got education and to us that is social justice...I can translate that into socialism...mixed economy to benefit the population as a whole.

In these passages, the above narrators catch the mood of the majority. In this view, democracy is not a value in itself. Similarly as there was a strict hierarchy in Swapo during the liberation struggle, the government now knows what is good for the nation and how to achieve it. In this light, it is no wonder that those who portray themselves as loyal cadres of the movement during the liberation struggle do not take an active stand towards politics after independence. In their view, each should know his or her place, and the decisions concerning politics and development do not belong to them.

Another view that equals development with Swapo's objectives has it that Swapo has too little power. This view is expressed mainly by loyalist bureaucrats and by the rank and file returnees. Basically, they complain that there are limitations to Swapo's power that prevent it from implementing the reforms that would bring about 'development' and 'social justice.' According to many, the limitations to Swapo's ability to bring about socioeconomic change are related to the fact that Swapo does not have full control of the political arena.

Generally, socialist vocabulary is absent from the narratives. Whereas the universalist discourses of nationalism, educationalism and developmentalism survive, socialism does not. Thus, for example, social divisions are not framed in class terms. The simple and broad ideals of collectivity and equality that survive in the narratives of the rank and file should not be confused with programmatic socialism. The references to 'social justice' and the like, made by some of the intellectuals, many of whom were working in the administrative part of the public sector, are more likely to be remnants of socialist discourse.²⁷² Indeed, these intellectuals were probably the only ones to familiarize themselves with socialist

²⁷² 'Social justice' and 'socialism' were equalled explicitly by Timothy above.

discourse in any depth in exile. They appear nostalgic about the socialist — or at least social democratic — ideals propounded by Swapo before independence. In their view, the circumstances under which independence was guaranteed, combined with Namibia's peripheral position in the world economy and a globally strong 'neoliberal' doctrine, have rendered the country only half independent and half developed (for the two are often seen as conditions for each other) by preventing major changes towards 'social justice'. It is an *aborted social democracy*. These narrators certainly have a more bureaucratic view of development than others. Peter provides the finest example of this view:

This is the system which the world wanted us to have, everybody spoke of...parliamentary democracy. In parliamentary democracy you don't change the world in one night...Of course if we keep to this system...and really work hard to [achieve]...economic growth and the narrowing of income disparities...you will see in 40 years that the average man is living in a welfare society. But you don't change rapidly...I would like that in 30 or 40 years my child and the child of a cleaner would have more or less the same possibilities of succeeding in society.

LM: What do you think were the reasons for choosing this particular kind of a political system?

Peter: Probably number one was the principles which the people thought were important: freedom, fundamental human rights, and that the people didn't want to see Namibia having a society like the one which we have just abolished...However...in terms of aspects such as redistribution of wealth...of rapid redressing of social injustices it's not necessarily the best system. But in terms of human rights, in terms of freedom, it is definitely the best system.

LM: If you think of the time you spent in exile, what was the system you wanted Namibia to have and has your opinion changed in that regard?

Peter: Well, we were speaking of social justice, we were thinking of freedom, we were thinking of solidarity. I believe that [in terms of] social justice, for instance, we are just laying down foundations, and are we laying [them], even that is a question. If you think of things like unemployment...illiteracy...infectious diseases killing people we are still very much at the beginning...Are we creating a system which cultivates the values of solidarity, comradeship between men, humanness...or are we creating a society purely of financial gains, of profits, of markets, of rapid growth?...If [we] are not very careful we will look at financial gains, at markets, at profits and we will think that these things automatically bring about justice and solidarity. Absolutely not true.

LM: And if we speak in terms of party-political system, have you been in favour of one-party system or multi-party system?

Peter: Maybe I have been idealistic but...I think that the discussion is irrelevant...I will ask myself do we have structures, institutions...which make sure that we participate in decision-making, that we have the fundamental human rights, that we have freedom...I want to look at the basic structures like parliament, how does it function, the municipalities, local government, freedom of expression and the autonomy of the judiciary system...These are the things I'm looking at rather than how many parties there are...What will happen...one day [is that] the people elect one party and give them 98 per cent of their votes. Are we going to say no? We have one-party system in practice if they give 98 per cent of their votes to one party. But we should look at it and say, 'yes, this is democracy'.²⁷³

Emma, who was also in a relatively good position in the civil service, expressed a closely related view. In her vision, Swapo, national unity and development are integrally tied

²⁷³ See also John's narrative in appendix 1, pp. 6 and 9, lines 303-308 and 440-454, where he speaks of the 1989 elections, which 'the people' won but 'not with the percentage that they deserved'. He justifies this view by referring to it as 'what the majority thinks' as 'everybody love[s] Swapo'.

together. 'The nation' emerges as the 'receiver' of development, a goal shared by returnees and remainers alike which is to be achieved through Swapo's policies in government. Even though she favours the multi-party system in principle, she also feels that Swapo's policies are superior and cannot imagine a situation where 'the people' would not see Swapo as their 'true representative'. Thus, Swapo appears as both a reflection of national unity and the primary insurer of unity and development. The reason why the goal has not yet been reached is not itself a matter of policy but, rather, of inevitable circumstances:

We all have been fighting for the same cause, wanting independence, whether inside the country or abroad. It is just the same people and I'm sure that we all still have the same goal, that we would like to see our country being developed towards the better of all the citizens...The policy of the government...is to...change the country into a better developed country, which considers the basic needs of the people...There are quite many changes and...Namibians should realize these changes...are based on the policy of the government through our constitution...What I have been dreaming about is...reflected in our constitution but...development cannot take place in a few years...I'm sure this is just a question of time. I'm still optimistic that what we have been dreaming about is what we are going to get...We have a lot of people who are not yet employed...The government is trying by all means to encourage companies or individuals towards creating jobs...but...the government does not have money because we just got our independence and we have to stick to priorities...The most basic thing is to see all Namibians living in a society where they...are recognized and...to upshape the whole social system [so that] all Namibians irrespective of their colour are protected and their voices are heard...I wanted to see a change in education and...I'm sure we are not on wrong foot, it just takes time before we can reach where we want to go.

LM: You have a multi-party democracy now. Was that a thing you could foresee and...what do you think about this situation now, is that a good development?

Emma: Sure, for the simple fact that we would like to see ourselves expressing our ideas...and this you can only do through a multi-party system. The nation will show whether it is for multi-party or one-party system because...we have free elections. Recently we had the local and regional elections in which each individual had a say...You vote for whom you want.

LM: In the light of the recent elections it seems that the opposition parties are losing ground. What do you see as the reasons for this?

Emma: Well, my goodness, how could I see why they lose? They lose because they don't have support, people do not believe in what they are saying, people do not believe they are their true representatives. The people do not believe that that particular party will serve them towards achieving...their goals...We just...expect to see a party being elected simply because the people trust that particular party and...people will continue voting for the party which they feel is a true representative of their ideas.

The rank and file narrators do not present elaborate developmental visions. Their ideas of 'development' are expressed in the language of concrete changes in living conditions rather than through the more abstract imagery of gradual progress. Such changes include peace, freedom of movement and material improvements, like better housing, employment, better water supply and electrification. This view can be termed *bread-and-butter development*. If these narrators resort to an abstract discourse, they use terminology that is anchored in the rhetoric of 'liberation' rather than in the post-independence rhetoric of 'national reconciliation'. They express a continuing collectivist ideal and whatever individual concerns they might have are either not expressed or are expected to be taken care of by

Swapo through a collective effort. In their mind, the basic freedoms that were obtained with independence had been delivered by Swapo. They were waiting, loyally and patiently, for it to provide also material betterment. Some also express doubts about the usefulness of ‘politics’, meaning the formally democratic machinery of decision-making. This attitude is in direct continuation to what they learned in exile, where their role, regarding decision-making, was that of supporters rather than participants. They are satisfied with the fact that Swapo is firmly in power, but seem to feel that its power is not extensive enough.

For example, Vilho, a former guerrilla, stresses the importance of peace and improvement in basic services:

LM: What were the most important things about independence?

Vilho: Peace.

LM: And...have things gone the way you thought they would be...in Namibia in general and in your own life?

Vilho: Not really...but when Namibia was not free these Casspirs just came and beat the people in the villages and there was not enough water but now people are beaten no more and sometimes they get water.

Julia speaks of post-independence Namibia in the terms of the ethos of exile unity, saying that there should be a family-like togetherness under the regime of reconciliation. Like Martha (appendix 1, p. 25, lines 176-179), she blames ‘the Boers’ for slowing down the process of development but is confident about the future:

The election was nice because it [introduced] reconciliation, that you have to be as [if you had] one father and mother...About political parties there is no problem because now everybody takes each other as sisters and brothers, so [there is] no confusion...We just got independent. Some things have been improved and some we are still going to improve. So we are still looking forward to do better...The Boers took out some important things and the country doesn’t have much money to develop...You can’t do things at once.

These and other comments by the rank and file exemplify the popular perception that the Swapo government was attempting to increase ‘the people’s’ share of the economic cake that has been controlled by hostile forces both outside and within the national borders. In this view, ‘making life easy in Namibia’ is not something that will happen through political participation and formal democracy. Rather, it will happen under Swapo’s careful supervision. However, the above narrators did not explicitly hope for a different kind of political system. Rather, the circumstances were taken as they are, with a hope that they would perhaps pass with time. David’s narrative is an example of a more critical stance towards multiparty politics. He feels that unemployment and ‘suffering’ are perhaps caused

by the fact that Swapo did not get ‘the maximum’ of the vote in the 1989 elections and criticizes the ‘big meeting’, that is, the National Assembly, of unnecessary talking and inefficiency. (Appendix 1, p. 27, lines 92-96.) Most of the rank and file apparently continue to see themselves as Swapo’s reserve, belonging to Swapo and remaining under its command. They are still waiting to ‘be called’ and are often at loss when the party no longer ‘sends’ them, that is, does not decide for them and assign them to tasks (see also chapter 5.5.2). The discontent and anxiety they may feel does not translate into critical distance from the ruling party. On the contrary, they underline their loyalty and a desire for strengthened collectivity and Swapo rule.

A few of the ‘intellectuals’ take a more critical line towards the ruling party than the above three views. By and large, they approve of Swapo being in power but stress the importance of other parties, civic organizations, free press and the international community in keeping the ruling party in check. *Swapo’s rule is justified but it needs a watchdog*. They welcome multiparty democracy but are sceptical about the credibility of the opposition and worry about what they see as a tendency of sliding towards a one-party regime. In this way, these narrators strike a balance between remaining loyal to Swapo’s objectives and the tradition of ‘liberation’, on one hand, and acknowledging its well-known problems, like authoritarianism, on the other. To the extent that they speak of ‘development’, they adhere to the view that it is the nation’s shared goal and adopt an administrative perspective. Richard’s narrative exemplifies this perspective well. He is worried about the poor performance of the opposition, not because he endorses their views, but because he sees a strong opposition as a precondition of democracy:

The opposition here should keep democracy alive. But the outcome of these elections²⁷⁴...threatens democracy. That has made me think about the national elections in 1994...You can expect some...smaller parties to be forgotten. And after some years, I’m afraid to say this, we may end up with a one-party state...The trend is frightening in view of democracy. We need a strong opposition party who should be able to say: ‘This is wrong.’...On such a basis we would preserve democracy. But...by the next, 1994, presidential and parliamentary elections we are likely to have Swapo and DTA alone, with DTA members of parliament significantly scaled down, maybe to seven or six.²⁷⁵ So not much will...be preserved of democracy. Maybe we’ll have some kind of internal criticism but it’s never effective, within the party it’s never effective.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ The 1992 regional and local elections.

²⁷⁵ Richard’s prediction turned out to be more or less accurate, as Swapo’s share of the vote grew to 72.7 per cent in the 1994 parliamentary election.

²⁷⁶ Likewise, Simon says:

I was very happy to find out that Swapo had won and I was more happy to find out that Swapo didn’t get the two-thirds majority...It could have been a problem because even [if] Swapo announced that ‘we are not going to do anything about the white Namibians, whoever wants to stay can stay’...nobody would have believed. And the president could be a very good guy, the prime minister could, or some other ministers, but still, if there is no watchdog...anything could go wrong. [Having] been in the struggle with

In his view, development is the common goal that should unify various groups and institutions as ‘participants’:²⁷⁷

Our white brothers and sisters...have in a way accommodated...the present reality...The white man was the commander and the black was the follower...Now...[we] say: ‘Let’s participate together, lead this country to prosperity.’...Both people, the colonized and the colonizer have to clean their [minds] and say, ‘this is a new time and let’s march together as partners in development, to make sure that this country is developed’, because...that’s the goal, development...Each and everybody has his role, though small individually, but combined you make a great impact...We used to think about the top-down approach. The government thinks that you need a borehole and they dig a hole and you have no contribution...Government wants a road somewhere, they come and make the road but you have no say. My role at present is to activate, facilitate the people’s participation...They should not only receive, they should have a say, they should have a sense of ownership. They should feel responsible...They should take part in identifying the projects after they have analyzed their needs...My main job is to liaise between the community and other...participants in development, be it the government or the non-governmental organizations.

Fifth, a few narrators adopt a more fundamentally critical relation to politics, Swapo and development. Associated with *political criticism* of Swapo, there is criticism of the development objectives and practice of Swapo in favour of some *alternative*, ‘from below’, approaches to *development*. Some go as far as to propose that democracy is valuable in itself and not only because it secures peace and stability and facilitates development. Interestingly, these views seem to be connected to the overall plotting of the stories; only the dissidents and the deniers express them.

For example, Maria is explicit about her reservations concerning Swapo and the extent of its political power (appendix 1, p. 44 and 46, lines 279-283 and 346-356). Hilma complements a distanced relation to Swapo with sharp criticism of ‘development’ as an elite project:

I’m very sensitive nowadays when it comes to politics because I...know Swapo from exile and that’s all I know...I don’t want to make myself a Swapo or something because I...don’t know...what their strategy is. Are they putting army first, are they putting themselves first or are they putting people first?...How are they going about...nation building...A certain group of people forms [an] opinion, not really ordinary people. Somehow they always decide what society...should be like...[For example], my father [would] never say that [let’s] have English as official language. So ordinary people have no choice but to follow what the elite is saying. They make their decision and make you ratify them...If they come to my village...they see certain things, they pick up those things that they want to promote. And when that happens once and twice and three times...the government policy has to develop towards these

some of those guys who have been appointed to be cabinet ministers it was very clear to me that corruption could erupt very easily. So I was very happy to find out that the two-thirds majority was not won, so that we can have ministers from different parties and to have a very strong opposition, so that those people can be controlled.

Yet, he was critical of what the opposition did in practice, accusing them of trying to hinder the project of development by politicizing the steps taken by the government in this regard.

²⁷⁷ He was working on rural development for an international non-governmental organization.

opinions...There is no participation from the public because the network is limited to a certain group of people...I think until...the African people themselves start...participating in everything, not just in doing but also in the talking and the media and everything, there have to be these gaps...And there [is]...something related...[If] you can afford to pay people to dig wells for you and when you have a well, you lock it, people come to you to ask for water...That gives you some power...Now, if everyone suddenly has like everyone else, you lose that respect...If every house has got electricity, who cares about you, but if you are the only one with electricity everyone who wants to watch something [on tv] has to come to you and you are the centre of everything...Rural elites or those elites who are running the country, they are all afraid of the same thing...There is...some selfishness coming in...Human beings seem to have an appetite for certain things...like one of my friends [whom] I once asked [about] basic needs. His basic needs are that he has a job, he has a house, he has a car and he has some activities...some good social places like pubs or night clubs, places where people of his own kind [go]...And he's serious that these are his basic needs...If you ask an ordinary person like my father, he will tell you that...he needs a house, he needs water, he needs food, this kind of things. If you already have all this food, that everything, why should you worry about it, you are worried about other things, like pleasure.

However, it is the dissidents whose views deviate the most from the unity-stability-development continuum that prevails in the loyalist comments. Gideon is a fierce proponent of the primacy of the basic human rights of liberal democracy:

After independence we [knew]...from past experience...under apartheid as well as under Swapo that we need...a human rights organization...that fights for the rights of everybody...I'm now engaged in ensuring that the constitution is adhered to. It's everybody's constitution, it's not a Swapo or a DTA [constitution], it's the Namibians' constitution...I refuse to be intimidated by anybody. If I believe that what I'm doing is correct then I'm going to do that, rain or shine...Many attempts have been made either to kidnap me or to kill me or to harass me...But these are things a human rights activist will have to expect...Even worse has happened to many human rights activists around the world...We do not say that this thing is popular or [that it] is unpopular. We have to go with our principles, what we really believe in.

Also for Matthew, 'a real democracy where there would be a free flow of ideas, where government would be accountable to the people and where you guaranteed a bill of fundamental human rights' is crucially significant, as in exile he had learned the 'lesson that concentrating power into the hands of a few can become very dangerous.' Therefore he, together with fellow ex-detainees, had formed a party to participate in the Constituent Assembly elections with the aim of denying Swapo the two-thirds majority. He also presents an 'alternative' view of development. While he criticizes the Swapo political programme as a 'utopia' that 'will not be realized' he still sees development as a reasonable goal, provided that it is on the people's own needs and effort.²⁷⁸ At the same time, he is rather pessimistic about the relation between Swapo and 'the people', arguing that the people expect to benefit from voting Namibia into a 'de facto one-party state' under Swapo and the ruling party simply exploits the people's ignorance. (Appendix 1, p. 37 and 39-40, lines 476-484 and 605-630.)

²⁷⁸ At the time of our interview he was employed by a major Namibian NGO.

In sum, ‘development’ appears quite consistently, though in various forms, as a resolute metaphor that carries both the liberation narrative and its alternatives towards the future. In the discourse of the intellectuals, an important aspect of such developmentalism (as well as traditionalism; see chapter 5.5.3) is to lend meaning to such ideas as ‘the nation’ and ‘the people’ and to support one’s own position in relation to these entities. For those in administrative positions, this relation is to a great extent one of control, which the abovementioned discourses serve to legitimize. Thus, even if the centrally planned one-party state has not materialized, the general idea of planning and intentional ‘development’ reigns. It makes no difference if the generally preferred economic role of the state has shifted towards that of a facilitator, instead of that of a producer. By contrast, the idea of ‘development’ conveyed in the narratives of the rank and file is much less abstract and they do not adopt an ‘administrative’ perspective. However, the idea of ‘development’ as gradual, intentional social progress has been adopted by them, too.

This brings us to the consequences or ‘functions’ of development speech. Analyzing Italian working class life historical narratives, Alessandro Portelli (1990) speaks about *uchronia*, meaning an “‘imaginary”, “wrong”, “hypothetical” motif” (*ibid.*: 143) that emerges to reconcile a feeling that, at a certain moment, history has gone wrong, on one hand, and the weight of the actual course of history and the sense that after all such course was inevitable, on the other. To my mind, a closely related mode of thought can be found in many of the former exile narratives of post-independence. However, whereas Portelli’s *uchronic* narratives correct the course of history in an imaginary alternative past, the former exiles project its ‘correct’ and ‘rightful’ outcome into the future. For them, history has not yet gone incorrigibly wrong, it has just been postponed. This idea is most clearly evident in the narratives of those who portray Namibia as an ‘aborted social democracy’, but it is reflected in all visions of ‘development’. The imagery of ‘development’ extends the narrative of national progress, from the times of precolonial harmony via the colonial era, the heroic struggle for national liberation and the attainment of independence, onwards to a prosperous and again harmonious future. It makes the many problems and deficiencies of the post-independence condition more tolerable by positing a new — even if ever elusive — end in a continuing struggle for full liberation. Through the lens of ‘development’, the present always appears as a transitory period.

For example, the ‘radical society’ that had been Peter’s ideal was not established at independence because ‘the world wanted us to have’ a different system. He looked at the present as a battlefield between the forces of ‘financial gains, of profits, of markets, of rapid

growth' and the forces of social justice, freedom, solidarity, comradeship and humanity that he associated with welfare society (p. 197). These were now the two potential courses of 'development' and he hoped that eventually true progress, associated with the latter, would win over maldevelopment, associated with the former. However, as the narratives quoted in this chapter demonstrate, most narrators were far more optimistic, taking the success of the development project for granted. Jesaya provides a particularly apt illustration of this view. Speaking of education, he contrasts the present with the 'stagnation' of colonial time:

This process will take a long time, to bring education at a higher level. The general ignorance of the people is still in place. But the point is that now we are developing, that's the difference between then and now. Maybe the actual difference is not there yet but we have started developing, away from that stagnation...I'm optimistic. I'm sure that after 20 years or 10 years we will find a different Namibia.

In this future orientation, the many examples of concrete improvements in the standard of living, which seem to constitute the essence of 'development' to the rank and file but appear also in the narratives of intellectuals, serve an important role. Meagre as they may be, they 'prove' that there really is movement towards a better future, that there is progress.

6 Alternative emplotments

So far, I have described the variants of the liberation narrative that dominate the narrativizations of former exile experience and traced their past and present origins. I have also demonstrated how the post-independence conditions challenged these narrativizations, a challenge that is often dealt with by cutting the present apart from the life stories proper and by extending the ethos of unity and commitment of the liberation narrative to the end of ‘development’ and thereby to the future. However, the liberation narrative also faced the more systematic challenge of two types of alternative emplotments. The first, dissidence, goes directly against the liberation narrative, mirroring its morale and subject positions. The second, denial, arises as much in relation to the liberationist canon but puts distance between it and the life of the narrated subject. Indeed, these alternatives must be read in relation to the liberation narrative which is the implicit background of their construction. However, the process works both ways; the ‘deviant’ stories also shed light on the making of those stories that correspond with the liberation narrative.

6.1 The dissidents: Matthew

The dissident stories are constructed fundamentally as mirror stories to the nationalist version of liberation history. They too follow the path of gradually achieving collective (and individual) goals through committed effort. Also the self portrayed in these stories is largely similar to that of the heroic (male) narratives of Swapo loyalists. However, in opposition to the liberation narrative, Swapo is transformed from the collective agent of liberation with which one identifies into a totalitarian monster that devours and consumes its own members. To demonstrate these arguments, let us have a look at how Matthew’s story proceeds.²⁷⁹

In his initial narrative, Matthew does not tell anything about his early years but begins with what he says was ‘one of the most important turning points’ in his life, namely starting to sell newspapers as a primary school student. This event appears as the starting point of his politicization and of the course which his life was to take. He tells of the earliest period of

²⁷⁹I interviewed Matthew three times at his workplace. I have also used parts of a shorter interview I conducted with him in July 1992 concerning his work. Of Ovambo origin, he was raised and lived in towns in ‘the south’ before leaving Namibia in 1978 at the age of 19. A radical student activist at the time of leaving, he proceeded through party education in Eastern Europe and became a political commissar and later an editor of PLAN’s bulletin ‘The Combatant’ in Angola. In 1984 he was arrested by Swapo, accused of spying, and held in detention in southern Angola for five years. After his release in 1989 he returned to Namibia where he was employed by a non-governmental organization.

his life only after I ask him about it and even then he places it immediately within the context of colonialism. (Appendix 1, p. 29, lines 1-30.)

By reading the newspapers he sells, Matthew starts to understand what is going on in the country politically. He is politicized further by his teacher who is a Swapo activist as well as seeing the oppressive conditions, hearing sermons about justice, and attending public rallies. After finishing primary school he becomes a Swapo Youth League activist himself because of ‘tribal factors’, because Swapo was active, and because of the example of older boys. All this combines into a picture of growing into politics gradually from an early age and channeling one’s activity rather naturally through Swapo . (Appendix 1, p. 29-30, lines 17-35 and 70-75.)

Like in many other stories, going to secondary school appears as a further step in politicization (cf. chapter 5.1.3). At the school, the students have debates and engage in political discussions and party political arguments. One aspect of these activities is to deal with the dilemma of inferiority by trying ‘to instill black consciousness’ among the students. He is also radicalized in the SYL by reading banned socialist literature. After being forced to leave school — an event that offers a parable for his detention and dissidence by portraying him standing his ground against a superior enemy because he knows he is right — he continues his political activities full-time by joining the national secretariat of the SYL in Windhoek. (Appendix 1, pp. 29-31, lines 36-51 and 75-127.)

After the preparatory narrative of deepening politicization, Matthew proceeds to give a detailed description of why he left into exile. Although political activism and consistent commitment to national liberation have dominated his story so far, he stresses that he would not have wanted to leave but rather continue the struggle inside the country. He tells of having known that there is a possibility ‘to join the liberation army’ or to get education abroad, but having still tried to avoid leaving as long as possible. However, the worsening political atmosphere and threat of arrest force him to go. (Appendix 1, p. 31, lines 128-161.) This is exceptional. In most stories, even those in which immediate circumstances like threat of arrest or violence are given considerable weight as reasons for leaving, also some positive expectations are mentioned. These include general excitement, adventurism, and wanting to be free from harassment and get to fight or to study (see pp. 5.1.4.).

This is not to say that Matthew ‘misremembers’ or ‘misrepresents’ his experience of leaving but rather that any narrator’s remembrance cannot be ‘freed’ from the influence of

subsequent experience. The construction of a life story as a coherent whole is informed by this experience as it enters the vantage point of the present. For most narrators, leaving into exile appears as a decisive moment in their individual participation in the heroic process of national liberation. It has paid off collectively in the form of attaining national independence and, in many cases, also individually through education and upward social mobility. In Matthew's narrative, by contrast, leaving cannot be seen as a part of a similar continuum. Rather, it emerges as a decisive moment in an opposite sense, as he would not have been detained by Swapo without joining its exile organization.

After coming to Angola, Matthew goes to military training at the Tobias Hainyeko training centre in Lubango. He is committed to the liberation struggle but also notices inequality in Swapo's ranks. The combination of militant liberationism and doubts sown by authoritarianism and mismanagement, established here, recurs in his narrative of his subsequent life as a political instructor at Tobias Hainyeko. Similarly, his narrative of his stays and studies in Bulgaria and Hungary alternates between developing a strong allegiance to Marxism-Leninism and having first doubts about socialism in practice. (Appendix 1, p. 31-33, lines 161-248.) Such dualism, of course, fits well into the overall character of his story, in which it is the Swapo leadership, not he and other former detainees, who has betrayed the noble ideals of liberation. It acts as a prelude for the things to come, extending the roots of later failures back in time.

Indeed, what follows is the major turning point of his narrative: his arrest, torture, and detention as a suspected spy. He first outlines the context for this event, describing how the 'spy-drama' started and how it led into an atmosphere of tension and mistrust. He then goes on to a long and detailed account of how he was arrested, tortured and questioned. The pivot of this narrative is the struggle between him and his tormentors over him confessing to being a spy. Facing death, he finally gives in and is taken to prison. In his initial narrative, Matthew jumps directly from being questioned to being released. In our subsequent discussion, he also gives a detailed account of living in detention, describing the horrible conditions of the dungeons and the solidarity that prevailed among the prisoners. (Appendix 1, pp. 33-36, lines 249-414.)

Matthew's story illustrates that Swapo loyalists are not the only ones in whose stories return to Namibia and the constituent assembly elections are a crucial turning point. He tells of the detainees' release and struggle to get back to Namibia and of their partial victory in being able to reveal their treatment to the world. However, their struggle does not end

here. While not committed to national liberation in the form promoted by the liberation narrative anymore, Matthew and a group of other former detainees do not give up collective effort altogether. Rather, they give a new meaning to ‘liberation’, embarking on a campaign to deny Swapo the two thirds majority in the elections, an activity that they see as necessary for the ‘rule of law’ and ‘respect for human rights’ to take root in Namibia. In this way, the narrative of a heroic ‘seeker’ who fights his way through ordeals and obstacles and returns victorious, can be found also in Matthew’s story, albeit in a different guise than in the loyalists’ stories. (Appendix 1, pp. 36-37, lines 415-506.)

In keeping with his dissident point of view, Matthew remains sceptical about the prospects of democracy and development in Swapo-governed Namibia. He stresses the need to deal with the past openly, safeguard the basic rights of the people, and balance the government’s approach to development with initiatives from the civil society. He sums up the personal significance of his detention and the awaited public apology from Swapo by telling of his disappointment of becoming a victim of his ‘comrades’ and ‘brothers’, of losing the opportunity to work for liberation and individual advancement, of being violently separated from his closest people, including his yet unborn son, and of being haunted by the memory of these personal hardships and of companions who did not return. (Appendix 1, pp. 37-40, lines 506-566 and 605-630.)

Overall, Matthew’s story, as well as those of the two other dissidents, is coherent, detailed and strongly ‘agentive’, just like other male ‘intellectuals’ stories. Matthew’s and Martin’s stories mirror the liberationist ‘seeker’ stories, merely replacing the protagonist – antagonist relations of the liberation narrative with new ones and leaving its plot and characters otherwise intact. The ‘object’ of the detainees’ ‘search’ is first national liberation and later, after their detention, democracy and human rights. In this search, they appear as militant heroes actively taking on their adversaries.

However, while Matthew’s commitment appears more through political intellectualism than direct militant action, Martin’s self-presentation is as pure an example of a knight-like militant male hero as possible and up to his conflict with Swapo, an orthodox example of the imagery of the liberation narrative. His story fulfils many of the western autobiographical expectations: It proceeds coherently from one event to another and has clear turnings that are told in detail — a conflict with school and state authorities that, together with the ‘vigour’ and ‘fire’ associated with ‘student radicalism’, leads to his

leaving Namibia; his arrest;²⁸⁰ and the release and return of the detainees. This coherence and evaluation of the turning points construct a unified, active subject — a hero — and convey a morale — of fighting against colonial and, later, totalitarian evil, for human rights. Militant heroism, in the sense of persistent and fearless individual action for collective good, organizes the presentation of self throughout his story. It emerges first as student political activism;²⁸¹ then as turning down an opportunity to get to study and getting to fight instead (p. 126); then as pride taken in contributing to the liberation struggle committedly and unselfishly;²⁸² then in refusing to confess to his tormentors because he is innocent;²⁸³ and finally in fighting for the detainees' cause after returning to Namibia.²⁸⁴

By contrast, in Gideon's story, the object of search is primarily individual freedom and achievement. His portrayed subjectivity is not as militant as that of Martin and Matthew.

²⁸⁰ Martin recognizes the significance of his arrest himself:

The most important turning point in my age of maturity is the day when I was arrested and put in Swapo prison. I used to believe many things; I used to believe in communist ideologies...Those five years were useful...although I lost a lot...I came to realize that...you need to look at things deeper than they appear in the surface...I started to accommodate other people's opinions, other people's ideas...It also [taught] me not to hate.

²⁸¹ 'From 1976 to 1979 I was very much involved in the student movement. I became the leader of the Swapo branch at the...secondary school...I was also a member of Swapo's Khorixas region's executive branch...The main reason of becoming active in Swapo was that...I felt that to fight colonialism the best way was to be united...The second thing...was the element of violence. We realized that in most of our demonstrations against the regime they were using violence...We felt that the best way to fight the regime was...to resist violence with violence. I knew that [Swapo was] fighting a war and I felt that this liberation war was a good means to resist the system.'

²⁸² 'I was very proud, because for me to be a commander of Swapo was to do something...great for my country. Even if I had died I wouldn't have cared...I didn't care whether I was sleeping in rain, whether I was going hungry by the day, whether [it was] summer or winter, I was always ready for the task...I gave Namibia what I could...I don't regret.'

²⁸³ '[We] went to the bush and they asked me: "Tell us your life story". I did that...One guy...said: "You have forgotten something...Tell us who sent you to Swapo, and for what reason, to do what?" I said: "What do you mean by sent?" "Why did South Africa send you to...spy on Swapo?" I said: "You must be crazy, you must be joking...Why don't you show evidence?...Why didn't you bring a person who says that I'm a spy?"...Then they said [that] I should get rid of my clothing. I said: "No way"...They grabbed me...and just stripped me naked and tied me to a tree and started beating me with sticks...This continued for almost two or three weeks..."you are a spy", "I'm not a spy", "you are a spy", "I'm not a spy"...I was getting weaker and weaker in body and soul [but] I decided that I would not say I'm a spy: "Let them kill me if they want to but I will never accept a thing which is not true..."One day they got frustrated...and one guy picked up...a [burning] stick and pressed it on my buttocks...I said:... "I'm fed up...I have decided I will never accept these allegations. I was never a spy, do whatever you want to do." And they put out guns, on my head...A guy wanted to kill me but another guy said: "Let's not kill this guy because [he has] contributed a lot to Swapo's struggle"...Then they took me to a prison.

²⁸⁴ 'When we came back we decided that we should reveal the thing, not because we want to destroy Swapo...but [because] we should tell the truth. It would be haunting to live with these memories...It's a question of integrity, a question of morality, an issue of conscience...We don't create names, we don't suck them from our thumbs, we knew [them] personally...They were born, they were human beings. [For example,] the people with whom I left Namibia, we were 18, we came back only four...I saw many of them in prison and they disappeared...I want to tell the people what dangers there are and what happened...What the detainees want is...those responsible to take the moral responsibility and say that "what happened in Angola is true. We detained you, we have no evidence to show that you were...spies. So, we are...sorry."

Rather, his story is one of martyrdom, of being an outcast and in opposition, and turns around having to go through various ordeals and difficulties in his endeavour to 'make himself'. This motif is established already in his childhood narrative.²⁸⁵ Thereafter it reappears many times: in his narrated motive of leaving into exile, as he tells that he wanted education and did not want to join Swapo because he 'knew already what Swapo could be and what people could do to other people' (see p. 115); in ending up being incorporated in Swapo by accident and because he is fooled by the villain/opponent who pretends to be a helper;²⁸⁶ in encountering malpractices in Swapo camps and being suspected of spying (see p. 137); in being lured into false beliefs by socialist propaganda but remaining doubtful because he 'had a mind of [his] own'; in the fate of his brother, the warning given to him by a Swapo leader in the Soviet Union, the false accusations and threats by Swapo representatives and fellow students (see pp. 168); and in the refusal of various countries and the Lutheran World Federation to help him after he had decided to defect from Swapo.²⁸⁷ After this, his individualism undergoes a shift from martyrdom to heroism. In the United States, where he was granted asylum, he undergoes a 'conversion' to liberalism.²⁸⁸ After his return to Namibia he turns his new beliefs into action for collective benefit, seeking to protect people's constitutional rights and to promote a liberal regime (see pp. 201-202).²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ 'There was hatred towards my family. We were regarded as foreigners, people who moved in from other areas...and we used to be beaten up, literally beaten up by other kids...So I, together with my brothers and sisters, was taught to be independent, to count on what we can do, what we have...We were taught to work hard...to provide for ourselves, not go and beg.'

²⁸⁶ 'I was brought to Zambia by Hisham Omayad and Peter Tsheehama...I told them that I was going to get education and they said, "you can come to Zambia because the United Nations is going to erect a United Nations Institute for Namibia and you can study there", and they said a lot of other Namibians were there...I wanted to get education, so I accepted going to Zambia and when I got there I was told:... "If you want to study here you first have to become a Swapo member." I said: "Fine, it isn't a problem, my aim is to study."'

Omayad was a Ghanaian working for the UN as the Regional Director for Africa in the Office of the Commissioner for Namibia in Lusaka at the time; Pütz, von Egidy, and Caplan 1990: 419. Tsheehama was a high ranking Swapo official.

²⁸⁷ He summed up the morale of these events in the following way:

I had seen it back home when I was brought up, there was discrimination. This world is not fair...You have to be your own master, the master of your own destiny...There is no situation where you just get everything good, you have to strive and fight on your own in order to improve your lot.

²⁸⁸ 'I did not want...to come to the United States because I was made to believe that the United States was the most unspeakable devil of imperialism. But then I started to see...that it was not bad at all, people were free...From that time I believe that it is good to live in a democratic society where [one] can express all his or her words even if there is nothing to eat. That takes off some psychological pressure.'

²⁸⁹ He evaluates his experiences in a similar way as Martin speaks of his arrest:

I thank God that I have gone through [the experiences that I have had]. I would not have been the same as I am, I would have been doing injustice to other people, which I do not believe I'm doing now...So it was a good experience even if there was a lot of bad things. There were times that I thought that I would die...but here I am...There were a lot of people against me...and there are still some who are against me, but due to the fact that I haven't done anything wrong I say that as much as this country is for Swapo or for anybody else it is mine as well...I'm not going to be intimidated by anybody...I'm gonna

All of the dissident stories are carefully crafted and polished, just like the most ‘developed’ liberationist ones.²⁹⁰ Why? And why does Matthew’s and Martin’s arrest and interrogation, or Gideon’s conflict with and breakaway from Swapo, emerge as the most important issue in their stories and not leaving into exile as in the liberationist ones? A partial answer may be found in the multiple previous narrations of their stories in publicizing the former detainees’ and other dissidents’ cause. In this process, their stories have become seamless, ready-made narratives that serve the purpose of justifying them individually and the group of dissidents collectively, both to themselves and to others. The need for this is heightened by the denial of their earlier positions, roles, and identity by being detained and labelled spies, a stigma that they and other dissidents still carried in the eyes of many of their fellow Namibians. They present their stories as testimonies, as vehicles of truth, wanting the facts to establish their innocence and personal worth in the eyes of the world. Therefore their stories are the most detailed when it comes to those parts of it which they do not consider to be part of the prevailing version of Namibian history, like Swapo’s internal conflicts and human rights violations. For them, the existence of a singular truth and one correct interpretation of history is crucially important. They situate the facts and events that they mention exactly in time and space and describe them in detail in order to lend them credibility (cf. Werbner 1991: 109), prove the dissidents’ innocence and legitimate their alternative view of history.²⁹¹

In spite of their attempt to carefully reconstruct aspects of Swapo’s internal politics in exile, the dissidents’ stories are a clear example of revising and ‘re-remembering’ that results from demand of coherence associated with a narrative understanding of a life. This brings us to another line of answering the above questions, one that concentrates on the extremity of their experiences of rejection and mistreatment. In these experiences, their identity came under enormous pressure and had to change. Yet they have to try to make sense of their remembrances so as to create a match between things before, during, and after the

do what I believe is correct and what other people also say is right and what is written in the books of law and in books of justice.

²⁹⁰ Martin’s story is the best example of this, as our first interview resulted in his one and a half-hour monologue, being the longest initial presentation given by any of the interviewees.

²⁹¹ Apart from Matthew’s and Martin’s narratives included in this work, there are numerous other examples of the importance of personal testimonies in the accounts of the ‘spy-drama’. See, for example, Groth 1995: 114-129; Peltola 1995: 155-161; Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement 1997: 34-40. Notably, the former detainees quoted in these works employ the same form, autobiographical narration, in which they were forced to confess to being spies. Cf. Westerman 1994.

watershed of their detention or defection.²⁹² Therefore, the personal catastrophes that shattered their earlier life courses and identities have come to be seen as key events that revealed things in a truer light and initiated a positive transformation in them as persons. Combined to the events that precede their detention or defection, this moment constitutes a major revelation and puts a new narrative sequence in motion, namely that of taking care of human rights and collective well-being against Swapo's predations. In this reading, these stories tell of recapturing and recreating one's individual agency and collective identity after the previous one has been forcefully shattered, without giving up one's commitment to 'liberation' or comparable collective heroic effort. The dissidents have come to cherish a far more liberalist view of an individual's relation to society than the one associated with the orthodox version of the liberation narrative. In serving this ideal through political, human rights, and NGO-activities they have found engagements that are meaningful to their individual pasts and yet retain a collective, 'liberationist' rationale for action. Elections and independence was not a similar closure to them as to liberationists, because the threat posed by Swapo continued in a different form.

In this process of 're-remembering', guided by their present moral perspective, the dissidents may remember and reinterpret events and issues that would not perhaps otherwise appear significant and be included in their narratives. This is well demonstrated by how vocal they are about Swapo's internal problems even when they tell about time *before* their troubles with the movement started, extending the causes and signs of this rupture in their personal history far back in time and elevating conflict, inequality and abuse to a major role in the history of the liberation struggle. Their criticism of Swapo's exile practices and denial of its overall unity is in sharp contrast to the 'maturity' argument of Swapo loyalists, according to which it was a result of one's lack of commitment to have problems. In loyalist stories, the same process of producing meaningful recollection works to the opposite direction. For them, the stress on unity and commitment continuously re-establishes their belonging to the organic body of the movement and lends credibility to their present expectations.

²⁹² However, dealing with this task is potentially painful. Indeed, one of the former detainees whom I contacted refused to be interviewed, saying that he would not like to start digging old things because too many bad memories would crop up again. The dissidents who told their stories to me had adopted a different course, taming their painful experiences by 'going through' them and situating them as stable parts into well-established life stories.

However, Matthew (appendix 1, pp. 32, lines 172-188 and 256-267) and Martin only introduce a rift between the movement's leadership and its rank and file, maintaining that unity prevailed among the latter. According to Martin:

We were really comrades...The way the people could help each other was just tremendous, it was just beautiful. I've never seen people [who] can collaborate like that.

LM: And the relations between different ethnic groups, people from different backgrounds?²⁹³

Martin: I don't think that there was a serious ethnic problem...[among] ordinary people...The only thing is that...there were leaders who used tribal differences to instigate...animosity...An ordinary person, an ignorant person, can be manipulated and there are people who have been...taken advantage of...In the Swapo security service most of the guys were illiterate or semiliterate...And if you told these guys, 'look, that guy is going to take over your position tomorrow', he might get angry, might become a hidden enemy...If a leader for example...called some few guys secretly and informed them that...'I have this evidence, this evidence and this evidence'...they would not question...[They] heard it from a Central Committee member's mouth, so [they] would do it. That's basically what happened.

Here, comradeship is presented as something that arose naturally among the 'ordinary people' and the problems of Swapo are attributed to leaders who have cynically taken advantage of the ignorance of ordinary people. In this way, Martin (as well as Matthew) can carry the heroism and righteousness of the liberation struggle over to his new interpretation of it. Only the leadership was corrupt, not the cause of national liberation and 'the people' who sought to bring it about. Later, when he speaks about development and politics in post-independence Namibia, Martin, like Matthew, extends his thesis of manipulation into the present and portrays himself, together with other former detainees and other critical forces, as the opposition to the corrupt and unjust practices of the government (see p. 5.5.4.).

Gideon denies unity more profoundly, as he tells of having been haunted even by 'ordinary' members of the liberation movement. As with the loyal 'liberationists' and Matthew and Martin, this is in line with the overall tone of the story in which it appears — an individualist story of a victim of collective injustice who overcomes his difficulties to become a 'hero' engaged in the pursuit of human rights.

However, the dissidents' denial of the ethos of exile unity is not without tension. Although they claim that they always relied on what they saw themselves and had doubts about socialist ideology and the practices of the movement, they also tell that prior to their conflict with Swapo, they were drawn to believe in its propaganda and in the Marxist-

²⁹³ I asked this question because I knew of the allegation that the southerners had been disproportionately in the line of fire in the 'spy-drama'.

Leninist doctrine, and felt more or less comfortable with the movement. To my mind, this ambivalence reflects the rift that opens between their identity before and after the turning point of detention or defection. Their remembrances of ‘feeling good about Swapo’ (as Gideon says), and of socialism may well be reflective of how they saw things before their break-up with Swapo. However, such narrated belief is also required as a background for the maturation, ‘conversion’, and wisdom that paradoxically ensued from their misfortunes with the liberation movement. Yet they also need to establish some continuity between what they were before their detention or defection and what they feel themselves to be after it. Hence the assertions of having had doubts and not having wholeheartedly accepted the propaganda that they were bombarded with by the liberation movement and the ‘party schools’. By extending a critical stand towards socialism and exile practices as far back as possible, they claim that already before their eyes were opened by their later experiences, they had tentative presentiments about what they now know. In this respect, the progression of dissident stories from believing socialist propaganda and accepting corrupt practices, via having first doubts about them, to learning to see through them, is analogous to the progression of liberationist stories from accepting colonial subordination and inferiority as a child, via having first doubts about them before politicization proper, to adopting mature nationalism.

The following actant model sums up the major characteristics of dissident stories (after their departure from liberationist employment) and highlights their differences to liberationist ones (see chapter 4.1):

Actant	Actors of dissident stories
subject	the dissident
object	freedom, truth, human rights
sender	morality, one’s own innocence and conscience
receiver	oneself, other dissidents, humanity, the Namibian people
opponent	Swapo, totalitarianism
helper	righteousness and will to survive, other dissidents, critical and liberal forces in Namibia and internationally

The dissident stories consist of several narrative cycles, the last two of which are compressed in the above figure. Firstly, there is the liberationist phase, which ends at the subject’s arrest or disillusionment with Swapo.²⁹⁴ These events disrupt the liberationist structure, setting in motion the second narrative cycle. By ‘revealing’ the truth to the dissidents, their arrest and other revelatory incidents transform Swapo from a benevolent

²⁹⁴ This phase is clearly evident in Matthew’s and Martin’s stories whereas Gideon’s narrative of the time prior to his defection leans more towards denial of than adherence to the liberation narrative; on denial, see next chapter.

helper into the opponent that withholds their freedom. The subject's knowledge of being innocent send him to a mission of surviving and reclaiming his freedom. In this mission, he is helped by his stamina and will to survive and by his companions in detention. The third narrative cycle begins, in the detainees' stories, with their release, and in Gideon's story, in being granted asylum in the USA. Truth about Swapo is not known or accepted by the Namibian people, whose human rights are threatened by the totalitarian tendencies that have taken over the movement. Sent by objective morality, the subject sets out to make the truth known, to thwart Swapo's plans of a complete takeover of power in Namibia, and to protect the dignity of the dissidents as well as the human rights of every citizen. In this task, he is helped by critical and liberal social forces and, more importantly, by knowing what is the truth and, consequently, what is right.

6.2 Deniers of the liberation narrative: Maria

Apart from the dissidents, the stories of a couple of women intellectuals differ consistently from the liberation narrative. Instead of merely mirroring its subject positions, as the dissident narratives do, these stories subvert the liberation narrative more fundamentally. Let us have a look at Maria's story to demonstrate these arguments.²⁹⁵

Her relatively short initial narrative instantly shows where the emphasis of his story lies: on her educational career instead of her participation in the liberation struggle. She first mentions, very briefly, when and where she was born, where she attended school, when she left Namibia, and what she did during her first years in exile. Then comes the turning point: the start of her educational career in exile. Here, her narrative gets more detailed and the rest of it is taken up by the description of her academic career, until she stop her narrative by mentioning her return to Namibia. (Appendix 1, pp. 40 and 43-44, lines 1, 4-5, 36-37, 173, 175-176, 179-181, 210 and 231-248.)

The status of departing into education as a decisive moment is confirmed by her subsequent narration, as we shall see below. In it, going to school in Namibia constitutes the first major phase of her narrated life. She describes the contents of the education she received, the conditions at the missionary boarding school that she attended, and the importance of religion at school and in her life at that time. (Appendix 1, p. 40, lines 3-35.) After this

²⁹⁵ Maria was interviewed twice, once at her workplace and once in a public park. She was born and raised in Ovamboland and left Namibia in 1975 at the age of 17. After a few years in the PLAN she obtained academic education at the UNIN and in Europe. She returned to Namibia at the end of 1991 and found employment in the civil service.

phase comes the first major turning point, leaving into exile, that initiates the next major phase in her story. Telling of the reasons why she left Namibia, Maria is explicit in rejecting liberationism. She first contemplates whether she can still actually remember the reasons and motivations that led into her leaving — a rare observation of the influence of later interpretation to remembering, which stands in contrast to the militancy or other firmly asserted motives of most other narrators. Maria then goes on to say that her decision was not politically motivated and that she only left because she wanted to have better education and because so many others had left too.²⁹⁶ Interestingly, she acknowledges the predominance of the ‘liberation narrative’ by referring to ‘people who are always telling’ that they left into exile to fight for national liberation. She negotiates the pressure of this dominant discourse by explaining that she ‘cannot hide’ the reason why she left — implying that perhaps she should — and by laughing as she tells this. (Appendix 1, pp. 40-41, lines 36-59.) Like Raina (pp. 75-78), she stresses her ignorance about what one could do in exile and says that the decision was not a result of careful consideration.

Having thus drifted into exile, Maria proceeds to tell of her experiences there. The contrast to liberationist stories continues, as her narrative is not one charting a heroic journey but rather one of drifting from one misfortune to another. After crossing the border, she and her companions end up being captured by UNITA, an experience which she describes as ‘terrible’ and ‘frustrating’. When she finally finds her way to Swapo, she receives guerrilla training in ‘terrible’ and ‘awful’ conditions, ‘regrett[ing] very seriously’ that she had left Namibia. She then joins the combatants. This is yet another misfortune, as she turns down an opportunity to get to study because of her immaturity and ignorance, believing that she could return to Namibia sooner by joining the military. Instead, she spends several years in a confused war situation ‘in the bush’ with not enough food and other necessities. (Appendix 1, pp. 41-43, lines 60-179.)

Thus, leaving into exile appears as a major turning point like in liberationist stories. However, it is a negative rather than a positive one. Her narrative of arriving into exile is far from the collective heroism of the liberation struggle. The picture she gives of Swapo’s military training and operations at this time is not flattering, if not explicitly critical either. Her account of Swapo’s relations to the civilians and to UNITA are instructive in this regard. What comes to the fore is confusion, personal suffering and regret, as well as her contempt at the authoritarianism of the military. She also mentions that sometimes there

²⁹⁶ Leaving is motivated in similar terms in the narrative of another ‘denier’, Hilma; see p. 115-116.

were abuses of power. The only good thing is the political morale, which ensures comradeship; without it everything would have collapsed.

Maria's reflections on military life provide another good example of how the narrative demand for coherence leads into revisions in what one sees as significant aspects and events in one's life, how one perceives their meaning, and what processes they are seen to constitute. Maria presents a dynamic view of personality, according to which its development is a natural state of affairs that, in her case, was halted by military conditions. Military life appears as 'vacuum life' in which one's personality is not developed but destroyed.²⁹⁷ Maria is rescued from this destruction only when she gets to study. Only then can positive personality development take place, connecting her present self to something that was there before her involvement in the military, the 'original Maria'. (Appendix 1, p. 46, lines 360-369.)

This may be true, if what is meant by 'personality' is a self-reflective and clearly demarcated individual; its development may require formal education and familiarity with western personality discourses. From the perspective of such a 'personality', life in the military can be revised into a 'traumatic' experience, because of the mismatch of two different normative orders and associated social relationships.²⁹⁸ Indeed, Maria tells of having had difficulties in both learning the military way of life and learning away from its discipline, which she had learned to see as necessary. She admits having accepted interpretations that she does not value anymore, and her contempt towards them may stem precisely from this former acceptance which now, in the light of her descriptions of military practices and social relations and her statements of personality changes, comes close to being a result of brainwashing. (Appendix 1, pp. 43-44, lines 196- 209 and 218-230.)

The foregoing narrative prepares the ground for her departure into education, the main turning point in her narrated life and the fulfillment of what she 'really wanted from the beginning'. The narrative of her educational advancement and of the contrasts between military and civilian life, and between African and European life constitutes the third major phase in her story. (Appendix 1, pp. 43-44, lines 210-266.)

²⁹⁷ However, even military life is not painted in completely dark colours. There is also learning and maturation through political education. Appendix 1, pp. 41-42, lines 100-109.

²⁹⁸ Of course there may be also other, untold, reasons for having such a feeling.

Maria's return to Namibia nearly two years after independence is the culmination of her narrated life, like in many liberationist stories. She ends her initial narrative at this point. Elections and independence also appear as significant landmarks, but only in our subsequent discussion, in her replies to my questions about their significance. In her initial narrative she does not mention these events. Her narrative of return is similarly dual as many others. In it, happiness of coming home after sixteen years of absence and observations about changes in the physical environment are mixed with observing changes that make her sorry. These include migration from the countryside to towns and a transformation of values. (Appendix 1, pp. 44-45, lines 246-248, 277-279 and 292-314.) Indeed, her narrative contains one of the most explicit expressions of the dichotomy between intentional development and the uncontrolled aspects of modernization that amount to 'maldevelopment' (see chapter 5.5.3).

Where Maria again clearly departs from the discourse of the 'liberationists' is in her explicit dissociation from Swapo. She tells of having grown critical of Swapo in exile and of being 'no more a member of any political party'. She also says that she was happy that Swapo did not get two thirds majority in the 1989 elections, as this ensured a balance in the political system and Swapo could not write the constitution on its own. Her multipartyist view developed during her studies in Europe 'because [you] had a liberty of expressing yourself and writing on any subject'. She also complains about the importance of politics in returnee thought. Interestingly, her narrative of these issues is dotted with interjections like 'I cannot hide it', 'I'm sorry', or laughter, that point out the delicate character of the issue. (Appendix 1, pp. 44-46, lines 279-291, 334-338 and 346-356.)

Let us compare Maria's story to the liberationist and dissident ones. I suggested earlier (chapter 4.2) that generally, women tell of suffering and uncertainty more openly than men and do not control these issues as easily by turning them into tests of courage and commitment, yardsticks in the narrative of heroically overcoming obstacles that stand in the way of collective liberation and personal achievement. The deniers' stories are the most radical in this regard. In contrast to the dissident narratives that substitute the protagonist – antagonist relations of the liberation narrative without abandoning its 'seeker' structure, their stories deconstruct the heroism of the 'liberation narrative' more profoundly. Thus, Maria's story is not set in motion by the establishment of a heroic mission that she would set out to accomplish. Rather, she drifts into exile almost accidentally. True, there is also the narrated motive of hoping to get better education. This can be considered as a mission that is interrupted by her long spell in the military. Either way, through ignorance and bad

luck, Maria has to go through various ordeals in exile. She is rescued from them by finally getting to study. This shift initiates a new narrative sequence. It is a story of seeking, but unlike liberationism or dissidence, its focus is not on ascending to a higher plane in the service of a collective purpose. Rather, it is a story of neutralizing a loss, of finding something that has been temporarily lost, in individualist terms. The task is to reclaim her ‘original self’, and she succeeds in it through gaining knowledge and experience by taking up and enduring the hardships of educating herself. The end-point of this latter narrative sequence gets its dramatic resonance from the hardships and suffering of the former one.

The individualist distance of her story from liberationism is confirmed by looking at its narrated subjectivity. Like in liberationist stories, the subject of her narratives about life in Angola and Zambia is frequently ‘we’, whereas before leaving, in Europe and after return it is frequently ‘I’. This is not unlikely to reflect actual differences. However, the ‘we-mode’ associated with life in Angola and Zambia is restricted to the level of describing facts and events whereas they are evaluated in the ‘I-mode’. In liberationist stories, evaluative statements are also predominantly in the ‘we-mode’. A similar phenomenon can be observed also in other stories that deny or challenge the individual subject’s identification with the Swapo collective.²⁹⁹

In the story of another denier, Hilma, one cannot find a similar second sequence as in Maria’s story. In it, the denial of not only liberationism but also of any forms of quest runs right to the end. It is a story of drifting in adverse conditions, dominated by the themes of misfortunes, sadness, and suffering. It conveys an ethos of pessimism and critical distance instead of unity and commitment. For example, in her narrative of leaving Namibia she tells of chaos and hesitation rather than of a firm decision to join ‘the struggle’ (see pp. 115-116). Thereafter, she tells of encountering hostility and loneliness in Europe, of the loss of tradition in contemporary Namibia and of the disruption and loss of her relations to her husband, her mother and her father. What further sets her story apart from the continuation of the unity speech associated with ‘liberationism’ is her criticism of the dominant version of development as a tool of particular interests (p. 201). To an extent, the tone of her narrative is fed by the harshness of her experiences, like being shot by colonial soldiers and experiencing the Kassinga massacre. However, such incidents do not necessarily translate into the kind of story that Hilma tells. Many of the former exiles had painful experiences,

²⁹⁹ These include the dissidents’ and Lucia’s stories.

including violence and loss of personal relations, but in most cases these experiences did not gain prominence in their stories.³⁰⁰

Indeed, even if Maria's and Hilma's stories break free from the heroism of the liberation narrative, they may also be informed by a general narrative model. In Propp's terms, their stories would be termed victim stories. Instead of glorifying 'the struggle', they convey a sense of surviving through it. Instead of setting out to a heroic quest on their own initiative, they are thrown from one place or situation to another by forces and institutions not in their control, that is, by colonialism and by the liberation movement. They are rescued from the misfortunes of exile by education and finally by the peace and individual freedom of the post-independence situation. In Maria's story, military life takes away her self which is returned to her by education. Interestingly, the denial of liberationist emplotment in their stories goes together with an explicitly critical or distanced relation to Swapo.

³⁰⁰ For example, Victor's detailed but unemotional and non-evaluative description of being seriously wounded in the attack is in sharp contrast to Hilma's narratives of violence. Not deviating from the heroic collectivism of the liberation discourse, he tames his experience by treating it firmly in the context of collective subjectivity: he is wounded as a Swapo soldier and becomes Swapo's cadre on the educational front through this event.

7 Conclusion

In the course of this study I have demonstrated that the life stories of Namibian former exiles do not arise from the facts and events of their lives by way of simple determination. Rather, they are best understood as narrative wholes, constructed at a particular moment and in a particular situation through a few basic structures of meaning that direct the selection and interpretation of these facts, events, and their relations. As such, they are both ‘self-representations’ and narratives of wider history.

Let us sum up the main points of the narrative structuration of the stories. First, there are general rules of narrativity. The things and events included in the story are linked together by meaningful relations into one coherent configuration of temporal (and spatial) progression that is constructed from a particular perspective. It also appears that beneath the multiplicity of actors and events of a story there may be a few basic ‘actantial’ positions. Second, the life story idiom presupposes a degree of continuity between the narrators’ experienced subjectivity and the represented, narrated subject. Without such continuity it would not be possible to focus the story to concern an individual life.

However, the above general rules of plotting, portraying agency and narrating ‘a life’ provide merely the skeleton of any particular life story. They are complemented by, third, the dictates of particular genres, in this case especially the liberation narrative with its specifically Namibian actors, events and ethos, and, to varying degrees, the autobiographical genre. Fourth, the narrator’s social context and position as well as the immediate context of narration may influence remembering, the selection of remembrances for narration, and the tone of narration. Specifically, the status of life story narration as a relatively public form of self-discoursing directs their production into relatively monologic accounts of self-justification.

Asking for a ‘life story’ produced responses with recurrent patterns, showing a shared understanding of the narrative ordering of a life. Apart from the general rules of narrativity, summarized above, the genre of the liberation narrative appears as a particularly potent force in the construction of the stories. Originating in literary and other narrativizations of nationalist history, as well as in the historical process of life in exile, it provides a model for narrating lives. In it, the harmony of the precolonial order is lost to colonial predation and has to be regained by journeying to take up liberation struggle in exile. Through this struggle, conducted committedly in unity, colonialism is defeated and the liberation

movement as well as its individual members return to reclaim the country and reestablish harmony.

It could be said that the liberation narrative articulated Namibian nationalism in the stories. However, the liberation narrative does not simply impose itself on them as a single, pervasive historical discourse. Rather, their construction appears to be taking place, in the interplay of the multiple forces mentioned above, on a far less determined discursive field occupied by the dominant discourse and its alternatives. From this process, a few main variants of (life) historical discourse emerge, namely seeker heroism, reproductive heroism, collectivist loyalism, dissidence and denial. Most of the narrators employ one of the first three of these narrative schemes, each one of them a variant of liberationism with different forms of narrated subjectivity and agency. Even they do not relate to an abstract ‘Namibianness’ in the same way. Rather, their common denominators may be restricted, first, to the ideas of ‘unity’ — in the more concrete sense of ‘familiarity’ and comradeship — ‘commitment’ and ‘freedom’ and, second, to narrativizing a partly similar historical trajectory, namely having been incorporated in Swapo in exile.

The few dissidents and deniers adopt a considerably more critical relation to the liberation narrative. However, even they cannot ignore it but have to construct their stories in relation to it. Even they have to take it into account as a presupposition, the silent background for their critical reflections. Thus, the stories are rooted in but not determined by the dominant narrative scheme, the liberation narrative. It enters into the construction of the stories but only through the narrator’s active appropriation whereby he or she ‘negotiates’ his or her remembrances with it. These narrative variations seem to be related to particular incidents in the narrators’ personal past, to gender and to educational background, the latter probably being largely reflective of familiarity with the autobiographical genre. Men’s stories range from seeker heroism through collectivist loyalism to dissidence, while women’s stories oscillate between reproductive heroism, collectivist loyalism and denial.

The above is not to say that the stories are ‘false’ or historically inaccurate. On the contrary, they contain a rich source of historical information as I believe becomes apparent especially from chapter 5, in which I charted the interplay between historical processes and narrative representations. Indeed, each life story has to be true to its narrator’s personal past, both in the sense of being constrained by what actually happened and in the sense of depending on the kind of symbolic resources for remembering and narrating that the narrator has come to ‘possess’ (for example through education). However, the ‘facts’ should be interpreted in the

context of the narratives in which they appear. As much as the lived historical experience of the narrators resonates through their narratives, it has to conform to general rules of narration, to specific genres, and to the demands of the narrative situation. Single 'facts' and 'events' find their meaning and come to be included (or left out) in relation to the narrative as a whole. Therefore, what can be expressed is constrained by the narrative scheme that is being followed. Although there may be various narrative schemes, all the narrators have to follow one. They cannot choose 'their' representations at will but have to tread the terrain of grasping the world through intersubjectively formed, structured discourses.

Thus, narrated life stories are neither mere sets of retrieved memories nor arbitrary inventions but an instant in the ongoing process of actively making sense of, explaining, feeling, justifying and thus, remaking of one's 'history' and 'self'. Through this process, things that are remembered come to be successfully incorporated in narrative schemes, left out intentionally, or forgotten. Because of the demand of coherence, a particular remembrance may be included or not depending on whether it fits into the account as a whole. It either has to be given such an interpretation that it can fit or it has to be left out. Therefore, life story is likely to be a relatively stable structure where new experiences are incorporated in the existing narrative scheme. Such constant minor revising does not happen only at the moment of narrating a story but continuously in the give and take of everyday life. The workings of such a demand of coherence can be seen for example in the way in which the loyalist narrators, those who tell liberationist stories, leave the internal politics of Swapo completely out of their stories or portray them as minor issues and tests of commitment. Likewise, it can be seen in how views concerning post-independence politics and development are in line with the variations in narratives of personal history; dissidents and deniers express more critical views than others.

However, a major change in lived experience (or the adoption of new narrative resources) can lead to revisions in which the story comes to be ordered from a new vantage point, to conform with a new narrative scheme, a new 'paradigm'. Indeed, such revisions seem to be a major factor behind at least a part of the variation in narrative schemes. At such points, major changes occur in what is remembered and what falls into oblivion, what are the things included in the story and how they relate to each other. The work of revisions can be seen, for example, in the way the dissidents whose problems with Swapo started in the 1980s remember the social and material problems of the 1970s as worse or lay more emphasis on them than those who were never detained. And at another end of relating to

the liberation narrative, in some rank and file stories, liberationism, with its emphasis on unity, seems to be strengthened to the point of approaching sacrality because of its contrast to the challenges of the present.

Still, even stories that have been radically revised are bound to carry traces of previous narrativizations. They may highlight a point at which the vantage point from which the past is seen has suddenly switched, thus making visible the multilayered construction of life stories, the way in which they arise not only from the present of narration but also from past moments of 'self-reflection'. For example, the dissidents tell of having believed in socialist ideology and having 'felt good' about Swapo before their 'eyes were opened' by their detention, and Maria tells of having considered military life as the normal condition before hers were opened by education and individual freedom.

There is also a more practical conclusion to be drawn from reading the former exile stories. A majority of them is dominated by a collectivist ontology of agency. This is related to the received wisdom that political allegiance should not be seen as a mere free-willed individual choice. However, I hope that this study in its part demonstrates that it should not be inferred directly from a primordial and unchanging 'African mentality' either. Rather, it must be seen as rooted in one's personal history as a whole, and in continuous communication with other aspects of one's lived experience.

Finally, one faces the question of how this story might be revised after being brought to a temporary conclusion. There are three alternative ways forward. First, understanding life story as a site for structured 'self-making' and of discursive struggles leads to the hypothesis that a further study among the same individuals or people with similar backgrounds would possibly yield life stories that differ from earlier ones, reflecting changes in the social conditions of narrators, especially in the discursive climate around them, and their reinterpretations of their lives to justify themselves in those new conditions. The forms, the extent and the 'mechanisms' of such changes would be the subject matter of such a study. Second, through a longer period in the field, and learning Oshiwambo, it would be possible to dig deeper into the informal discourses of history and society, and compare these with those of the life story presentations. Third, a more systematic popular history of exile life, from the perspective of ordinary exiles and their everyday experiences, is also awaiting to be done.

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Appendix 1: Seven life stories

Note: Initial life story narratives are presented in bold type, and material obtained by further questions in normal type. My questions are indicated by my initials (LM), and my additions and clarifications are set in parentheses.

John

1 **I was born in 1954 in Ongwediva, actually a homestead between Ongwediva and Oshakati. [It] is no longer**
 2 **there. There are few of these traditional houses left because of Ongwediva becoming a town and**
 3 **[Ongwediva and] Oshakati coming together. My mother and father are peasants, the typical peasants of**
 4 **rural Ovambo. And I was born in a traditional family whose main source of survival was the mahangu field**
 5 **and cattle, goats, so as a boy I was raised by my father to look after cattle. Cattle was everything for my**
 6 **father and for me as well. For this reason I started school very late, my father actually objected to the idea**
 7 **of me starting school when I was six, so I started school six years later, at the age of 12. I remember when I**
 8 **tried to attend the first school, my father took it strongly and asked who is going to take care of his cattle. I**
 9 **don't blame him, he was right that time and in his own way because he didn't see a reason why I should**
 10 **learn, what I was going to get from school. One of the objections he told me [was] that the school was a**
 11 **plan by the white man, a conspiracy to steal the children from their traditions, for the white man to step**
 12 **forward. The school was a strategy to destroy the traditions and steal the land, colonize, conquer the land.**
 13 **He was against all Christian blacks. He said, 'yeah, these people are crooks', and I [have] realized that he**
 14 **was right to a certain extent. Education is good but he knew what was going on, the plans of taking over**
 15 **Ovamboland and the chiefs not playing a role as they were supposed to. The white man came there to**
 16 **collect the Ovambos to come and work on the contract system, [my father] included. He didn't want me to**
 17 **have any connection with anything that the white man was trying to do.**

18 I come from a family of more than 20 people. But my background goes back to the family of my grandfather. I
 19 was named after him. He was a senior headman. And this was a traditional man. I can't remember but I know that
 20 there were about 50 people in one homestead and as a traditional man he had many wives. My own family, my
 21 father's, [was] about 20 [people]. My father had two wives, while my grandfather had more than that, might have
 22 been about ten, so my father decreased it to two. I didn't see anything wrong with that and still I don't think
 23 something was wrong with that in the sense that it was culture, it was their tradition and and it has only been
 24 stopped by Christianity and western culture — actually western culture is Christian culture. Both these wives, one
 25 of whom is my mother, I call them both mothers, which is our tradition, and I could end up in any kitchen, could
 26 sit anywhere and eat, so it means there was harmony, there was nothing wrong. I miss those years when we had a
 27 lot of children playing around.

28 [The] only sad story I can tell about that [time] is when my parents got divorced. It was in the mid-sixties when my
 29 mother became a Christian, actually both wives became Christians. To be baptized, she was told that she cannot be
 30 a Christian and belong to a congregation if she is married in a polygamic family. The church forced my mother to
 31 divorce and forced me [and] my brothers and sisters to experience that trauma of divorce while we didn't know
 32 what was wrong, what happened. The other wife also left because she also got baptized [and] they said any one of
 33 the wives have to leave. Only one had to remain and on the moral point of view no-one can say, 'well, I stay',
 34 because both were married and there was no reason to leave apart from the church. Who is going to leave? When
 35 my mother left the other one had to leave also because it appeared that the remaining one was the reason for the
 36 other one to leave.

37 That's the bitter experience that I still [have not] forgiven the church. That's why I don't go to church these days. I
 38 believe that if there is something wrong with polygamy then it is from the Christian point of view but not from the
 39 point of view of our traditional Namibians. If we had to discourage polygamy why did it have to be done in such
 40 a way that someone had to suffer? I think it is not the best way of getting rid of polygamy where the children have
 41 to suffer. I'm not a victim but I was as a child, seeing the quarrel and the separations and all these problems while
 42 I knew that we were ok. There was nothing wrong. I regard my brothers from the other wife of my father as
 43 brothers, full brothers. My sisters and brothers, we have quite a good relationship, maybe because we have
 44 experienced problems and we know that our family was falling apart, because for us that was a family of my father
 45 and his two wives and we as children. In our tradition it was accepted. I'm not saying it should come back, myself
 46 I can't imagine having two wives now, but I think it should be discouraged gradually, maybe through a sort of
 47 education. When they marry many wives maybe some [things] dictate that, because if people depend only on
 48 mahangu fields you need a work force to work that field to survive hungers. Put these people together as a
 49 community and the best thing to consolidate this is by traditional marriage, which means you need maybe three
 50 wives to work.

51 During those years my father had a lot of cattle, we ate milk, butter, we took care of the cattle. I was actually the
 52 first son of my father. We had everything. If you have been in Ovambo you know there is everything, there is beer,
 53 there is mahangu and playing, dancing. Up to now I know the traditional dancing from my father. My grandfather

54 was actually the last person to have kept the traditional Kwanyama drums. Now they are not there, I'm looking for
 55 them. I can still play them, I can dance the traditional dances. I learned them there, these are things that made me
 56 as a person, as an Ovambo. I cannot be an Ovambo without these things and these are the things that have been
 57 destroyed by the church and it means the churches are destroying that love between us, you see. To me it's bitter.

58 We were well-off, maybe sort of middle class but by then we couldn't talk of class. We were wealthy because we
 59 had cattle, the cattle provided milk, and my family was a ruling family in that community in the sense that my
 60 grandfather was a headman and by inheritance my father is headman as well. Myself I could be headman as well.
 61 We had enough fields to feed us when it rained. I have experienced hardship during days of drought but under
 62 normal conditions we were well-off. What was a good family in those days? It was a family that had everything.
 63 You had to have cattle, you had to have goats and if you had extra things like a horse then that was a well-off
 64 family. My father was sort of an attorney general of that area, who could go to the king, or to the chief because we
 65 don't have a king in Kwanyama anymore, since the death of Mandume.¹ It was my father who defended cases in
 66 our area. Normally every ward was governed by a headman, and the headman had his spokespersons who were
 67 going to participate in cases. My father was that person. He went there by horse and a horse in those days was
 68 Mercedes Benz (laughs). So he was sort of a spokesman, a foreign minister for our ward. So it was not really a
 69 poor family in the community, we had cattle, milk, we were self-sufficient, we produced by ourselves. We were
 70 independent, we were not buying from shops.

71 **I started school around [19]66. It was called [the] year of helicopters, 1966, because we saw helicopters in**
 72 **the sky of Ovambo for the first time. Apparently those were military helicopters. We didn't know what was**
 73 **happening, apparently [it was] after the first clash between PLAN fighters and South Africans. Many**
 74 **things were new to me, it was sort of a turbulent, very interesting atmosphere. [At] school I was told that I**
 75 **had to be baptized and to be given another name. I was baptized only at the age of 14, two years later. I**
 76 **[had to] change my name, my lovely name, to a Christian name.**

77 **Another thing was that I used to attend meetings every Sunday. I didn't actually understand what was**
 78 **going on but I heard people singing about Africa, for the first time I heard the name Africa. I [attended] a**
 79 **missionary school [and] there was a man called Leo and many others whom I knew, they came together. He**
 80 **mentioned that Africa was going to be free, he was talking about the wind of Africa, he was talking about**
 81 **those things, freedom. The more you knew the more you started to fear because people were being arrested,**
 82 **one by one, those who were involved in these meetings. Then we took a know nothing stance. The army**
 83 **could come, the police could come, asking: 'Do you know Swapo?' Then you would say: 'No, I don't know**
 84 **anything but I have heard about it.'**

85 **1974 is a year which remains in my memory. That year many of my friends left to join Swapo in exile and I**
 86 **was for the first time at the crossroads to decide should I go to join Swapo in the struggle or should I go to**
 87 **work after my standard six. Coming from a poor family, there was a problem that there was no-one to pay**
 88 **for my school or take care of me financially. I postponed the struggle first because I discussed it [with a]**
 89 **friend of mine and we advised each other that it would be better to go and join the struggle with a little bit**
 90 **of education. Maybe we could finish standard six or standard eight or secondary school. We foresaw the**
 91 **situation of ending up fighting in the bush if [we would] just go and fight and then you wouldn't have**
 92 **education unless [you] studied first. Then we would be well equipped either for further study or even for**
 93 **fighting if it would be better. I proceeded to secondary school. I went to attend the first secondary school**
 94 **headed by a black man in Ovambo, Oshakati secondary school. By then I was already a matured man.**

95 **In 1976 was the second struggle in myself that I considered leaving the country to go and join the struggle**
 96 **in the bush. That was because the first resolution which led to 435,² was the basis of 435, it failed. They**
 97 **were talking of Namibia becoming independent, so it failed and then the South Africans militarized the**
 98 **whole Ovambo. They started militarizing the schools, they started sending South African soldiers, white**
 99 **soldiers to schools. It started with Ongwediva where all the teachers were white soldiers with uniforms and**
 100 **automatic weapons and they started indoctrinating people at school.**

101 **They came to us several times, almost every month we had one black official and one white official telling**
 102 **us that it was time to consider joining the army of South Africa to protect or to defend the country from the**
 103 **communist invasion. And we started asking questions. I remember asking them that 'man, who are these**
 104 **communists? Are you talking about the men and women who just left our school last year and previous**
 105 **year? We cannot consider them communists, apparently those are our sisters and brothers, and we do not**
 106 **want to join the army with the South Africans anyway.'** So an argument was going on, of course including

¹ Mandume, the last Kwanyama king, refused to submit to Portuguese and South African authority and was consequently killed by South African forces in 1917. He has become a staple figure in the gallery of heroes of nationalist history.

² Apparently, John refers to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 385 of January 1976 that called for free elections and Namibian independence. It was superseded by a modified resolution 435 in September 1978.

107 other friends of mine, but I was one of the people who actually could stand up and ask why this and that,
108 why [did] they introduce a pass system [for example].

109 That same year our school fought with the first group of South African recruited black soldiers, the first
110 black soldiers to join the South African army. It was the embryo of Koevoet,³ it was Koevoet in the making.
111 They beat up two or three of our colleagues when they were walking to go and buy some groceries. They
112 asked [for] their kopkaarts⁴ and they showed them [their] kopkaarts but they said: ‘We know you are all
113 political, you are all Swapo, we beat you up.’ They beat [them] up so they came back bleeding. So we
114 mobilized the whole school and followed them up to the shops of Frans Indongo,⁵ he was still in the centre
115 of Oshakati, non-white area, and we beat them with stones, we nearly killed one. [They] arrested all of [us],
116 the whole week we [were] just moving between police, headman, police, headman, we sat in the truck, 200,
117 all of us in one truck. It was the year of confrontation [with] the first group of Koevoet, by then it was not
118 called Koevoet anyway.

119 That year proved to me that I could no longer live in Namibia. Having fought with these soldiers and
120 staying in Oshakati I remember during weekends when my colleagues went home I was left alone, walking
121 around. There was nowhere to go, some of these soldiers knew me and it was one of the reasons that I had
122 to join Swapo in exile, to go and fight only a few months after that. There was no time to waste anyway, so I
123 and more than half of the whole class went while I was still in secondary school, went into exile.

124 I knew that I needed better education opposed to bantu education. I wanted to study somewhere and I was sure
125 that Swapo could provide me with that education because it was clear to me from Swapo programmes. But that
126 was not [the only] reason for me to leave the country. I left during the escalation of the war and I had seen people
127 with guns intimidating or terrorizing myself and my people. The final decision was the third [time I] thought of
128 leaving. The first one, I didn’t want [to leave] because I wanted at least to have high school, second, I couldn’t go
129 because it was not clear to me how I should go about it, but the last [time] I couldn’t stay because my life was in
130 danger. [However,] I didn’t go [merely] because my life was in danger. I wanted to go [and] I couldn’t postpone
131 [it anymore]. I should have gone [anyway] because I wanted to respond to the culture of guns and I knew that over
132 the barricade there were guns for me. Swapo made it clear through its information that ‘we have guns for those
133 Namibians who want to liberate themselves and defend themselves’. With my friends, we said: ‘Well, why should
134 I be intimidated because this guy has a gun? There are guns [over there].’ I wanted to take a gun and shoot back.
135 Let’s be honest about it, I was ready and I wanted to shoot back. Education was the second priority, if I could just
136 shoot back for a while and respond to the fire and then later I would go and further my study. That [was] what
137 happened although I didn’t have enough time to shoot back. I was sent to school, although I was trained and I was
138 a member of the military wing for a certain time, for not more than a year. I was in a uniform and [I had] a gun in
139 order to protect my brothers and to fight the occupation army.

140 [Our departure] was well organized, we hitch-hiked to far northwest in Ombalantu after school, two
141 o’clock, with all my friends. Most of them are [now] serving in our government that we helped to bring to
142 power. [In] Ombalantu we waited, we [were] pretending that we were just looking for some drinks. Nine
143 o’clock in the evening, when it got dark, we took off. The group became [bigger], some people were from
144 Ongwediva, some were from Okahao, some were from schools in Ombalantu. We became a big group, all
145 but one boys, and we went on foot to Angola during the night, it was on the 22nd [of July]. It was a difficult
146 night because although we had some people who knew the road we had to be careful dodging the South
147 African army. It’s fascinating that we managed, a group of about a hundred people managed to cheat the
148 South African soldiers who were guarding the border. That gave us encouragement that Swapo could
149 successfully fight these people, I mean if a group of about a hundred civilians could pass through. They were
150 firing lights in the air. We came just under the lights but fortunately they didn’t see us. We could hear
151 shots but we had some people leading us, actually we got contact with guerrillas. The contact [had been]
152 made in advance because we knew them. We asked them to help us going through. We walked the whole
153 night and luckily enough Angola was not so far, I mean the [part of] Angola we were going to. We were not
154 interested to go to Luanda. We went to the bush and we crossed the border around midnight and we met
155 an old man, an Angolan civilian who had contact with guerrillas and we talked to him.

156 Around seven or eight o’clock in the morning we met the first guerrillas and we recognized one friend of
157 us. He is now a fully qualified medical doctor. We met him at the front with his AK-47. He was one of the
158 men who inspired us that we had made it. Here was the man who was one of our heroes, he was a football
159 player, he used to play in Ongwediva and he had a brother in our group. It was like meeting someone you
160 had thought was dead, like someone who went first to heaven and then you arrived there and found him,
161 because in those days leaving the country to go to Zambia or to Angola, to go into exile, was seen as equal

³ Koevoet was a police counter-insurgency unit that was founded in 1978 and composed mainly of black Namibians.

⁴ Identity documents.

⁵ Indongo was a wealthy Ovambo businessman and Minister of Economic Affairs in the South African backed Ovambo administration.

162 to death because no-one could come back. You couldn't come back, you just went, until we came back
 163 before independence. So we thought: 'Now we came to heaven because this man is here, he's alive, Jesus.'
 164 Then we met many others. When you arrived they started a song for us, a popular [liberation] song which
 165 Ndilimani⁶ sings (hums the song). It was great, it was fantastic and they gave us encouragement, these few
 166 men. They were a group of maybe 20 guerrillas, they were just under the trees, you couldn't even see where
 167 there was a person. And they had some AKs, some Bazookas and some strange weapons and we were
 168 encouraged that 'these guys really can make it with these strange looking things' that we were seeing for
 169 the first time.

170 The first day we walked with two of them, they escorted us to a further base. We walked and then we
 171 arrived at a base called Vietnam which was destroyed a year later together with Kassinga. It was where we
 172 stayed for a week or two weeks undergoing first training, to protect yourself, first training in guerrilla
 173 warfare. And we were lucky, our group. Apparently it was noticed in the leadership of Swapo, they had
 174 headquarters in Luanda and in Lusaka, that 'there's a group of students who are able to continue', because
 175 we crossed in a big number. Swapo had a good policy that I cannot forget that the struggle should be
 176 waged on different fronts. The first one military front, the diplomatic, political, actually mobilization, and
 177 education was one important part of the front as a whole.

178 It was the year, I think, that the United Nations Institute for Namibia was established and opened⁷ with the
 179 aim to prepare, educate Namibians to take over administration when South Africa had been defeated. And
 180 Swapo had already established, long before, the Department of Education and Cultural Warfare and the
 181 message was sent that 'those young men and women who are coming straight from school should move
 182 towards Luanda, for in the future they are going, some of them, to attend courses in Lusaka, at the
 183 Institute'. So we left that first base where we had spent a few weeks and then we proceeded to Kassinga
 184 where we stayed again, I can't remember now exactly how many months, but for quite a long time. And
 185 Kassinga was a transit camp with a few soldiers just to defend [it] but a lot of children and many handicaps
 186 and pregnant women. It was a transit for anyone coming from Luanda to the front maybe after having
 187 recovered or anyone from the front going either to school or for medical treatment.

188 We ate once a day, and because there were many groups we had our own platoon. Every platoon would go and
 189 make bricks or do something [else] because we had a lot of construction work going on to build up the camp. And
 190 sometimes, because there were many groups, your group might eat at five, which meant that from the morning till
 191 five or six [in the evening] you didn't eat. I remember when the situation became critical a friend of mine said:
 192 'Jesus, man, really it's tough. If I knew I wouldn't have come.' Then I told him: 'I think I would have come
 193 because that's the price.' There was propaganda on the radio that people are starving, dying of hunger, which was
 194 not true. Food was there but there were situations that did not allow you to have food all the time, because it was
 195 an extraordinary situation.

196 I was talking to this friend of mine, I said: 'Why do you think these people are here fighting, they are not
 197 producing food? Definitely one has enough food so I think I could have taken the decision.' It was only during
 198 special times when you didn't have enough supplies. That means maybe the trucks that brought supplies couldn't
 199 come that week because they were afraid of armed action from the enemy. But I had a clear picture, I knew that I
 200 wanted education, I might not go to school, I might end up in the army and fight whereby [it] was clear that you
 201 would go there and fight. I knew I might die and I was ready to die because I knew clearly that people are dying in
 202 the war. I was grown up, I was 22 when I left the country. And I was proud to participate. I didn't want to be an
 203 outsider in the liberation movement. It was clear to me what might happen and I wanted to be part of that difficult
 204 situation.

205 From Kassinga [we] proceeded to Luanda. In Luanda I celebrated a national day for the first time, 26
 206 August in the stadium of Luanda and it was fascinating to hear so many people, all speakers one after
 207 another speaking about Namibia. I couldn't understand Portuguese but I could hear the mentioning of
 208 'independencia', 'solidaridade', all those things, all those good words. We stayed in Luanda for quite a
 209 while, then we left for Zambia where I spent some time as a PLAN [member]. 1978 was a difficult year for
 210 me and for my friends in Zambia. Although I was attending a school we had to be called from classes after
 211 Kassinga was attacked and destroyed by South Africa. So we were mobilized and ready for any attack
 212 from South Africa in Zambia as well because there was information [that] South Africa was hunting for
 213 any place. The time when Kassinga was attacked I was in Nyango which was an education centre of Swapo
 214 but we had to be mobilized and go in the bush and be ready. I caught malaria because of mosquitoes and I
 215 spent sleepless nights in trenches waiting for a South African attack.

216 At the end of [19]78 I was lucky, I passed my exams in the Namibian education centre and I was sent to
 217 Europe to study after I successfully completed my school in Zambia. Before I was enrolled in the university I
 218 had to start a preparatory course for the language and some subjects in social sciences because I was going

⁶ A Swapo 'cultural group' established in exile.

⁷ UNIN was opened on the 26th of August 1976. Dreyer 1994: 113; Dobell 1998: 62.

219 to do social sciences and journalism. Then I passed successfully with good marks and was enrolled at the
 220 university. It was to take me five years to complete because it was a five-year Master's degree course. In
 221 1984 I completed my Master's degree with high marks and my final examination with excellence, and my
 222 thesis was confirmed with excellence. I had to do that because I had an ambition to continue with my Ph.D.
 223 degree, I [had] developed an interest in political science. I applied to the Minister, now Minister of
 224 Education, the Swapo Secretary for Education and Cultural Warfare, Nahas Angula, who with no
 225 hesitation allowed me to continue with my studies.

226 In Hungary I was safer [than before] because Angola [was] a battlefield and Zambia as well. Socially being with
 227 my people in Zambia and Angola was more interesting to me, it was better being with many people. The second
 228 year and the third year were critical to me in Hungary because I wanted to come back to the camps and be with my
 229 people, I was counting years. Then the interest grew after I was moving toward my final examination to defend my
 230 Master's, I thought that it will be of help if I do my Ph.D. thesis. Life in Hungary also influenced me much
 231 politically because it was a country where people were well informed about world politics and they were people
 232 who followed a policy of solidarity towards the suffering people all over the world and it was exciting for me to
 233 see ordinary people who thought about other people's problems. In Zambia and in Angola, socially I could say
 234 that there is a difference between [them and Hungary]. Hungary was more advanced, I mean [in terms of] welfare
 235 but in life there are things that [one] cannot explain; I still wanted to be with these people, I wanted to go back and
 236 see what's happening, influence developments, you know, it's my life. Sometimes one is sort of addicted to his life
 237 and doesn't want to change it with anything else, though I came back only when [the resolution] 435 was
 238 implemented.

239 We [Namibians] were more than one family because no-one had a mother there, no-one had a brother there, no-
 240 one had anything. In exile people were as brothers. It didn't matter whether it was in Hungary or in Angola
 241 because I remember that in the camps in Zambia we were one because we were united by that one goal, one ideal,
 242 that we had to care for one another as brothers because we were fighting for one cause and we were educated in
 243 that spirit by Swapo, so much so that we shared everything. You could find someone eating and start eating
 244 uninvited. It was another way of life, individualism was gone. It was not really a result of ideas of sharing, of
 245 socialism, not necessarily. It was determined by the fact that this was your comrade, you were fighting together
 246 and if he was alive you benefited, you couldn't afford to lose anyone. The more fit people you had the better. I
 247 think that there is comradeship among any group that has got a common ideal, especially when you have common
 248 hatred for something. Though we had a common love for Namibia, we [also] had a common fear and a common
 249 hatred. If you have got only common love for something then you can like one another, but if you have common
 250 hatred then you come together. In the struggle we had both common hatred towards our enemy and common love
 251 for our country. That put together was common interest, common goal, that put people together, so socially we
 252 were together. It meant one was obliged to care about others, even social problems, including if a fellow quarreled
 253 with [his] girlfriend [you had] to intervene. In a free country like now [people think:] 'Why should I care,
 254 whatever one does to another one, it's personal.' [There] it was a common interest.

255 LM: You [also] got married in Hungary. Was it all the time clear to you that you were going to come back to
 256 Namibia?

257 Yes. Being a Namibian and a revolutionary I regarded [I] needed a wife, and that would be a wife of me as well as
 258 of a revolutionary, so that wife should join everything that I aimed at.

259 **I completed my Ph.D. degree just on time, in 1989. It was a coincidence, just before I led the group of my**
 260 **colleagues to come back and join the Swapo election campaign in 1989.** I was the student leader there, leader
 261 of the Namibian students' union or section, students' representative, coordinating with the headquarters in Luanda
 262 or with our embassy in Berlin. **I [have] noticed that many major changes take place in my life during**
 263 **wintertime and during the same dates. I was born in winter, in July, and I left Namibia on July 22 and then**
 264 **I packed my luggages in July to come because the people came from exile, the first ones came in June and**
 265 **then the students arrived in July. Big changes take part in my life in July and it's nothing, just for interest.**
 266 **It was again in July when we started organizing the visas and packing and we were supposed to travel, I**
 267 **was supposed to travel in July but I came in September. We were the last group to arrive in September for**
 268 **the election campaign, we were delayed because of these arrangements.**

269 [My return] was something like a dream. When I landed at the airport all of us start clapping hands that 'we have
 270 landed, is it true, have we made it?' [It was] unbelievable because for us this was a country with a lot of Koevoet.
 271 And there was something, the people, the majority who welcomed us, they were sort of depressed. I remember that
 272 you saw people on the street who were not really free psychologically and not sure of themselves, but of course
 273 they had determination that they wanted to change their lives. But for me everything was strange, it was something
 274 like a promised thing, like a dream that really came true. I couldn't believe that I had landed after so many years
 275 and now I was here. [I thought:] 'Is this really Windhoek, is this really Oshakati?' Everything was special, and
 276 another thing is that I find myself strange because few people know me, few people can remember me because
 277 there are new people who moved in my area, they don't know me. Then [they would ask:] 'Who are you?' I would
 278 say [who I am and they would say], 'I thought this person is either coming from Angola or from somewhere else,'
 279 and I would say, 'oh, what the hell, this is my area and I'm supposed to be a headman in this area, then you ask me

280 where I come from' (laughs). I still experience that. They come, 'ok, where do you come from?' I say: 'Don't ask
281 me, otherwise I'll ask you to pay tax.' So, everything was strange and still is. With time, wherever I go, I'm still
282 rediscovering, still getting used to something.

283 There are changes in the mentality of the people, sometimes they are for good and [sometimes] they are for worse,
284 especially among the youth. The majority of the young ones have changed for worse, the values. The young ones
285 do not have the values that we had. It seems that the young people are goalless, they don't have goals, they don't
286 have plans for the future, most of them. [I don't know] whether it's their fault or not but even the students of
287 today, I don't see them learning hard as we used to do. People were more ambitious in the sense that people had a
288 clear vision. I find that most matric students today don't know actually what the whole life [is] about, what they
289 could do in life. Few know but not all of them while when I was at high school almost everybody could tell you
290 what he needed in life, though as far as education [is] concerned [they] were not exposed to different fields. What
291 you could take was only to become a priest, a teacher, and maybe a mechanic, but despite that you knew what life
292 was in this country. But I observe an unseriousness, a lack of vision among many young people in this country,
293 that's the difference. Another thing that has changed [is] that the young people lack moral values. During my time
294 you hardly saw a young man either being rude to an elder or getting drunk or stealing something from an elderly
295 person, or harassing an elderly person, especially in my area. Every elder was respected and people would say,
296 'ah, how could that happen?', if something wrong happened. Now it's normal, if nothing wrong happens to an old
297 person because he passes through the street, people could say: 'Oh, how did it not happen?' That's the difference,
298 the mentality of the people, they believe it's normal anyway for something wrong to happen though it's abnormal,
299 something wrong happening to a person who walks, so those are the differences with the young people. Maybe it's
300 unavoidable.

301 **I joined the Swapo directorate for elections, I mean the Department of Mobilization and Information. We**
302 **established Namibia Today as a newspaper, Swapo newspaper, and were the first journalists to work on**
303 **that paper when it was launched in Windhoek, although we had Namibia Today published in exile.** I was
304 not satisfied [with the election results] although we won because I had expected more. I was happy in general that
305 justice had been done, that the people had won at last, though not with the percentage that they deserved. Justice
306 has been done because the people who were supposed to win, they won. It is normal, it's logic, it's not something
307 like football, it's something historically [inevitable]. We came back home because we were going to win, to
308 complete that cause, so I was happy anyway.

309 LM: Do you remember what you were doing on the day of formal independence?

310 I was sitting with my wife watching Sam Nujoma and de Klerk, watching the flag of South Africa going down and
311 the Namibian one going up and de Klerk holding his heart. I was sitting close to Dirk Mudge, Muyongo⁸ and
312 observing everything, interested in how they react. I observed everything. I'm lucky to have been [there], I was on
313 the parade during that day of independence and my sister was just behind me, [she] was in a group of women,
314 Swapo Women's Council came from Oshakati to perform and I was taking pictures. I was actually in the centre of
315 that event, about ten metres from the group of leaders, less than a metre from Desmond Tutu, for the first time to
316 talk to him. He was sitting close to me and I got an autograph from him. That's not a big issue but I saw him for
317 the first time. You see I observed everything, I was observing the goal being scored that we had been playing for
318 during those years and then when the ball entered the net I was there.

319 **After the elections I was employed at the then Academy, at the University of Namibia. I worked there for**
320 **one year and [then] I joined the ministry, I went back to the information department, now a ministry**
321 **headed by Hidipo Hamutenya and I'm now working there as an editor of a magazine.** I'm planning the
322 agenda, the content of the magazine, what to cover, depending on the relevance as far as development of my
323 country is concerned. It's a magazine which should publish in-depth articles on policy analysis and development,
324 and I'm editing these articles and I'm a journalist and a photographer. I'm interested in community development
325 going on here and there, look at development and look at the policies, 'is this policy good for Namibia, what does
326 it mean, where will it take us?' That's what I do every day, and communicating with different people in the
327 country, community leaders, meeting them. I can say I work 24 hours [per day] because I'm always opening my
328 eyes [and ears to see and] to hear what someone is saying, does he make a point, can we write, can we look into
329 that, what can we do about it. Technically that means I plan, I put myself a plan, what I need to cover, 'oh,
330 negotiations in Walvis Bay',⁹ what does it mean to Namibian development, education in Namibia, and the
331 Bushmen, what's happening and what's the government policy on that and who's saying what and what are we
332 going to do about that and who is going to benefit from that. Every day at home I think about what to cover.

333 LM: If you were now in a similar situation [as before you left Namibia], knowing all the experiences you had in
334 exile, would you still make a similar decision, to leave?

⁸ Leaders of the former ruling party, DTA, at the time.

⁹ At the time of our interview, Walvis Bay had not yet been annexed to Namibia.

335 Of course yes. The idea for which many friends and relatives of mine died for is realized and my mother supported
 336 me until now and I got encouragement from her. She said, 'yes, you are alive, but I wouldn't like [you] being alive
 337 [just] because you stayed and maybe ended up in the South African army', so I regard myself lucky. I knew what
 338 was going on and I knew that it might take a lot of time, and I knew that it [might] take life. As I was a good
 339 Christian at school, I would be a good revolutionary. The ideals [of] Christianity were appealing to me. The word
 340 of God is the word of justice though I'm not a full time Christian.

341 LM: Do you still have the same kind of relationship [as before] with those people who were with you in exile?

342 Yes. Though not with all. There is a sort of alienation from [some] but everybody who was in Hungary, we speak
 343 in Hungarian and they occupy a certain place in my life. If I'm in Ovambo now and I'm with my brother and then
 344 there comes someone from Hungary or someone from exile, he may have been in Zambia, I will tell my brother:
 345 'Hey, my brother, please, I'm sorry, can we meet tomorrow?' Most people here complain that 'these people who
 346 returned from exile, if you give [one] 20 rands he divides it in five rands for his friends from exile, while they
 347 were meant for him' (laughs). [I'm] maybe mostly with people from exile because we have a common language. It
 348 doesn't mean that because someone is from exile I necessarily spend more time with him. But if someone is from
 349 exile and he has the same view as I have I'll definitely prefer him to someone who is not from exile. There is a
 350 difference, maybe you can say sixty per cent goes to people from exile and 40 to anyone [else] because there are
 351 also friends who have been in the country. The whole country experienced this struggle, most people have got the
 352 same view although they were not in exile. It may be a question of different philosophy, outlook, so [I find it
 353 easier to be with] a person from exile who [is] intelligent, whom I do not know, than with someone whom I know
 354 from childhood and who is not from exile. A person from exile generally understands me without saying a word.
 355 Because we had the same view of Namibia, we know what we were fighting for, we may understand each other
 356 without a word. [With the stayers] it depends on the person. I have seen some [who] are different persons, with
 357 different philosophy, the values have changed. There is not much [in common] apart from that we are all
 358 Namibians and we all want freedom, in general terms. There is not much you can discuss with some of the friends
 359 who stayed. Someone from exile is more free in every aspect of life, he's freed himself. These are men who have
 360 been well exposed to the world. They speak freely or maybe they have lost some cultural touch, they are not
 361 dictated by cultural prejudices.

362 My personality has been formed by different factors. First at school I had to be baptized. That means I was
 363 baptized at the age of 14, and I still remember that, and I was combining different cultures at school and at home
 364 where I was born and raised as a normal Ovambo boy who has to look after cattle. And I know the struggle
 365 between my father and me that I shouldn't attend any school because I'd be spoiled and I'd be stolen away from
 366 him. Going to school meant I wouldn't be able to be a normal Ovambo boy. [I have] been influenced by
 367 Christianity. I learned about the Bible, I learned about whole new civilization [and] I [did not] see any
 368 contradiction. I saw it was something new, it was appealing to me, the Bible. The general ethics in the Bible were
 369 appealing, there was nothing wrong and most of the commandments, God's commandments, are not far from our
 370 traditional commandments. We were taught to respect parents, to help parents. While at high school [my]
 371 personality could have been changed, if you can call it that, by sort of a new outlook, new way of thinking towards
 372 reality, towards the world, that I did not really want to live the same life as my father and mother lived. I didn't
 373 envy my mother being married in a [polygamous] family. [I thought] that when I would grow up I would have to
 374 marry one wife that I would love, that I would make decisions with in life. I didn't want to depend on occasions, if
 375 it rains you survive, [it] doesn't you won't, that is subsistence farmers' life. I [wanted] to take another direction
 376 and I decided to study and become something, make something out of myself, which I have succeeded [in]
 377 generally.

378 [So,] my personality was formed already before I went into exile because I was already matured, I was grown up.
 379 That made me ready to go to join the exiles, looking at what was happening in my country and at my parents. My
 380 father is from a chiefly family and I knew that my grandfather was one of the chiefs in the country supposed to
 381 report to our kings and they had no power. There were those chiefs who cooperated with the South Africans and
 382 there were those who didn't, like my family. My father did not want to accept Christianity and he didn't want me
 383 to go to school because he knew that there was a hidden agenda. My father being traditional influenced my
 384 personality, he prepared me that the white man was here to destroy our culture and take everything we have
 385 because you had to pay for your cattle, tax and all those things and looking at my poor father who had few cattle,
 386 they had to pay a foreign administration for the cattle. Those are the things that we looked into with the
 387 consciousness that there were independent countries, some countries were free, they had own governments. Why
 388 couldn't we have our own government?

389 My personality was made up in those years. With time political awareness and political consciousness also
 390 developed in me. And in exile [I] could have changed in the sense that I don't think I'm anymore a traditional man
 391 but I'm a believer in tradition and I think it's very good for one to have a tradition. I would be ashamed if I didn't
 392 have that tradition. I will have the drums in my western style home if I [find] them, I have my bow and arrows, I
 393 have the spear and I have planted mahangu in my yard and I have planted all this traditional stuff and I like
 394 traditional food despite many years in exile, many years in Europe. I look at tradition as a way of respecting, a way
 395 of identity, no matter that I'm now an educated man with degrees but I think people have to have an identity. I'm

396 not fanatic about it but I think that if I'm Ovambo I must be an Ovambo and it's that Ovambo that makes up
 397 Namibia together with others. To be a Namibian means [that] you [are] either a Nama, Ovambo, [or some] other
 398 one. In exile, the more I learned, the more I studied, [it] made me to believe that I may too be someone, doctor
 399 John, but what is that doctor John, where does he come from? It just strengthened my belief that you must be
 400 someone in [the sense of] cultural values and if I had the power and the means I would do more to restore that
 401 culture of my father, to have the drums back. For example the churches are still causing trouble to people who are
 402 practising traditional marriages. That's very sad, I don't like that, I think there must be a sort of reconciliation
 403 between traditional practices and the western religious practices, the church should accommodate those traditional
 404 practices.

405 I strongly believe that I cannot be a Namibian unless I am an Ovambo in a country where there is a Nama.
 406 Namibia is not Namibia anymore if there is no culture of Nama, [if] there is no place for Bushmen, [if] there is no
 407 place for Herero. That's how I grew up. That is Namibia and it's beautiful like that. I would put these people
 408 together, I'm not saying to form one culture, no, [but] to display their cultures in public, so that everyone sees the
 409 culture of another one and appreciates it and accepts it. Different cultures, being together, makes up Namibian
 410 culture. Even the Ovambos are not just one thing. There are Kwanyamas, I'm Kwanyama by culture but I speak
 411 Oshikwambi because I grew up at school in Okwambi and I know the Kwambi culture and I know quite [much] of
 412 Ndonga culture, so maybe that influenced me to accommodate easily other cultures. I know the Ndonga dances, I
 413 know the Kwambi dances, I know the Kwanyama dances. I believe that tradition can be a big and important tool to
 414 promote, which I don't see in this country, even including Afrikaaner culture, it should be displayed. Let's say we
 415 take once the whole Saturday, we have sort of a traditional programme or cultural programme where we learn
 416 about Afrikaaner culture, Ovambo culture, Bushman culture, what[ever] culture, that put together is Namibia.

417 LM: If we bring in politics, do you think the ethnic divisions that were promoted during the colonial era still play a
 418 role in Namibian political life?

419 Namibian politics is very interesting. [The answer could be] yes because you still have parties that are exclusively
 420 ethnically based, but [the answer could be] no because most of these parties are not exactly political parties. Of
 421 course [they] represent tribal interest and as you said tribalism [was] promoted in the past by the colonial
 422 government, it was in their interest to make people look everything through the tribal eye. [The answer is] no
 423 looking at the recent elections, the pattern of voting. The people who voted for Swapo, 99 per cent of Ovambo
 424 voted for Swapo, but maybe some 50 per cent of other tribes each voted for Swapo as well. The [other] parties got
 425 support only from one tribal group because they're tribally based, because they have been created as tribal parties.
 426 I would say that tribe doesn't really determine here because had Swapo not enjoyed support from other groups it
 427 could not have had the same percentages as it did now. And another thing is that there were also parties which are
 428 Ovambo based and they failed. Swapo succeeded not because it's Ovambo based but because it's Swapo. An
 429 Ovambo doesn't vote for any Ovambo party, Ovambos do not vote for an Ovambo politician, they vote for a
 430 politician who is Swapo because there were politicians who are Ovambo but they failed even in 1989. Look at the
 431 Kalangula party, Christian Democratic Action, he is an Ovambo, Kwanyama for that matter because we are told
 432 that the Kwanyamas are dominant in Ovambo but why he couldn't become second to Swapo or to Sam [Nujoma]?
 433 Let's look at personality, because in this country the people vote for Swapo, they vote for Sam. They know that he
 434 fought for this country. They didn't vote for Kalangula, they didn't vote for Andreas Shipanga who is also a
 435 veteran politician that is Ovambo. Why he didn't get [enough] votes to become second or third if the Ovambo
 436 factor is so important? I think that tribalism doesn't really play a major role in Namibia unlike in other countries
 437 because what happened in recent elections in the south, the south voted for Swapo, even in Hereroland they voted
 438 for Swapo.

439 [When I was young] I knew Swapo, I supported but I didn't know the content. I knew that it was there to liberate
 440 us but there were sort of details, procedures and laws and regulations [that I didn't know]. When I joined I had to
 441 learn a lot of things, that Swapo is not just like a football club, it's something that you have to attach to strictly and
 442 you are in a serious business, that you are really what you are and appreciate that. I have supported all the ideals
 443 and all the practices and I just fight [for] them. I just fight [for] every action of Swapo. Even when Swapo is wrong
 444 I still justify because even a drunk person is justified, you know, he is drinking maybe because his wife left him.
 445 So, in this case, Swapo and the world, if one says Swapo was wrong here then I'm the first to justify. I know that
 446 Swapo was right, because I know Swapo is Swapo because something wrong is happening in Namibia. So any
 447 wrong thing that Swapo is doing is a result of that wrong in Namibia. But [I am] not following blindly, I have a
 448 philosophical approach to it. I'm not saying that one shouldn't criticize a certain action or step, we should rather
 449 say: 'Ok, we should do that better, this is the best way to do it.' But during my [time in] exile I have just [fallen]
 450 more and more in love with Swapo as an idea, and I think I was right. When I came to the country I wanted to test
 451 my belief, yet everybody loved Swapo. As a political analyst I was worried [that] these people had got a strong
 452 propaganda machinery, but I saw how people approached [the issue]. What I think is what the majority thinks.

Anna

1 I was born in the northern part of Namibia, Oshikango just right at the border of Angola and Namibia
 2 and, well, I suppose it's a long time ago, I must say, 1953. I still regard myself as a [person] who has been

3 **born in the good old days, growing up in big families. I lived with my grandmother, not my maternal**
 4 **grandmother [who] died when I wasn't born yet and my mother tells me she doesn't even remember her**
 5 **mother's face. But as I'm saying those were the good old days because we lived with my grandfather and at**
 6 **that time my grandfather had 12 wives and those were all our grandmothers and we were very happy, I**
 7 **must say, each and every one, you could go from one place to another. Then the time came when my mother**
 8 **came to fetch me to stay with her in Tsumeb where she was married, I had to start school. I was six. I**
 9 **started school in Tsumeb which is a small mining town in the northern part of the country, copper mining.**
 10 **There were five of us in the family. I'm the eldest, and for eight years I was the only child, and I actually**
 11 **remember the days when the other kids made fun of me and said: 'Oh you are the only one.' My sister was**
 12 **born eight years later when I was already at school in Tsumeb.** That time we thought [that] if you stayed in an
 13 urban area you were better off and as I said I was the only child then, [so] I think I was spoiled, I had everything
 14 that I wanted to, what my parents could afford, so I was happy.

15 **I went to school in Tsumeb until I was about 14. Those were the days of apartheid of course.** It was a usual
 16 black location in Tsumeb, most of the houses were identical, two bedrooms, a sitting room and no kitchen. The
 17 social condition in those days wasn't good because there was no entertainment in the first place, no cinema,
 18 whatsoever. Alcohol was also prohibited, blacks could not go into a bottle store and buy drinks. Also the home-
 19 brewed drink was illegal. People were not moving freely because the police were always moving around and
 20 asking people, 'where is your pass?' During the nights you were sleeping and then the police would come and if
 21 there was anybody in the house they would ask you, 'who's this person, he didn't have a pass?' They would take
 22 [him] to the police. That was terrible. My father always used to try and help some of the young people, especially
 23 the young men who were working in the farms. They were young men who walked the distance as far as
 24 Keetmanshoop and back on foot and then they wanted to be helped to go back to the north so that the police
 25 wouldn't arrest them, and one picture I have clearly [on my mind is] of this young fellow, his feet were swollen, it
 26 was really terrible. So he used to be under the bed the whole day, because the police would come and look. And
 27 during the night he would be taken out, so they sat outside in the yard until business people from the north came.
 28 A lot of business people used to stay there in our house, that was the time blacks could not even go to hotels, even
 29 if you had money. When they bought their things [and went back to the north] this person would sort of sleep
 30 under the boxes there. When they reached near Oshivelo¹⁰ this person would get out and walk, try to cross until
 31 they could meet on the other side, because there they had to unload everything so that they could be searched.
 32 Each and every box used to be searched before you cross to Ovambo. Those were really horrible times, the social
 33 life was non-existent, one lived in fear.

34 As children we used to go out in the hills, look for food, and sometimes our sport was to go and fight with white
 35 kids. You left the black location and you went to the white township and just looked for kids. As long as they were
 36 white you would start fighting, you would start chasing each other. If the police came, they would only arrest the
 37 black kids and beat them up, and the whites, they wouldn't do anything to them. We never went out to fight at the
 38 German or English schools, we always went to look for a fight at the Afrikaner school. You thought the Afrikaners
 39 were the worst people, because they were the ones in the police, they were in the army and everything. My father,
 40 he would go to work in the morning and in the evening he would just be at home. He would tell us stories and
 41 Sundays were the days that we went to church. Church was the social occasion you actually looked forward to
 42 because that was sort of a big event. Or you went and watched a football match, which wasn't good either. There
 43 was a lot of fights because it wasn't seen as a football match, it became a tribal thing because you had one football
 44 club belonging to one tribe, the other one belonging to another. Whites took this opportunity, they really
 45 encouraged it. Blacks were too busy fighting each other, that was good for them.

46 **We had one school for the blacks only, different tribes. We used to have different classes for Ovambo,**
 47 **Herero, Namas, for our languages. And I remember [that] we never wanted to sit next to a child that**
 48 **belonged to a different tribe. And despite the fact that we had one school we also had different football**
 49 **clubs and netball clubs for different tribes. I played netball, I belonged to a club that belonged to Ovambo**
 50 **only. And I remember, that changed a bit when some of the younger teachers came from Augustineum, that**
 51 **was the school in Okahandja. One of those teachers was Hage Geingob, now the Prime Minister, and there**
 52 **was another one, Linekela Kalenga, he died in exile. And when they came at that school they started telling**
 53 **us [that] 'it's time we should forget what we are by tribe. It's time that we start living together and in**
 54 **Namibia' — we used to call it suidwester — 'we are all suidwesters, there is no Ovambos and there is no**
 55 **Hereros.' We were confused, as kids. We all, speaking our different languages, all of a sudden we would**
 56 **have to have this, 'no no, it can't [be]'. The next thing we came to school and heard these two teachers had**
 57 **left. 'So they have left', oh we were so happy. 'Ooh, they have left, it is very good. Where have they gone?'**
 58 **'They've gone to Tanganyika.'**

59 **Then my mother decided that I have to go the school up north at Odibo. That was an Anglican mission**
 60 **school and this is where I went, I was 14.** My mother is Anglican. That time there was no Anglican church in
 61 Namibia so she felt I was missing out on my religion. At that school I was able to study in English. [After my
 62 return to Namibia] I went back, although that school, the army had stripped most of it. But [it was] funny, we were

¹⁰ A control post between Ovamboland and the so-called police zone of white settlement.

63 looking at those rooms, '20 years ago I used to sleep in this place.' You had one sleeping on top of the other, and
 64 we used to work, we used to stamp corn to help make the mealie meal. And there was study hours. We also used to
 65 be taught sometimes how to sew. There was one English girl who had been born there. And she grew up there with
 66 her parents and she spoke fluent Oshivambo and regarded herself as a Kwanyama. She used to teach us how to
 67 cook but unfortunately what she used to teach us to cook was things like scones and cake, which none of us could
 68 practice at home. We had our netball team and on weekends we could go out to other schools and play against
 69 them. There was no time for loneliness. [Being there] also gave me an opportunity to be near my family, my
 70 cousins, my aunts, my uncles and all that. I stayed in a hostel but every weekend I was out to one of the aunts and
 71 cousins. In the north you still had your family structure intact. The family life was there, where[as] in Tsumeb
 72 there was nothing else to do, what the young people were involved in mostly was drinking and fighting.

73 **I didn't finish my secondary school. I had a baby at school, and I came back home to Tsumeb in 1973, had**
 74 **my baby girl. Well, I must say I'm a grandmother now, she's got her own baby. Unfortunately those were**
 75 **the days when things like contraceptives were unknown and I had another baby and then I thought [that it]**
 76 **is time [to] pull my socks [up]. I was just at home and I started working in a supermarket and at the same**
 77 **time I started to study, corresponding. A lot of my friends were still going to school and they used to come**
 78 **on holidays.**

79 **1972 was when I started getting [personally] involved in politics.** Since I was a child, there was always
 80 politics. **Our neighbour was an older man who was very active with Swapo activities, Muashekele. They**
 81 **used to have some Swapo rallies, that was just the time when they were starting and I got more and more**
 82 **interested.** I can remember, although I wasn't involved, [19]62, when my brother was born, they had a big rally,
 83 Swapo rally, in Tsumeb and there was this very famous man, Muashekele, and a lot of politicians came, people
 84 like Maxuilili, Nathaniel Maxuilili, they all came to Tsumeb. My mother was expecting and it was a Sunday and
 85 we were going to church and my father was sitting behind the house with these men and of course they were
 86 drinking. That time alcohol was prohibited but they were sitting there and hiding their bottles and I remember I
 87 was waiting for my mother with a Bible in my hand. And I said: 'Mom, we are going to be late for church.' She
 88 was in her bedroom and the next thing she said, 'no no, please call [the midwife]', and I said, 'what, call her, I say
 89 we're going'. She said, 'no, call her quickly', and I called this lady and she was in the room for a few minutes. The
 90 next thing this woman put her head through the window and told my father, 'oh, you have a son in the house'. And
 91 all these men stood up and as much as the drink was prohibited they had glasses and said, 'Swapo'. So up to these
 92 days my brother is known as Swapo. They started calling him Swapo. And they had a rally that afternoon and I
 93 remember, the police came and broke up the rally and a few of the people were arrested. Maxuilili was one of
 94 those who were arrested. But of course that time I was a child.

95 **When I went to the north I really got more friends than I had in the south, my life changed completely.** That
 96 to me made a difference because talking to some of my friends that I went to school with [in Tsumeb], sometimes
 97 you started talking politics and then they would say, 'oh no no, you can't talk politics, you'll be arrested', and all
 98 that. But up north people were talking more openly about politics and there were a lot of young people, we had
 99 meetings and some of us assisted preparing documents and sending them out to Swapo, and sometimes in the
 100 evening you would sit down and listen to the radio, the Voice of Tanzania.¹¹ And then you had these issues to
 101 discuss, more developmental issues really. One was education, or what was happening, about the apartheid system,
 102 whereby you couldn't really discuss it openly in Tsumeb. At Odibo there was this lady, Mrs George, she was
 103 American, one of our teachers. She used to teach us Bible studies, and her husband was a priest, and she would tell
 104 us, 'listen, what are we sitting here and talking about the Bible, "give the other cheek", and this is what's
 105 happening in this country. Our school is like this, we don't have facilities. Look at the white schools', and issues
 106 like that, and then she would show films about people like Malcolm X, and I remember her saying, 'oh no, I don't
 107 like Martin Luther King, I like Malcolm X', but that time we didn't know the difference. She was telling us all
 108 these issues and the injustice of apartheid. And then people started being arrested and one of my uncles, I
 109 remember, he was also arrested, but then he escaped and he was shot in the leg and he died. And when we were at
 110 school, students sort of started getting restless and we started attending meetings, Swapo rallies. I personally
 111 started getting to know more and more, and seeing the injustice of our society. Especially living in Tsumeb I could
 112 see clearly what was happening. I realized that this is our country and we were not getting a fair share of it, a fair
 113 share of the economy.

114 **Some of my friends from the north asked me, 'since you are in Tsumeb, maybe we can start a youth club in**
 115 **Tsumeb', and then I said, 'ok'. We started this youth branch. I must say a lot of the youth were not**
 116 **interested in politics then. No, maybe it is unfair to say that they were not interested, but a lot of people**
 117 **really were scared because there were so many arrests and people being beaten up and things like that. But**
 118 **I remember I talked to quite a few people and started collecting money. Then a few of my friends got**
 119 **arrested and we were trying to collect money to pay for the lawyers and I remember --- (name unclear) came**
 120 **to my house and he said: 'Ok, please, you've just got to try as much as you can. We know we won't have**
 121 **the money but you've got to try and get this money so you can get a lawyer for these people.' And then I**

¹¹ Anna means the Voice of Namibia, which was broadcasting from abroad.

122 got the lawyer and these people got out of jail. From then on, I think, my social life became more political. I
123 became more committed to see changes, but in Tsumeb it was difficult as an individual.

124 Then what changed the whole course of the history and the revolution in Namibia, I mean in my time, was
125 the 1972 strike. I remember that strike very well, the whole of December [1971] I had two friends who were
126 down for their holidays, we did nothing else, we were cooking at my house, because the people who went on
127 strike were denied food. And I remember the white school kids were the ones working in the mine that
128 time, they recruited the whole high school of the whites. We cooked and my father continued to tell us that
129 we had to cook, and sometimes we were so angry, I said, 'no, it's all our food getting finished', but he would
130 say, 'no no', and people started collecting money to feed the people. And I remember the day when the
131 police harassed everybody and they told my father that they would arrest him if he didn't stop feeding the
132 people. A lot of people were deported, put on cattle trucks and sent to the north. And immediately as they
133 were leaving some others were coming. Most of those people were Angolans, they were recruiting people
134 from Angola. That was the turning point in politics for me, especially the strike, seeing the people being put on
135 cattle trucks and being taken back, and having a lot of my friends, almost all of my friends that were close to me,
136 arrested. From then on I became committed to my politics. Things were really never the same, especially
137 among the youth. Demonstrations started at schools, all the schools, especially in the northern part of the
138 country. The people who were taken back there to the north, this was the time when they started saying, 'no,
139 we've got to fight back', and the youth as well, we started having more meetings and this was when we started
140 saying: '[Something] ought to be done. There is a liberation movement outside, they've got the guns.' This was the
141 time we started [looking for] an opportunity to get out of the country and join the liberation struggle outside.

142 Luckily enough there was a coup in Portugal in 1974 and that created an opportunity for us to leave. We
143 tried to leave the country [already] in 1973, my friends ---¹² came to me and we sat, and they said: 'We've
144 got to plan, we've got to leave the country because we've got to go out and fight.' And the only way was
145 through Botswana. But the men were reluctant, they didn't want to have us [with them], and then we said:
146 'Ok, you guys go on and see what it is like and maybe when you get to Botswana you can pass a message
147 on.' They left and then they were arrested, they didn't get through. There was the broadcasting from
148 Tanganyika, Voice of Namibia, and the people were telling us [that] what we were doing was ok, we should
149 try [to fight] against the South African government. That gave us encouragement and motivated us, but
150 then 1974 came and created the opportunity for us to leave the country. I remember, first, one of my
151 friends, she died in exile, she came and told me, 'I'm leaving', and I said, 'no, you can't leave now, let's wait
152 for the other people who went first, to hear if they have arrived', and she said, 'there is no way'. [I was]
153 there in Tsumeb and I heard she had left and I said, 'ok, I'm sitting in Tsumeb and up north everybody is
154 leaving', because it was easier to leave through Angola. And then my cousin whom I went to school with
155 came and he said: 'Ok, I'm leaving too, are you ready to leave?' I said: 'Of course you are not gonna leave
156 me here, I'm leaving, yeah.' Then I thought, 'what about my children?', and I even thought, 'what of my
157 studies?' He said: 'Ah, forget about these studies, just corresponding anyway, you could go and study.'
158 'What about the children, I'm not taking the children with [me]?' Then I said, 'ok, we go, I leave the
159 children to my mother, anyway they are hers already', so we left then. The hardest part for me, I must say,
160 wasn't to leave my children but to leave my mother. I have to be honest, it was more painful for me, and I
161 was deceiving them, so to say, because we never told them [that we were leaving]. We had some people who
162 had been arrested, some of the youth, and I told my mother we were going to the north with my cousin just
163 to see what was happening to them. And I remember that the whole thing was set up and we went and
164 bought a few things and we sat down and had a feast and my mother [asked:] 'Why are you in such a good
165 mood?' I said, 'I'm just happy, you know', and now and again me and my cousin were looking at each
166 other. Then we left.

167 I was one of the lucky few who had contacts with my parents [when I was in exile]. When we were at secondary
168 school in Zambia, we just sat there and I said: 'Ok, I'm going to try to write a letter to my mother and see if it will
169 get there.' So I wrote a letter and two weeks later I got a reply. They told me they were fine and of course my
170 mother was happy to hear from me. And from then on we had regular contact. The only time that we didn't have
171 regular contact was when I finished my studies and went back to Angola, but there was always people coming
172 from home and I had my brother and my sister studying in [Europe] so that was fine, they were in contact with
173 them all the time and they were sending messages.

174 My cousin had a car, he [was] one of the few black youths that time [to] own a car. Then we came to
175 Ondangwa, my cousin lived in Ondangwa, and my aunt, his mother, was sick when we got there. So we sort
176 of looked at each other, 'but your mother is sick'. He said: 'I'll manage, you have to go.' I said: 'No, that's
177 not fair, let's stay for a few days.' We stayed for a few days and then we called this young boy, he was just
178 about 14 but he was a good driver. And we asked him, 'let's go to the north, to Odibo', and this poor guy
179 says, 'to the north yeah', he was so happy. Then we went to Oshakati, one of the shops and we bought
180 ourselves jackets. [We were thinking that] we should just leave with few things, we didn't want to create

¹² Anna mentions the names of a few youth activists who went on to 'Swapo careers' in exile and obtained high positions in the civil service after independence.

181 any suspicion. [The boy] was happy also, [we] bought him a jacket and then we went to pick up two more of
 182 my cousins and then we went and just drove around the north until the sun set, so that we could cross over
 183 the border. We waited until about nine o'clock, then we stopped right at the border and told [the boy:]
 184 'Hey, do you know why we brought you?' 'No.' 'We are crossing', and he started crying: 'No, you can't go
 185 there.' We said, 'there is the car, here are the letters', each had written, 'take them, this one's to Tsumeb,
 186 and take the car to David's mom, we're gone'.

187 We then crossed the border that night. Of course we didn't know actually where we were going or how we
 188 were going to get there. We didn't also want to walk in the town because we were afraid we'd get arrested.
 189 We walked most of the night and we sort of had an idea what the direction was, because my father is from
 190 Angola. He left Angola as a small boy to come and look for work, and he worked on the farms. Angola wasn't a
 191 strange country to me, because we had used to go and visit now and again. [Those days] it was easy to cross
 192 the border as long as you had what was called a pass, that was sort of an identity document, just going to visit, that
 193 was ok. The only terrible thing about visiting was that you had to be searched, even physical searches. Then we
 194 decided: 'We are too tired, let's wait.' We slept and the next morning we decided: 'Ok, let's walk on until
 195 we [get to] Namakunde and then we will get on the road and try and hitch a lift.' That would be too far for
 196 the South African police to see us, and we doubted very much if the Portuguese would take us back, so we
 197 got on the road and we got a lift from one of the Portuguese guys and he took us as far as Ondjiva.

198 When we got there he asked us where we were going. My cousin could speak Portuguese fluently so that
 199 was ok, and he said, 'we are just visiting', and he said: 'No, you are not. There are others here who have
 200 crossed over as well. I just have to take you to the police.' 'No no, please, don't take us to the police.' He
 201 said: 'No no, I take you to the police because the police will be able to help you.' Of course we had no
 202 choice, we went to the police station and the police were very friendly. They gave us food and said, 'oh, you
 203 are coming to join the others', and we looked at each other, 'others?' [They] said: 'There are other people
 204 here and we know where you're going, you want to go to Zambia.' We said: 'Yeah, we want to go Zambia.'
 205 They took us to one of these hostels and put us there and all the time you had the police and some of the
 206 people in the army [there]. I think we stayed there for a week, and as we were there more and more people
 207 were coming, I think we became more than two hundred. We were not even the first group, there were
 208 other groups that had left before us. We stayed there for a week and then they said: 'Ok, now you've got to
 209 move on, we will take you to the next town.' We went with the army. Sometimes we went by train and
 210 another time you got army cars that transported you. And those people were quite nice, we were never
 211 harrassed or anything like that. We were well fed too.

212 Sometimes it is good that you don't know anything about war. It was ok travelling through the towns but
 213 we had to go to the borders and of course we went there in army cars and they got more army [there], but
 214 you couldn't understand then. We really didn't know what was happening. But the last night, when we
 215 slept there I remember, at the last town where we slept, we heard some gunfire during the night. We didn't
 216 worry, but then the next thing they were bringing in a lot of wounded. [But we thought] that doesn't
 217 happen to you, you know, when you're young and you feel you've got a cause. We didn't realize that you
 218 had MPLA there at the border fighting against the Portuguese. The convoy would stop, the soldiers would get
 219 off and inspect some of those roads. But you were there happily singing, no problems at all. I would definitely not
 220 go through now, knowing what I now know about war.

221 We tried to ask some of the Portuguese soldiers what they were doing in Angola and some of them were telling us
 222 they had been sent there to fight and some of the soldiers were actually happy because of the coup that had
 223 happened in Portugal, tired of fighting. They were ready to go home. I remember talking to two black guys who
 224 were in the army of the Portuguese and they said that if the blacks came to power they would also go to Portugal.
 225 And I asked these brothers of mine why. They said: 'Those people who will come here, they are killers, they are
 226 even eating people out there.' I really didn't know anything about the MPLA or any Angolan political parties.
 227 When they were talking about these freedom fighters I could even connect them with Swapo, our PLAN
 228 combatants.

229 The next morning we got up and they told us [that] this would be our last journey and they would take us
 230 now to Zambia. We got to a place, middle of nowhere, no houses, nothing could be seen and then they told
 231 us: 'Ok, now you people have to get off, that's Zambia over there.' We said: 'What, Zambia is there?'
 232 There was nothing, and the thing is that they had been telling us: 'When you get into Zambia there is going
 233 to be a plane there that will take you to your people.' Now [we] said, 'where's the plane?', and [they] said,
 234 'you just walk on straight, and you have to walk in a single file, don't walk side by side.' And we didn't
 235 know about war and we didn't realize these guys were talking about landmines and things like that. We
 236 started just walking and they gave us some army rations, and we all had maybe a bag, a few clothes and
 237 things. Then they left us and we walked and walked and walked. We didn't even know whether we were in
 238 Angola or in Zambia. Some of the people started to cry: 'Oh no, I can't walk.' I think automatically when
 239 you get in a group, get sort of stranded, some people have got that leadership, you know, people just start
 240 coming up and saying, 'no, this is not going to happen, now we do this, we do that', you know. All of a
 241 sudden we had set some order. We thought, 'ok, let's walk in a single file as we've been told', and I
 242 remember very well when we were walking along that road, there were some deep holes and wrecked cars

243 but the thought of death never came to our mind. We walked the whole day. I think the Portuguese left us
 244 about midday and then before we came in contact with any human beings was about six o'clock in the
 245 evening.

246 We were walking and all of a sudden we were surrounded by these [guerrillas]. We looked at each other
 247 and they said, 'just put down your things', and they were young people really. To look at their clothes,
 248 some of them had no shoes on their feet and they had guns. Then there came this older guy who was the
 249 commander, that time we didn't realize it. He said: 'Now you put down all your things, all of you, come, sit
 250 down.' And [he] said, 'ok, we've been watching you coming for days with your Portuguese friends', and we
 251 were looking at each other, 'Portuguese friends?', and [he continued:] 'We are the MPLA. We are fighting
 252 for the independence of Angola and why we didn't kill you with your Portuguese friends — you know we
 253 are fighting against Portugal — is because we know you are Namibians and you are going to join Swapo to
 254 fight for Namibia. This is why I didn't kill you. Have you seen the holes on the road? They were landmines.
 255 We have removed all of them.' So we were looking at each other. And he said, 'well, anybody who is not
 256 going to join Swapo is ready to turn back and go and join your Portuguese', and he said, 'the road is long,
 257 there are deserts and mountains to cross'. We were just looking at each other, 'my goodness, what have we
 258 come to?', you know. 'So, now we are taking you to a village, which is a Zambian village and you sleep
 259 there and tomorrow we'll come to you, but in the meantime we'll go back to our camp and get you food.'

260 We went to this village, a Zambian village and for most of us it was the first time to see a village, because
 261 most of our people were from Ovambo [and] we have got homesteads there instead of ordinary African
 262 villages. I remember my cousin said, 'why [are there] so many elderly men living in one house?', because
 263 the village, we took it that it was one man's homestead. 'It's funny, they are all old and they are living
 264 together in same house.' We never realized that each hut had got an individual family. Anyway, these guys
 265 from MPLA brought mealie meal and dried meat and we cooked that evening. We weren't too hungry
 266 because we had some of these rations, army biscuits from the Portuguese. We ended up staying in that
 267 village for three days because [the commander] was trying to organize a boat to cross the Zambezi river.
 268 Many of us couldn't swim, [many] Namibians from the north cannot swim. There were also some of these
 269 young people from the MPLA in the group and then we went, crossing the river. For some of us it was the
 270 first time to sit in boats, or canoes rather. I remember it very well and honestly I doubt very much if you
 271 [could] put me in a canoe that easily [anymore] because of the fear of crocodiles. That time we walked
 272 among the reeds, no problem, and we crossed. The next day we started walking. These people told us [the
 273 destination] was not too far but we walked and walked and when it turned hot, say about 11, we slept until
 274 six in the evening. Then we cooked and started walking again. It took us about four days before we reached
 275 [our] destination.

276 In the next town this MPLA commander said: 'Ok, we are leaving you here now. I'm going to report to the
 277 police so that they can contact Swapo to tell that "your people have arrived here".' He went but before he
 278 came back another group came from UNITA (laughs), 'we have been sent by Swapo to take you', so we
 279 went to a UNITA camp. This was late in the afternoon, and we stayed there until the next morning. This
 280 MPLA man never came back to our camp, and I must say we really liked that fellow and we still talk about
 281 that man. [If I] could meet one person in my life it would be that man, one really would like to say 'thank
 282 you' to him, all the help, the advice and the fact that he left base at the front while he was commanding the
 283 war, he travelled for days on foot just to make sure that we arrived safely.

284 LM: Why do you think virtually every party or warring faction helped you along the way? I mean you told that the
 285 Portuguese helped you and the MPLA helped you and the UNITA helped you.

286 I suppose with the Portuguese, that was the transitional period. We didn't know then that the UN also gave
 287 assistance that we had to be assisted on our way to go to a safe place. The MPLA, they assisted us because they
 288 were freedom fighters and they knew we were going to join Swapo. As for UNITA, that time UNITA had closer
 289 ties with Swapo than MPLA. I think mostly those ties were because UNITA was more in the south, and also
 290 Swapo was fighting in the south, to get through to come to Namibia.

291 The next day doctor Indongo who is now the deputy minister of Health and Social Services came to see us.
 292 He was working in a Zambian hospital there and we looked at him: 'This man is supposed to be a
 293 Namibian, with a beard and he has all this wild hair and they say this is a medical doctor? Are all the
 294 Swapo people here like this?' We stayed in that camp for two days and then Swapo trucks came to collect
 295 us. We then left to the Swapo camp in Senanga. This was where we found a lot of our friends and most of
 296 the people who had left Namibia before were there. We were happy and everybody was trying to ask 'how
 297 is home?' and everything.

298 But then as we stayed in that camp we [started] asking ourselves: 'What are we doing here? We came to
 299 join you to fight and even the Voice of Namibia was saying you've got guns, you have a front. Where is the
 300 front, where are the guns? We want to go and fight.' I remember one of these guys said, 'I want to go and
 301 kill that Boer before I forget what he looks like, the one who arrested me. Come on, we have to get back
 302 home, give us the guns now.' 'You people have to sit and wait, you have to go through training.' 'Training,

303 who trains to get a gun to kill, you don't need to train.' Of course we didn't know [of] all this diplomacy,
 304 negotiations. We didn't know that Swapo was negotiating with the Zambian government, because
 305 according to the Zambian government we were refugees and we should have gone to refugee camps. Peter
 306 Mueshihange, now Minister of Defence, he was then the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Swapo, he came to
 307 us and told: 'Ok, the Zambian government has decided that you people have got to go to a refugee camp.
 308 You cannot go to the front, [because] your status in this country is [that of] refugees.' And we said: 'What,
 309 you mean we left Namibia to come and live in a refugee camp? We don't want that, we left to go and fight
 310 and we want to go and fight. All you have to do is to tell us that Swapo doesn't want us and then we go
 311 back. We'd rather go back and fight with our bare hands [than] sit in a refugee camp.'

312 I think the negotiations between the [Zambian] government and Swapo were continuing and I suppose then
 313 the government just decided that we had to go to a refugee camp. We were in one small town or village
 314 where Swapo had houses and there were hundreds and hundreds of us. Then some trucks came, about 20
 315 or so. We got on these trucks and poor Mueshihange of course told us, 'no, we are not going to a refugee
 316 camp', although the trucks were written UNHCR. We saw that and we said: 'These are refugee trucks.' He
 317 said, 'no no no, they are just helping us to take you to the front', and we travelled and travelled and late
 318 that evening, we couldn't do anything, we got to the refugee camp. We stayed in that refugee camp for
 319 more than two weeks and Mueshihange stayed with us. It was one of the well organized refugee camps and
 320 you had Mozambicans, you had Angolans, a lot of people, and you had Namibians, but they were mostly
 321 from the Caprivi. This was actually the first time when we came across Caprivians and these men, they
 322 were so happy and the women, they came there ululating, they said: 'Oh, now Namibians are becoming
 323 many, it is many of you coming.' 'Eh, these are Namibians?' The women were dressed in [a way] which you
 324 had never seen, we had only seen it in Zambia and they said they were Namibians, Caprivian. 'Where is
 325 Caprivi?' You know, you had this apartheid system, you didn't even learn anything about some parts of
 326 your country. Then we said: 'No, they cannot be Namibians.'

327 We stayed there for two weeks and during these two weeks we sort of tried to organize ourselves. There
 328 was a school of course [and] a hospital. We organized a football team, we organized a netball team, did
 329 some sports. Then one day the man who was in charge of the camp came with Mueshihange and some
 330 Zambian officials to talk to us and they told us: 'Ok, we are going to divide you and each [group] is going to
 331 have a plot, then you're going to be given plants and then we are going to assist you. You start cultivating
 332 your own plots.' And we said: 'What?' I remember some of us just started crying, they said: 'No no no, we
 333 cannot live in a refugee camp.' That evening it was nothing but meetings. We said, 'no, what we've got to
 334 do, let's leave', and people were looking through the maps: 'Ok, this is Namibia, now we are near Zaire. If
 335 we cross we can still cross back, maybe go through Zaire and then go back to Namibia, because we
 336 definitely cannot live in a refugee camp.' Then we sent some people to see Mueshihange to tell him that
 337 'this is our plan, we are leaving', and he said 'no no', we should give him two days. We settled back and
 338 [after] two days, seven o'clock in the morning, Swapo trucks arrived to pick us up. They had managed to
 339 negotiate that we were really not refugees and we hadn't come to live in a refugee camp because we
 340 regarded ourselves more as freedom fighters.

341 We got on those trucks and we went to one of the settlements just outside Lusaka. That was one of the first
 342 settlements.¹³ We arrived in August 1974. We had left in June, but there were others who had left before us
 343 in that very same group because they had just been in one base until we got many. I think some of us must
 344 have had been [in exile] already for a period of four to five months but for me this was about two months.
 345 The next day the president came and — we were many, in our hundreds — he greeted each and every one
 346 individually. We were standing in a queue and he went to each and every individual and greeted
 347 everybody. Within our group there were three of his sons. There were many people [in the camp], some of
 348 them we used to hear about when we were kids, 'this one has left'.

349 We talked to our leaders and they tried to tell us the history of Swapo, what they were doing, what actually
 350 was happening, and what they expected from us. And I remember the first day when they talked they said:
 351 'Ok, now what's going to happen, some of you have to go to schools.' 'What, schools, who wants to go to
 352 school? We didn't come here to go to school.' We were looking at each other. 'All of us want to go to the
 353 front and we are getting sick and tired of sitting here and you people are not giving us guns.' Coming from
 354 Namibia that time you were very militant. You know, [when] you had a demonstration you had these Boers
 355 with their dogs coming, chasing you. They had the guns, you didn't have the guns, so all you were thinking
 356 of [was] to get back at these people, you wanted a gun to go back and fight these people. This was the
 357 important thing to us and we were even saying: 'Ok, why don't we go and fight and then we can go to
 358 school afterwards? Why go to school now when the Boers are sitting in that country.' And I remember one
 359 thing they told us: 'Ok, you know, the struggle is long and it's bitter, as Herman Toivo said.'¹⁴ I said: 'Ah,
 360 but now it is short because there is more of us here, we can go and fight.'

¹³ The Old Farm.

¹⁴ This is a reference to Andimba Toivo ya Toivo's statement at the so-called Terrorism Trial in 1968, often quoted in nationalist sources. Towards the end of the statement, Toivo ya Toivo says: 'I know that the struggle

361 Apart from going out to join Swapo and the liberation struggle I had very vague expectations. Most I was thinking
 362 of getting there, and when you are young and you get into a crowd you really become militant. The only thing that
 363 was in our mind was to go and come back and fight. As for the future, it was to go out there, fight and then come
 364 back home. When we were celebrating the Namibia Day on the 26th of August, I remember we were saying:
 365 ‘When we get our guns we should kill all those Boers. Next August we’ll be celebrating in Namibia.’ That’s really
 366 what we thought, only to realize that the struggle was going to be long. We were thinking in terms [like] you want
 367 independence, you want to be free, you want to move where you want, you want the black man to rule. We were
 368 militant. All the white people would have to leave, we thought we would not even see white people in this country,
 369 it was only going to be the blacks. The development, economical side of it, it never came [to our mind] that time.
 370 The world to you was black and white, so you forgot that there was some grey there, you couldn’t see. But then, I
 371 think having gone to Zambia, which was of course an independent country and going to school and learning in
 372 school, especially history, then I realized there are other sides to independence.

373 **In that camp it was a lot of hard work.** When we got there, there were no houses. There was a very small
 374 population of women and children, very few men, most of them elderly, because all the men of course were at the
 375 front, and the few of them who were there were officers and they were staying in town. Most of the people that we
 376 found there were from Caprivi. It was a life of hard work because we had to build the houses ourselves, so we
 377 started from morning, six o’clock we were up and most of the time we were cutting grass to make thatch. It was
 378 the rainy season and then it was decided as [there was] plenty of land that we should start ploughing and planting
 379 some maize. We used to divide: some went and cut grass and [some went] to make the huts and some went to the
 380 field. **Some, especially a lot of the young men went for military training, just were told: ‘You cannot go to**
 381 **the army without having training.’ For us army meant a gun and fire, there was no training. So they said:**
 382 **‘No, some of you have to go for training.’ So some, especially the young men, left for training mostly in the**
 383 **Soviet Union. A lot of us started school, evening classes mostly at a college in Zambia,** about 20 kilometres
 384 [away]. **We used to go there by bus in the evenings and have English courses.** So it was a lot of hard work but
 385 we were all happy. I can’t remember anybody arguing or saying, ‘no, I’m not [going to work]’, and the people sort
 386 of started organizing activities. Some women, the elderly, would have to stay with children because the children
 387 were getting many, some of the women were coming with children. It was a happy atmosphere, it really was.

388 [19]74, in the end of the year, we wrote our exams and the ones who passed, I was one of those, we were
 389 sent to complete our secondary school at one of the colleges in Zambia. [There were] a lot of refugees from
 390 Mozambique, Angola and South Africa. But the majority of the students there who were refugees were
 391 from Zimbabwe. And of course you had also Zambians there. You discussed most of the time, politics, and
 392 sometimes you got into fights: ‘Who’s fighting? Ai, Swapo is fighting. Ah, you Zimbabweans, you are lazy, you
 393 don’t fight’, you know, it was like that. ‘Ah well, you’ll see, we’ll get independence before you’, all that kind of
 394 things. And I remember this guy from South Africa, ANC, he said, ‘yeah, we’ll become independent before you,
 395 then we’ll colonize you’, you know. But all in all I must say it was a nice college. [It] was in Nkumbi, **just near**
 396 **the road, the Tanzania highway, and Swapo trucks used to go to Tanzania to get supplies. We were lucky,**
 397 **you know, all the trucks that used to pass, especially the Swapo trucks, used to stop there, and they gave us**
 398 **food and sometimes clothing and all that. Even some of the refugees said: ‘No but you Namibians, you are**
 399 **too swell, your riches are always coming.’ Hidipo Hamutenya, now Minister of Information and**
 400 **Broadcasting, he was then the Secretary of Education. He made special trips to come and see us and I**
 401 **remember that a lot of these people couldn’t understand [how] they could take time to come and see us.**

402 The camps of course were always home for us. Every holiday we went back to the camps. It was hard work
 403 [there]. The first days when we came, all the houses that we used to sleep in, we made them ourselves,
 404 cutting grass, everything. Then as more people were leaving Namibia women started leaving with children
 405 and some of the women who came got pregnant and they were having babies so now really the question
 406 came, schools had to be set up, especially pre-schools, a hospital had to be set up. In the past, if people got
 407 sick there was a car to take them to a Zambian hospital but the population was increasing, especially
 408 women and children and they could not go to the front either. Doctor Libertine Amathila came then, that
 409 was [19]75 at the end, she was studying, her husband was the representative in Sweden then. Despite of the
 410 fact that she was in her third year to complete [her education], she just left and said: ‘Ok, people have to
 411 come back and help out, there’s too many women and children.’ We then went to Nyango where we started
 412 to build a new camp, a new settlement, put up schools and hospitals, that was 1975 at the end. The
 413 population was growing too big for the camp, so the people really had to move. It was realized that we
 414 couldn’t stay there any longer and I think it wasn’t a healthy place per se, there was such a lot of mosquitoes.

415 Me personally, after leaving school, that was 1976, I came back to stay in the camp and doctor Libertine
 416 told me I had to help her, we had to set up a creche, and we started setting a creche for the children,
 417 looking after the children while their mothers were working. Five of us were working in the creche, and we
 418 had started up a group of about 50 children. That hospital, the first hospital, we built it ourselves with mud

419 **and bricks and it was beautifully done. One thing about doctor Libertine, I don't know where the woman**
 420 **gets her energy from, because I was staying with her in the house. She would be on call, she'd go out in the**
 421 **hospital, the only doctor there at night, in difficult delivery, children getting sick, but in the morning six**
 422 **o'clock she would still wake me up and tell me: 'Hey, the coffee is boiled, we have to go back.'** **The first**
 423 **thing that we tried to do was to build a bridge across the river to get the supplies through. That time was**
 424 **one of my happiest times in the struggle, working with the children.** When we went there people were just
 425 staying in tents, so a lot of children were getting bronchitis. So doctor Libertine drove everybody crazy, she just
 426 wanted to build and build, especially the hospital had to be finished and houses for women and children had to be
 427 finished and dormitory for the school children had to be finished. That was the period of really hard work, yeah,
 428 and within six months that hospital was finished with beds, delivery, maternity section and even a small operation
 429 theatre, so we had to work hard.

430 LM: If you think about the relations between the people, did they differ from those in northern Namibia that time,
 431 if you think of for example the relations between men and women, young and old?

432 That close relationship was there, we were close to each other, always ready to help one another, so in that way it
 433 was sort of a same thing, but then the social set-up was different of course, [because in Namibia] you had a
 434 homestead with your family but in the camps as much as we were close, you were still individuals, I mean
 435 strangers, people who were just living together with one common cause and one common goal. I think that was
 436 something that held us together. We make a joke now when we meet each other sometimes in the street: 'Ah, now
 437 we are back home. You know when we were in the bush we all belonged to one mother. [Now that] we are back
 438 home everybody has got their [own] mothers.'

439 LM: And what about in terms of the organization of the settlements, was it very hierarchical, how much for
 440 example one could have a say in what he or she was going to do, or was it that certain tasks were given to certain
 441 people?

442 I think a lot of people had a say, that's in terms of now your profession. Of course you had your teachers, you had
 443 your nurses. I think most of the activities that went on in the camps, it was teaching, the children went to school. I
 444 think the people who worked the most must have been the nurses. Their houses were close to the hospital, so they
 445 were on call any time. But whatever you did was because of your own professional choice. Of course you had
 446 people who had no skills, but people had to work, there was a lot of work. For example, the camp that we moved
 447 to from the first one in Lusaka, houses had to be built and as I told you there was a bridge that we built ourselves,
 448 so the people had to cut sticks, they had to bring sand and all these things, and then there were also gardening
 449 activities that had to be done, and there was a place where they kept some rabbits and pigs and goats, especially
 450 for school children to have those meals. I think nobody was idle, and I don't think there was anybody who was
 451 forced to anything. Especially if you had a profession, fair enough, you practiced that. There were people who
 452 came back from school and then you could not practice your profession within the camps but you could not sit
 453 there idle, there was work to be done there, houses had to be built and there were children that had to be looked
 454 after. Of course where human beings are, you've got a few people who don't want to work, they want to lie down
 455 and sleep, and then you tell, 'ok, you sleep and then you won't eat', it was as easy as that. You had to have
 456 sections because you could not control all those hundreds of people, so you had a section where you had
 457 education, the school principal, and they looked after the children. The children were also divided, they had
 458 women whom they called 'matron' and every woman had ten children to look after, to act sort of as a mother to
 459 these children, to give guidance, just to see them on daily basis. She had her own place where she slept, these
 460 children slept in a dormitory. If they needed advice they went to her, if they were sick she knew that they were
 461 sick. So everybody was accounted for, but I don't think there was any such thing that people were forced to work.

462 **Then I told Libertine that I wanted to do nursing. I went to Ireland in 1976, I left with another girl,**
 463 **Victoria. That was a three-year course. From December [19]76 to [19]77, 78, 79, that's when I completed.**
 464 This was the first European country I had been to. I must say I was surprised, I've never seen a country that's
 465 green like that. In general the Irish people are very friendly. It took me about three months before I got used to that
 466 accent as much as I was used to people speaking English. It didn't take me long to feel at home. We were out in
 467 the countryside, this was where the hospital was where we trained, three of us from Namibia and there were other
 468 two girls from Africa, one from Zambia, one from Zimbabwe. The three of us, the Namibians, we were in the same
 469 class. Me and Victoria were close but the third girl, we didn't become that close because she decided she wasn't
 470 going to go back to the camps. From there on she didn't want to be associated with us anymore and when she
 471 finished she married another Namibian guy and stayed on in Ireland. She only came back to Namibia after
 472 independence, she never went back to the camps.

473 I went out a lot with friends and I had a lot of friends that I could visit, in their homes and on the farms. Some of
 474 the girls invited us to their houses now and again for weekends. I remember I made friends with this other girl,
 475 Moira, she was the first Irish girl that invited me to her house for a weekend, and then when we went over, the next
 476 day Moira said to me: 'Ok, would you like to go and milk the cows?' I said: 'What, milk cows? We don't milk
 477 cows, you know, in my culture [women] don't milk cows, I'm afraid.' She said: 'Ok, you can come with me.' And
 478 I was surprised, I said: 'So, what, women also milk cows?' In general it was a student life like any other student
 479 life. When you had free time you went out to discos, you went for holidays, but that was different because that was

480 a convent, a church hospital and you were only allowed to stay out at certain times. I remember at one time we
 481 went to a disco and you had to come back in the evening, they waited until two o'clock, and one of the nuns would
 482 come and see that you were all in. And I remember one evening the sister came, they always came and asked you,
 483 'did you have nice time?', very close to you, if they could smell alcohol from your breath, and I said, 'yes sister',
 484 and then the next thing she [put] her hand on my head and said, 'oh, you've got a blond hair in your head'. I said:
 485 'Oh yes sister, I was dancing with a blond man.' She looked at me, you know, she said, 'what?' I said: 'Yes, I went
 486 to disco. The man I went out with was blond.' And she said, 'oh', and the next thing I was called into the principal
 487 tutor's office and she said, 'now, I understand you went out and I hope, you have to be careful with Irish men', and
 488 I said, 'do I have to be careful with Irish men or men in general?' She said, 'oh, men in general', and she really
 489 couldn't talk of the subject because she was really going red and I could see the poor lady, she [had] difficulties in
 490 talking about [it]. The thing was that going to Ireland, I couldn't even put in my forms that I had children, because
 491 this was a Christian hospital. You just had to say you're single, and I said, 'ok sister, thank you very much', and
 492 she said, 'ok, I hope you know the next time you go out, be careful'. I said: 'Well sister, I'll go out, I'll continue
 493 dancing and I had a date and I'm not gonna refuse if a guy asks me to go out and this guy that I went out with, it
 494 was not the first time that I went out with him, we go out regularly,' and she said, 'ah, ok'.

495 But all in all I think life in general in Ireland, from the political point of view, I learned a lot because it gave us
 496 also an opportunity to address some of the meetings as Swapo youth. We had an office in England, but there was
 497 Kader Asmal who was from the ANC, in Dublin, and when there were youth meetings he always asked us to talk
 498 about Swapo. We had time sometimes to go and address some of the meetings and tell people about Namibia,
 499 about our struggle. Apart from our studies we committed ourselves to create awareness about Swapo and what we
 500 were fighting for. So we really worked a lot in that. It gave me also time to do more research on the Namibian
 501 situation, especially on Swapo, so that I'd be able to stand up and tell the people. The Irish people of course,
 502 having gone through the same thing and also trying to have a country united, I think they understood us and there
 503 were times when we went asking for money, donations and all for the refugees, and I think they were quite helpful
 504 in that sense. And I felt that they really understood our struggle, especially the youth. I think in a way I also
 505 learned a lot internationally from other students like from the PLO and other international organizations as well
 506 and especially from the Irish, the Irish history, their struggle, and what they were trying to achieve at the moment,
 507 because from the outside here, it's like there is a religious war going on but it's not true. It's more a war to unite
 508 Ireland. [All this] made me more committed to my struggle. There were quite a lot of people who were not
 509 prepared to come back to those camps, but being in Ireland and seeing the Irish people, talking to them, how
 510 committed they were to the struggle, it made me more committed to my own. Even when I was studying I couldn't
 511 actually wait to go back and to contribute.

512 **These years as a student in Ireland gave me the opportunity to travel quite extensively throughout Europe.**
 513 **We had what we called a United Nations passport and I remember the first time I travelled with my friends**
 514 **to France for a holiday I ended up being deported back to Ireland because they couldn't accept that**
 515 **passport. They said it wasn't valid, it didn't have a country, although it said 'Namibia' and I told them that**
 516 **France, being a member of the United Nations, was part and parcel of that passport. So they deported me.**
 517 **[Then] I got an EEC student card, so that was ok. That student card helped me to travel extensively. And it**
 518 **was cheaper because you could get reduced student fare rates, so I was able to go to holidays in different**
 519 **countries. I went to Italy, to France again and countries like Spain, Greece. The other countries that I**
 520 **wanted to go to were the Scandinavian countries but the time when I planned to go I got a free ticket [to**
 521 **Angola]. It was great to come back to the camps and just to see the progress, the work that was being done.**
 522 **During those three weeks that I stayed in the camps it was quite a lot of hard work and unfortunately we**
 523 **got one of our worst outbreaks of measles. So it was a lot of work and I remember when I came doctor**
 524 **Libertine was there and she actually kept me working during the night. She said: 'No, you just have to**
 525 **work. There in Europe you're studying but you don't have the same situation here.'**

526 **When I qualified I wanted to go to England to continue with my studies but my passport expired and I had**
 527 **to wait. So I worked for six months then in the hospital. After that I went to England for a year to study**
 528 **midwifery. I didn't like England one bit. The English people were cold, it was totally different, and I just couldn't**
 529 **wait to get out of England. The only thing that made it worthwhile in England was the activity that I was involved**
 530 **in, going to our office in London sometimes and trying to help out, and you had a lot of protests, you would stand**
 531 **in front of the South African embassy to protest and that kind of things. That kept one busy. In Ireland I cannot**
 532 **remember that somebody would have said, 'you can't touch me because you're black', or, 'you can't come into my**
 533 **house because you're black'. It never happened to me in Ireland, but it did happen so much in England, that you**
 534 **had a patient and you had to keep your distance or when you were doing your community work they opened the**
 535 **door and then they saw you are black and they said 'no'. I just couldn't wait to get out of that place.**

536 **Then I came back to Angola. I left from Zambia but I went straight back to Angola because we had**
 537 **established bases in Angola and there were camps in Angola. It was [19]81 December. Coming back to**
 538 **Angola, you were coming back to the camps, that was your life, you were coming back to your people. It was sort**
 539 **of a surprise. We had such big camps and the population had grown.** As much as you heard, when you were at
 540 school, that the people were putting up the camps in Angola I was quite surprised at the organization of the work
 541 and the set-up of everything. I must say everything was really organized even better than it was in Nyango. Some
 542 of the buildings had been improved, especially the hospitals, the nurses' home and the dormitories and the schools,

543 they had grown bigger. I was also surprised at the creche, the place had improved so much, and also the gardening
 544 activity had expanded, so there was vegetables on a daily basis and also the rabbit project had grown. The
 545 atmosphere was still the same but the things had improved because by then you had some of the people who had
 546 gone for training coming back, professional people, to do some of the work.

547 **I first worked in Kwanza Sul for about six months** in the hospital, nursing. There were a few hospitals and they
 548 were quite good. My biggest problem was the work itself. Coming from Europe where everything was there at the
 549 touch of a button, and coming back to work in a hospital out in the rural areas I really had difficulty. I remember
 550 the first day on duty a child was brought in from another camp, and this child died. And I was panicking and
 551 actually went to tell doctor Indongo who was the Secretary of Health, he is now the Deputy Minister of Health. I
 552 said, 'there's a child, it just died when they brought it', and he said, 'yeah, so?'. I said, 'uff, but I thought you have
 553 to do a post mortem or something like that and the papers to be filled in', and he said, 'my goodness, you're really
 554 coming from Europe if you're going to continue doing that'. I said: 'What's going to be the cause of death?' He
 555 said: 'Ask where it was transferred [from] and look at the paper which was transferred. There's the cause of
 556 death.' And I would wonder: 'How am I going to work without running water, deliver a woman.' 'Oh, she's not
 557 delivering a woman without running water.'

558 Once I started working things went on fine. You grew with work and there were things that you did that I never
 559 had dreamt that I could do, things that you had to do just to save life. But as time went on one got used to that. We
 560 were the referral hospital, you were quite busy really. I was given the maternity section to run. You did antenatals
 561 for the women of all the camps and you did postnatals. You also did family planning and you had deliveries. A
 562 typical day was started by getting up early in the morning if you were lucky enough, if they let you sleep
 563 throughout the night, if you were not called during the night. The good thing [was that] we had a few doctors from
 564 Sweden, from Finland and from the GDR, and some nurses, so there was quite a number of staff there. But of
 565 course the doctors who were there were going out to different camps during the day, so I was on call mostly during
 566 the night. Unless the case became critical I didn't call the doctors. I loved [the work], I really did love it. It was
 567 your people, you felt at home, you were doing something worthwhile, participating in the struggle.

568 Time abroad kept one moving from one place to another, especially people like me. Wherever one went one made
 569 friends but those people who were really close to me, very good friends, people like Olivia, we were in contact all
 570 the time. So when she was in the States she was having problems [going to] school with her daughter so when I
 571 went back to Angola I told her: 'Come on, I'm going back to the camp. Send the child to me, so I'll take care of
 572 [her] until you finish your studies.' So the day would start, I had to cook for her, feed her and send her to the
 573 creche. Then I went to the hospital. So one would start working, seeing your patients and then maybe going out for
 574 lunch, you had a central kitchen then. You went to the central kitchen and got your food. There was not stipulated
 575 time, ok, there was lunch time but sometimes you had so many patients that you really felt guilty [if you went for
 576 lunch]. The creche only went as far as around one o'clock. In the afternoon, if I had to go back I went back with
 577 my baby, carrying her on my back. And there were days when you were caught there and then you were carrying
 578 your baby and sometimes even spent the night there with your baby, working. I couldn't leave my baby in a room
 579 by herself because you lived in a war situation, you didn't know if you were going to be attacked, so most of the
 580 time I worked with her on my back although she doesn't like me saying it now, you know: 'I was never that small.'
 581 That was a typical day. But there were days on weekends that you arranged a party, you got a few beers from the
 582 Angolans, you sat down and played music and had a dance. Or there was a wedding and then you went out for a
 583 wedding. And I would say the Angolans in the vicinity were very friendly people, sometimes they would invite
 584 you out to their houses in the evening.

585 **After that I went to Lubango and worked in the maternity unit. We had quite a big base there. At one given**
 586 **time you had about 200 pregnant women and as they delivered they went back to the camps.** We didn't just
 587 serve our Namibian people, we also had to serve the Angolan population, vaccinating children, you could not just
 588 vaccinate the Namibian children. Mostly they would not come to the hospital, especially the women, unless in the
 589 last minute when they had tried everything they could. That was the camp of pregnant women and those women
 590 who had delivered. It was decided that pregnant women should be kept apart [from others] so that they could be
 591 fed better. In the other camps the priority was children, there was the central kitchen for the children only but not
 592 for the women, so if a woman got pregnant she came to the maternity, usually from six months onwards until three
 593 months after delivery. At least you made sure they had some meat, fresh vegetables and fruits. There was a central
 594 kitchen, the women themselves of course did the cooking and fetched firewood. Building was done by other
 595 people, you couldn't have pregnant women or lactating mothers building. It was quite busy, on a basic day you
 596 could deliver five or four babies and for some reason babies like to be delivered at night, so most of the time it
 597 was during the night. You [also] did administrative work because there were only two of us midwives in that camp
 598 and the rest were just assistants. It was a happy place as much as it was demanding, you had babies to look after,
 599 you had women to look after. Being in exile, of course you had also young people getting pregnant, teenagers, and
 600 they were really dependent on you, you had to act as a mother, a counsellor to these children. But as much as it
 601 was demanding it was a happy place to be, apart from being near the front and sometimes being attacked.

602 **When I stayed there I started [to get] sick. I didn't know [I was] asthmatic. But when I was in Angola it**
 603 **started really getting bad. So I went to Zambia, Nyango, to start working there. But then I started getting**

604 **very bad asthmatic attacks in that place, so I was transferred back to Lusaka. I was working in the clinic**
 605 **there.** It was more administrative work. I stayed with [people who] were working for the [United Nations]
 606 Institute for Namibia. Because Swapo had a problem with accommodation and because they had houses, working
 607 for the UN, they put up some of the people and I was staying with them. So life was more or less normal, getting
 608 up in the morning and going to work and coming back home in the evening. I was home most of the evenings. I
 609 love children so most of the time I stayed with the children, reading to them and talking to them. On weekends I
 610 went out for walks with the children.

611 **[In 19]86 I got married and I went to Luanda** because my husband was [mostly there]. I met this fellow many
 612 years back. The first time I've seen him, met him as a comrade, was 1975. He was [one of our] representative[s
 613 abroad] and he just came for a meeting. We were introduced and this was the first time we met but that was just as
 614 comrades. The time we started going out together was when I was in England. When he would go out for a
 615 meeting he would come by. **I started working then in our clinic in Luanda,** mostly administratively, ordering
 616 medicine and treating some of the people, but mostly you got orders from the camps and made sure that things
 617 were sent off to different places. It was different [from the camps] because in the camps you were together most of
 618 the time whereby when you were in town you left work and everybody went to their houses and that was that,
 619 whereby in the camps you really were together most of the time. **[19]87, when I got pregnant I was very sick. I**
 620 **went to [Europe] where I had a baby. I was six months pregnant [when I went there], then I came back**
 621 **when [the baby] was three months. I started working back in the camps until 1989. [19]89 in June, that was**
 622 **the time of repatriation, I came back home, started working for the election campaign.** I was just told a week
 623 beforehand that I would have to come home with the first leadership plane. It was hard for me to believe. We were
 624 told that no family would get on the plane together, you know, no husband, wife, children. We were coming out to
 625 help to set up the office and that was a plane that most of the leaders travelled on, people like our Prime Minister,
 626 Speaker of the House, a lot of our ministers, so they said 'no children', they would not risk. Pohamba was leading
 627 that delegation and he made it clear to us, he said: 'No, this plane is going to take back the Swapo leadership, if it
 628 gets shot we don't want to sacrifice children.' 'What, so you are going to sacrifice us?'

629 It was hard to believe that one was packing up and going home until I was there at the airport and saying goodbye.
 630 So we got on that plane, it was hard to believe that we were going to go to Namibia, it was like getting on any
 631 other plane. And on that plane, when we were entering Namibian airspace it was all ululating, it was champagne,
 632 we were all hugging each other, people were crying, they said, 'Namibian airspace?', and as we were coming near
 633 Windhoek it was quite late, we couldn't see anything but then we landed and it was so emotional. When they gave
 634 us these immigration forms to fill in we were asking each other what we were going to fill in, purpose of entry. I
 635 remember some of us saying, 'coming to stay', you know, 'occupation: ex-terrorist'.¹⁵ These were some of the
 636 things that we were putting on our papers. 'And what are they gonna do to us?' It's not easy to explain that feeling,
 637 the emotions that one gets and you're getting off the plane and even the smell is different, you know it was just a
 638 unique smell. And there were some houses that were prepared for us to stay. Most of our leaders had places in
 639 Katutura and Khomasdal. But us who were nobodys were put in homes in town. 'Why are they doing that to us',
 640 we were a little scared, I remember very well, we had no guns, nothing, and looking at the white people as
 641 neighbours, we literally couldn't believe it and I said: 'No, these guys are not being fair. They put us in town and
 642 they go and stay with the people.'

643 The next day the bus came to pick us up, we went to Katutura and one thing that [made me] really realize I was at
 644 home, I saw this woman walking and I said: 'People, look at that woman.' She was a Nama woman wearing a
 645 dress with different patches, you know, and she had this tiny waist and this big [bottom], your typical Southern
 646 African figure, and we all said: 'We are really back home.' You don't see it anywhere [else] in Africa. It was
 647 something to us to see that woman and we all got excited, we said, 'this is real Namibia', you know. Coming
 648 home, I didn't even tell my parents, they knew I had arrived in Windhoek but they didn't know when I would be
 649 arriving home. But then I passed through Tsumeb, I couldn't believe looking at my mother, she looked much
 650 older but it was just great to touch her again. But one thing, my mother knew I had a baby. When I came in to the
 651 house and my brother saw me first and said, 'it is really Anna', it was just screaming, yelling the house down. It
 652 was night and my mother started ululating and she just passed me by. She said, 'where is the child, where is the
 653 child, I cannot touch you before I touch the child', and I said, 'mom, I'm sorry, but the child is not with me'.
 654 'Where is it?' I said: 'Listen, the child is in Angola.' 'Oh, ok', this is when she touched me. It was great seeing my
 655 mom, my parents and my elder daughter. The younger one was not there, I saw her later.

656 LM: How is your relationship with [them nowadays]?

657 The first girl, we are friends but with my second daughter, no. I don't know why. I thought of it a lot when I came
 658 back. I wondered would they accept me but I had already made up my mind that I am not going to impose [myself]
 659 on them. With my first daughter we are quite good friends really. But with the second one there is still that big
 660 gap, we aren't friends at all. And of course there is no mother relationship, they relate more to my parents than

¹⁵ Anna is referring to the practice of South African sources to refer to Swapo and especially Swapo guerrillas as 'terrorists'.

661 they relate to me. But all in all it isn't too bad, I should say. Most of the time we meet at home when I go to
662 Tsumeb.

663 We were part of the election campaign team. We started working at the Swapo headquarters, setting up the office.
664 The Directorate of Elections had different sections, health, economics and all that, so I was in the health division.
665 Most of the time [my job] was to go on campaign trail to different areas and give assistance where it was needed.
666 There was much work to be done. Not only from the health point of view but also a lot of organizing. When the
667 election results came out and especially when they started announcing, Swapo was losing. We were living in a
668 Swapo house with other comrades. And Swapo was losing very heavily. That evening none of us ate. My daughter
669 even came to me and said she was hungry. I just told her to go to bed. And I remember some of these security guys
670 came with a map and said: 'Which is the way to Botswana? We are not going to stay here, definitely, if the DTA
671 wins.' But the next morning they announced that Swapo started leading and Swapo became the winner. It was a
672 great feeling, especially when you were at the headquarters. Nobody likes defeat, nobody likes to lose. Especially
673 when one has been working so hard all those years, when one has been fighting all those years. Just to come home
674 and work so hard and to lose. When it was announced that Swapo won, that was one of the greatest moments of
675 my life, one of the greatest experiences in my life.

676 **I didn't start working in the government until in November 1989 after the election results were announced.**
677 I started in the hospital as just a nurse in the ward. In the present job I started in 1991. I like the job, it's quite
678 demanding, challenging. I like challenges and this is one of the biggest challenges, to start a nutrition programme
679 in the country, starting it from the scratch, there was no programme in the country before. The only thing I don't
680 like about is the lot of travelling, that I'm away from my family most of the time, and the late working hours. But
681 all in all I love it.

682 LM: Is Namibia now the Namibia you thought it would be?

683 It is not the Namibia that I thought and hoped for but being a young nation it's still early. I think there is a lot that
684 needs to be done. There is a need now to start a development programme and especially to create employment. We
685 have a high rate of unemployment in this country. And looking at issues like hospitals and schools there is still a
686 lot that needs to be done to take our services to most of the people. It will still take a long time before everybody
687 can realize the independence of Namibia. There are still communities that don't even know that this country is
688 independent, especially the farm workers. When it comes to peace, stability, if we can maintain it, then hopefully
689 we can all work towards making independence a reality to each and every Namibian. Then things will work out.

690 I think I'm still adapting to Namibian conditions. You see, the whole thing is that you had friends, people you
691 missed when you were in exile that you looked forward to seeing, only to come back and realize you have nothing
692 in common. You cannot even sit down and discuss with these friends, people that you used to sit down and laugh
693 with. Maybe the reason is in the different exposure that one had, and the different expectations. We who have been
694 in exile, we have created a community. You see, you're sitting down and most of the time you talk about things
695 that happened to us in the camps and issues like that. So you find that even when you are socializing with people
696 that you used to know they feel left out. You don't have a common denominator, you don't have anything in
697 common.

698 LM: Who are the people you spend your time with usually?

699 Maybe 99 per cent are people that were in exile. But I don't think it's a matter of being different in person from
700 the others. I think that you have lived different lives and then you don't have things in common and your
701 expectation in life is different. For example, if I go home to Tsumeb where I have a lot of friends, my friends will
702 rather spend time having a party and drinking. I like to go to parties now and again but I don't like to get up early
703 in the morning and start drinking for the whole weekend, no, I will like to do some work.

704 A lot of things have changed. The house where I found my parents in is not the same [that we had] when we left.
705 They broke down the houses that we were living in. This is one of the things that one misses, you come back to a
706 different environment. Things in general in Namibia really have changed, the social set-up. I suppose things do
707 change as time goes on but I think a lot of things are due to the war as well, I mean like for example in my parents
708 house, my children go to disco, I could never dream of going to a disco in my days. They sleep out, I could never
709 dream of sleeping out. Even when I had kids I couldn't dream of doing that. My kids will [say] back to parents.
710 This is the sort of social setting that has changed completely. One really heart-breaking thing is alcoholism.
711 Namibia has become an alcohol consuming community. I think this is the most unfortunate thing that has
712 happened. And when you go to the north you get a shock because you had trees there and there is trees no more,
713 literally, it's a desert. All in all one feels that the population has grown because there were never these
714 concentrated communities. In areas like Oshakati you had a few houses here and there but not as it is now. These
715 are just some of the things but unfortunately these are things that didn't change for the better but just for the worse.

716 And I will be scared to go out in this area if I see a white man walking in the street. I will really be scared that they
717 might attack you. These are things that one of course has to get used to but you've still got that fear and you hear

718 of isolated attacks, especially in areas like this that used to be white only areas. Then you move in and you still
 719 have some of the white people who want to make it hard for you, they want to make it a lesson for other black
 720 people not to move in. These are some of the things, but all in all this is my home, this is what we have been
 721 fighting for. And I suppose one just has to make the best of it. Politicians keep saying that we have to live
 722 together, there's a policy of national reconciliation and one tries to sit back and think what national reconciliation
 723 is, does it have to be one-sided? You never hear of an attack where a white man was attacked. You've got a lot of
 724 discos and socializing places in Katutura but you never hear of a white person being attacked because of his
 725 colour. Anybody can get mobbed but a racial attack on a white person, it does not happen. But every day you hear
 726 about black people being killed in areas that used to be white only. So you sit back sometimes and you wonder,
 727 does it have to be one-sided? I think this is the time especially for the white people of this society, if they want to
 728 live in Namibia they should think that blacks are not going to sit back and take this for longer. I just wonder what
 729 will happen, you have white youths in the evening, especially on weekends, trying to threaten, what will happen if
 730 all of a sudden black youths decide to do that. Then you won't have peace. And if you start talking about the past
 731 whites tell you, 'national reconciliation, you don't talk about the past', but for people like me there is no way I
 732 could not talk of the past. The past is part of me, and I have people, friends, relatives that I have lost because of
 733 the war and there's definitely no way that I cannot talk of the past. We just have to accept it. It's not that when I'm
 734 talking of the past I hate a white person, no. And when I talk about apartheid and what apartheid did, this is reality.
 735 But I suppose it is still early and there is still enough time for us to work things out and live in peace.

Martha

1 **I was born in Walvis Bay in 1962. I grew up in Walvis Bay, schooling there, finishing my primary school in**
 2 **Walvis Bay. [I then] came to Windhoek for my secondary school. I didn't complete [it because of] politics. I**
 3 **studied in grade ten in 1978, I didn't complete it. I decided that I was going to join Swapo abroad. I did,**
 4 **leaving Namibia in 1978. That time I never even knew what Swapo was actually and what it was for. I was**
 5 **just a member and in reality I never knew what the aim of Swapo was. When I went abroad I [got] to know**
 6 **what Swapo is and what Swapo was fighting for. I joined Swapo through the northern part [of Namibia]**
 7 **and I went to Lubango. I only stayed there for two weeks [before] I was selected to go for further study in**
 8 **Lubango as an assistant nurse. And I completed my education of assistant nurse. I went for further study**
 9 **as an enrolled nurse. When I completed my enrolled nursing [course] I operated in different places like the**
 10 **Cunene area in Angola. I operated from Ondjiva to other places in the Cunene area. From the Cunene area**
 11 **I went to Huila province until I came here in Namibia.**

12 Life was very good to me [when I was a child]. Because I was a kid I couldn't know the badness and goodness of
 13 life. My mom was a housewife and my father operated until now in Arandis mine. We are seven [children]. I went
 14 to school, my parents used to pay for me, and as a small girl, what I needed was only money for sweets, that was
 15 all, or maybe to go and buy a dress. And [I was doing] what I could, helping my parents. I was just cleaning the
 16 house. Since childhood I have never liked dirtiness. That's why when I was selected to go and [study] as an
 17 assistant nurse I was happy because I knew I would [learn] more of hygiene. There was only one location in
 18 Walvis Bay, we were not divided according to tribes like here in Windhoek. It was only one location for
 19 Ovambos, Hereros and Damaras, and that location was called Kuisebmond. [We had] a house of two rooms.
 20 During that period in Walvis Bay, Boers were not so many and the army, there was just a small base and it was
 21 very far from the town, it was in a small town called Rooibank.

22 [When it comes] to politics people were very active. It was a shock for me to go back to Walvis Bay [after my
 23 return]. When I left Walvis Bay there was never another party, there was only Swapo and the Boers. I could hear
 24 about DTA when I came for secondary school here in Windhoek. But in Walvis Bay there was only Swapo.
 25 People were just talking about Swapo. There was a compound where people from northern Namibia used to come
 26 for contract work. All they were people who were suffering a lot because their living conditions were very bad.
 27 Relatives were never allowed to come and visit you in the location. And we were never allowed to go and visit
 28 them in the compound. Maybe you met in town and [arranged] where you could meet, like these small shops in the
 29 location. Later on people used to complain and it was changed. They too were given a [right] to come and visit us
 30 but you would just visit, never sleep there. The police used to patrol 24 hours and they used to knock on people's
 31 doors. When you happened to be found there without a pass you would be arrested and you would pay a lot. You
 32 would pay and you would be escorted to Ovamboland because you were a Wambo, you were not supposed to stay
 33 there.

34 To come here in Windhoek was good, but it was a little contradictive between tribes. In Walvis Bay people never
 35 fought another tribe. But here in Windhoek people used to fight each other. There were locations, people were
 36 divided by tribes. The Wambos were at Wambo location, Hereros, [there] was a location for them, Damaras,
 37 Namas. And when it comes to politics, Damaras here in Windhoek mostly joined Swapo. Most of the Hereros
 38 were DTA. Those Hereros who used to stay in Herero location and supported Swapo, they used to be killed by the
 39 members of the DTA. So it was a little contradictive between the tribes. People here in Windhoek that time were
 40 just busy with their politics, parties. In our school the teachers were members of the DTA. The one who used to

41 teach us English, Marco Hausiku,¹⁶ and [another one] were the only teachers of Swapo there. They were the ones
 42 who organized us, taught us politics, what Swapo was and those things. And that time, if you were a month with
 43 Marco you were lucky. He used to be arrested by the Boers [all the] time. [When I] came [back] here and saw
 44 Marco I was shocked because I [had thought] he was maybe dead or in Robben Island, he used to be arrested a lot.
 45 And when the Boers came to arrest him we would start singing Swapo songs. It was tough, that's why we decided
 46 to go.

47 LM: Was there a strong student movement?

48 That time there was not. NANSO,¹⁷ I heard [about] it when I was abroad. There was nothing, just Swapo. I was
 49 very active in Swapo. We used to go for Swapo Youth League meetings. Every afternoon we used to go and gather
 50 somewhere, talk [about] our problems or what we wanted Swapo to do for us. We were just organizing ourselves
 51 so that we could support Swapo and maybe demonstrate in the town that we didn't want Bantu education and those
 52 things. We were just student members of Swapo. The main thing we used to discuss was education because it was
 53 very low. For instance you would pass standard eight and go and search for work, they wouldn't give you work
 54 because they would say you were not qualified. The principal of that school [where] I was was a director of the
 55 DTA and he was a Tswana. And we could strike because of the education. Education here in Windhoek was so
 56 low for the blacks. You would be taught languages, Afrikaans, and the teachers were just coming without teaching
 57 anything. They would say that 'go and read this chapter, tomorrow we have a test.' We used to strike and we,
 58 schoolchildren, used to be arrested, maybe go to jail for three to four days and you would get sjambok, they would
 59 beat you [and] say: 'You are a student, a small kid. Why should you support Swapo? If you want to support a
 60 party or join a party, it is better to join the DTA, because the DTA are the people who will rule in Namibia.'

61 We were many students [and we] organized each other: 'Oh, this condition is not good for us, we don't have
 62 [good] education. [It] is better to go and join Swapo abroad.' Each and everybody was saying: 'I am tired of
 63 colonialism. It is better just to go and join Swapo.' Sometimes we used to listen to the radio from Angola,
 64 Tanzania, Zambia. Those people, when they were talking in the radio you could feel that 'oh, if it was me', and the
 65 person would be speaking English and you didn't know anything. So we decided to go. The first point [why we
 66 left] was our education. There was another point of Swapo fighting colonialism in our country. And I really knew
 67 that we were colonized, because here in Windhoek, [for example,] you would walk past white men and they
 68 [would have a] small boy. The boy would come and beat you and you [could not] say anything. Or you would
 69 [hear] certain words like 'you kaffir, kaffir maid'. You had no rights in your country, you couldn't say anything. I
 70 decided it was better just to go [than] to live in such a country just like an orphan.

71 When we held meetings we used to ask the leaders of Swapo, those big leaders, if they could [arrange] us
 72 transport, take us away from Windhoek so that we could go. In Ovambo location there were members of Swapo.
 73 They organized transport for us to the north. Even my parents, I never told them that I was going. They only heard
 74 later that I had crossed the border. We did not have IDs and that time an ID was a big thing in Namibia. If you
 75 didn't have it you would be arrested or beaten. So that's why when we came at Oshivelo we [pretended] that we
 76 were going for sports in Ovamboland. So they left us [alone]. We were really many and we were singing songs we
 77 used to sing at school. I stayed [in the north] for a week. [There] was a lack of transport to Angola, so I left my
 78 colleagues behind and we went, two girls. We just started walking facing the north without even knowing where
 79 we were going. We walked for four days. We used to walk during night time because the South African army was
 80 surrounding the border between Angola and Namibia. They wouldn't ask, they would just start shooting at you.
 81 We were sleeping, tired, [under] a tree [and suddenly] we heard, 'who are you?'. Whooh, we woke up. We were
 82 surrounded by many soldiers with guns. I was shivering. They only asked: 'Who are you, where are you from?'
 83 'We are from Namibia.' 'Where are you going?' 'We want to go and join Swapo abroad.' We were lucky, they
 84 were Swapo members. We were already in Angola. We turned back again so that they could show us the border.

85 LM: How did you feel about going? Was it a difficult decision to make?

86 That spirit was something. People used to go there but I never saw anyone [who] returned to say [how it] was
 87 there. But when that spirit fell in your mind you would just have a feeling to be over there. I just wanted to be a
 88 soldier so that I could come and fight these Boers. That was the aim, to go and fight. Maybe I was unlucky or
 89 lucky, when I came to Lubango I was selected. We had a small examination and I passed, so I went for studies.
 90 When I happened to get such an opportunity I tried by all means to pass with a nice mark. That time I couldn't
 91 even say, 'how are you?', and people there didn't teach in Afrikaans, only in English, so I [had] to try a lot. In the
 92 beginning it was very difficult. The course [lasted for] one year and six months. [After it] I worked as a nurse and
 93 at the same time as a typist for the people working in the administration. I was always occupied. You [would be]
 94 on duty the whole week maybe [from] seven to seven. After that you were so tired you would just go to bath and
 95 sleep. If I was not on duty I used to go for typing. It didn't matter whether it was a weekend, you had to work.

¹⁶ Hausiku was one of the most prominent figures of internal Swapo up to independence and has held ministerial positions thereafter.

¹⁷ The Namibian National Students' Organization, which was established in 1984.

96 The first years I was just an ordinary person. In 1982 I was promoted to be a commander of nurses in the area
 97 where I was staying. I used to give orders, even to tell the people what was good and what was not good, to
 98 educate them how to keep healthy and so on. I learned a lot, growing up. [When I went there] it was very difficult
 99 for me just to come to you and start talking, because here in Namibia you could even pass by each other without
 100 saying 'hi'. [Then] I started learning that these people were not like people in Namibia, it didn't matter whether
 101 you knew [someone] or not. He would come to you and maybe start telling you stories or talking to you and I also
 102 did the same. When I saw you sitting there and I didn't have anything to do it was better just to come and talk for a
 103 while. [When] I was promoted to be a commander I had a right to say whatever I felt. You would be sitting there, I
 104 would come to you and start teaching you first aid: 'When you go over the border and maybe get injured, you
 105 better do this and this and this.'

106 LM: Did you have many contacts with the local Angolan people?

107 Yes, me especially, because I used to give them treatment. Those people are very nice. You would go there, you
 108 would treat him or her [and] they would give you something. They are good people, they know what
 109 comrade[ship] is. Sometimes we had visitors from [any]where in the world and those people used to stay maybe
 110 for three months, maybe teaching us something. Or maybe they established some disease in the area and we had
 111 never known that disease, how to treat it. Maybe they even came to us and told that 'there is a new disease, when
 112 you get a person complaining about this and this, [it is] better to give those patients this medicine', and we used to
 113 get supplies from all over the world, from those people who supported Swapo. Here in Namibia I had never come
 114 around [the same] table with a white man. There we had so many people from all over the world, Finnish, the
 115 Soviet, Cubans and they were white, but we used to sit around a table.

116 [I returned to Namibia on the] 19th of July [19]89. When we were told that we would come back I was so happy,
 117 but the first step from the airline in Grootfontein, I was very much afraid. We were only given two weeks to stay in
 118 the reception camp so that you gave others a chance to come. I lied that my family [had] died and I didn't have
 119 anywhere to go. So I was given a chance to stay there for a month. I looked for work in Grootfontein, so I worked
 120 with the UN as an interpreter. When I got that job I left the reception camp and was provided a room to stay in
 121 Grootfontein. [Then] I was sent to operate in Ovamboland. I went to see my family. When they heard that I was
 122 around they came to [fetch] me. The first thing which showed me that I have really got a family, my people, was a
 123 big photo of president Sam Nujoma. From then on I was free, that no-one would hurt me. [Still] you are not like
 124 them, you are somebody strange. I can say you are a soldier and they are just ordinary [people]. [But] it's not
 125 difficult to stay with them. You can tell them something if you can see that they are wrong. That time returnees
 126 were not free to move around in the north. When those people of the DTA heard that you were a returnee they
 127 would come and start beating you. Or [if they] heard that 'in that house there is a returnee', they would maybe
 128 come during the night and search for you so that they could kill you. It was difficult. It could be [that] I knew you
 129 from the time [before] I went abroad [but] I would be afraid to come and greet you because I didn't know which
 130 party you were [in]. Maybe I came to you and you knew that I was from abroad [and] you were not a Swapo
 131 member, you were a member of another party. You would call people so that you could come and beat me.

132 LM: What did you feel about the election results?

133 At the beginning it was very bad, because they started announcing the southern part and as you know in the south
 134 we don't have any supporters, just for the DTA. We were very much behind. Even the elderly people in
 135 Ovamboland were saying: 'Oh, why God, why? Please help us. If we fail this election we go together with you
 136 again to Angola so that we can fight.' It was bad.

137 LM: How long did you stay in Ovamboland?

138 Two years, man, because I came in July [19]89, and [in 19]91 I came here in Windhoek, it was March. I was just
 139 cultivating my parents' land after the UN left, after the election. The situation there in Ovamboland is not my
 140 situation, you will suffer. You are just on the land [all the] time, cultivating. When it is over, [there is] nothing to
 141 do. You will never get money. Here your friends who are working are many. Sometimes when you meet them they
 142 give you something. In Ovamboland, you will never — like these who smoke — even get 20 cents for cigarettes.

143 LM: Have you found any work?

144 No. I [have] tried a lot, many times. Any kind of a job would do. It would be better [than] doing nothing, just
 145 sitting without getting any cent in your pocket. Sometimes I sell beer when my friends come to visit me, and soft
 146 drinks, and sometimes I cook food, like meat and sell that, so that way I survive.

147 [When] I was in Lubango I just saw in my mind that maybe when Namibia would get independent we would have
 148 [it] like in Angola. Or maybe we would build our country in another way. In Angola you could see that the people
 149 were free, they got independence, but they were suffering a lot because there was war. You wouldn't say that [it]
 150 was a country which was already independent. People used to die every minute and I was really thinking: 'Will our
 151 country go like this?' [However,] you couldn't compare Angola and Namibia economically. In Angola the

152 economy was very poor and here in Namibia I could see that it was better, the development of the country that
 153 time. You could see that people from Namibia were developed. Even [if] our education was low or a Bantu
 154 education I could see that it was better. So I could imagine that 'when our country gets independence, maybe it
 155 will gain more, maybe we are not going to look like [Angola], we will develop more'. We are really better [off]
 156 and we are lucky. When we got independence there was never violence, fighting each other, killing each other,
 157 like in Angola. We got our independence in peace and we are still living in peace.

158 Life in Swapo was better than this one here. Even when our country is independent I sometimes think if I could go
 159 back, if Swapo was still there, because there in Swapo we never suffered like this. You didn't have any
 160 responsibility or maybe only to cook and eat. Food you got for free, clothes, everything there you got for free.
 161 Here, you can say it is good [that] our country is free now, you are free to move. That time you wouldn't move
 162 after six o'clock. Now people move, they are free, but you can't compare life in Swapo with life in Namibia. Here
 163 it is very difficult. [You have] to struggle for your life. You are just suffering. But Namibia [has not had]
 164 independence for many years. This is the third year now and we can't just think that 'Namibia is independent, now
 165 each and everybody must have what [he or she] wants'. That is very difficult. The way to independence people
 166 used to work hard, so that you could get what you prefer. People are just complaining, 'I don't have work', but we
 167 can say our country is independent but not yet economically. Our leaders say: 'We don't have money to pay you,
 168 so how could we give you work? We can give you work, but are you really going to work without getting
 169 anything? That's why we don't want to give you work. We don't have money.' Obviously our country is not yet
 170 free economically. [It] is still controlled by those who colonized our country. We don't even have a currency in
 171 Namibia, we are still using South African money. We are still struggling, we are not yet independent. Only the
 172 country is independent but we are many in Namibia and our country was colonized by the Boers. They knew that
 173 'when Swapo comes to this country Swapo will win the election'. Do you think that they were just there with the
 174 things waiting for their enemy to come and eat, take them. I'm sure that they took it to their country.
 175 [Furthermore,] when we were in Angola we were freedom fighters and refugees at the same time. So there were
 176 many countries which used to take care of [us]. Now here in Namibia we are not freedom fighters, refugees
 177 anymore. We are now in our country, so no-one will take care of us. Maybe just for the country itself but not for
 178 the people. For the country is also for the people, but not to give one money or food. Maybe there is something
 179 which the government will develop or build, maybe a factory, so people will help us [in that]. But there we used to
 180 to get food, clothes, everything, because we were refugees.

181 I can't even compare those people who were abroad and these people here in Namibia. There is a big difference
 182 because here in Namibia, even now, you [could] see someone stabbing another with a knife. We can be together,
 183 you are sitting here, someone just comes, a man or a woman and starts beating me. No-one will say, 'no, don't do
 184 that'. You will just stand and look while I'm beaten, without saying anything. That is not comradeship. There in
 185 Swapo we were just like from one mother, one father, because that period was a period of war. [If] we would have
 186 quarrelled, fought each other, who would have taken [care of you] when the enemy attacked us? Maybe you were
 187 shot. If you were injured and you had been quarrelling [on the day before], who would carry you? Would I carry
 188 you if we had been quarrelling and you had beaten me. I would say: 'It is good, let him stay there, injured.' That's
 189 why we never had that atmosphere in Swapo. We were just like from one mother. You couldn't say, 'this is a
 190 Wambo, a Damara', whatever. We were just as one. Each and everybody was a comrade. It didn't matter whether
 191 it was the president himself, [he] was just a comrade. We had commanders, leaders, just like in the house there are
 192 parents and kids. Our leaders used to command us, give us orders, but the word comrade was always there. It
 193 didn't matter whether it was your commander, you used to say comrade, even to the president, you used to say
 194 comrade president, the word comrade was always there. It was just the same as with parents and children. You can
 195 give rules to your kids: 'Don't do this, this is not good.' That was just the same in Swapo. You would be told that
 196 'this is not good, don't do it'. That was not difficult to me, maybe to some people. When I saw those rules, it was
 197 just the same with my mom here. When I was here I never just walked [around] or visited somewhere during night
 198 time. People used to go for disco dance, I liked it but my parents did not allow me to go there.

David

1 **I was born in Erundu. Erundu is called Oshakati now. Now Oshakati is a town, the houses [where I lived]**
 2 **have been removed. I started school at Omeege, Uukwambi [and schooled there] up to standard five. In**
 3 **1975 I left Namibia into exile. I went up to Lubango. I was trained, military training, [how to use] a big**
 4 **gun. I [became] a platoon commander. After training I went to combat, to Oshinota. In 1979 I left to**
 5 **Germany for a scholarship for six months. After I finished I went back to the front, to the Bravo battalion.**
 6 **I was a commander of a big gun, 82 millimetre mortar. I stayed there up to 1989. Then I came back to**
 7 **Namibia.**

8 [We] were 40 to 50 people in the family. [We] produced [our] own food, farming. My father was working at
 9 Walvis Bay but I don't know what kind of work he was doing. [He] worked for 18 months without coming home. I
 10 was young, I was not interested to ask about work. [We] were removed by government cars from Erundu to
 11 Omeege. [We] were forced out because the government wanted to build houses. I can't remember the year I
 12 started school because my mother did not know how to read and write, she was not a Christian. I liked to go to

13 school but during the summer I had to go and look after cattle. That disturbed [schooling]. So I was behind others.
14 And sometimes there was not enough money to support me to go to school because my father had many children.

15 After finishing school I went to the south to look for work, in 1968, because I was poor, no-one was taking care of
16 me. That time the white people were buying the people to go and work for them. So I was bought to a farm
17 between Rehoboth and Windhoek. I was cleaning and [looking after] the wire. If there was a hole I tied it together
18 so that the cattle couldn't go out. That white was a Dutch man, the one who was [my] boss. I was getting food but
19 with salt only, [there was] no relish. I used to get eight rands per month only. It didn't matter [whether] I worked
20 overtime or whatever, it was only eight rands per month. And I couldn't complain because the white would say: 'I
21 paid for you to come and work for me.' I felt bad but I couldn't do anything because I knew that to come back
22 home [would be] just useless, still the same, you would still be suffering. [It was] better to work and get
23 something, although it was too little. After the work I even bought a bicycle.

24 LM: Were there many workers in that farm?

25 Five. All came from the north. We were discussing [our] problem but we didn't do anything because we were
26 afraid to go and tell the whites because we would be beaten and told that we could go back to our houses in the
27 north, so we just tried by all means to finish [our contract]. At first I worked for 18 months. Then I finished it, [but
28 I] went back and worked again for 18 months at the same place. [Then] I went to Walvis Bay and got work in a
29 ship. I worked there for one year. [I stayed] in a compound. It was very bad. I had no permission to stay there. I
30 found some people who had a permission because they were booked by the Boers. I was by myself, I did not book.
31 I did not have anything to eat so my friends used to give me food in the compound. I only joined Swapo in the
32 south. [Earlier] I did not know what Swapo was. When I went there I understood what Swapo was. I wanted minds
33 to develop, all people be [treated] in the same [way], black people, white people, all people. That's all. I discussed
34 with friends and we also used to go to comrade Maxuilili. People in Namibia are all Namibians, white and other
35 people but when we used to [have] meetings the Boers used to come and beat us. [From Walvis Bay] I came back
36 home. Then I went to Ruacana, from Ruacana to Lubango. I came [to Ovamboland] on Friday. On Sunday I went.

37 LM: Can you tell me something about [your] reasons for leaving Namibia?

38 [It was] because of colonialism.

39 LM: Can you give me some more description, what especially were the things in the colonial situation that led you
40 to leave the country?

41 I want to tell you three points. The first one, for example when we were working we used to work together with
42 white people. The whites got more money, and I only got some cents. That's the first point. The second point is
43 that the white people had their own schools and the black people had different schools. The third point is [that]
44 when you bought a bread you bought a black bread and the white would buy a white bread, and you would not buy
45 at the same place. I just gave you examples, I know a lot about this.

46 LM: When did you start to think about leaving?

47 I started to think about [it] in 1974 because [I] woke up [in a way], previously I was ignorant. It was difficult to
48 make the decision, because [I] didn't know where [I was] going to and I didn't know with whom I was going to
49 stay. I wanted to fight for Namibia and I also wanted to get a scholarship there abroad. When we left we were two.
50 We just went up to Ruacana. In Angola we found some buses. We went up to Ocahama, then from Ocahama to
51 Lubango. There we found some [Swapo] officers. The officers took us to Okasapa. Okasapa was the centre where
52 we found many people. At first life was difficult because people hadn't known that there would be some people
53 coming from Namibia. The food was not enough at first. Later on we were taken care of. We stayed there for six
54 months. We were trained [there]. We were practicing, how to shoot this 82 millimetre mortar and also to run as
55 soldiers. Life was not very good but I knew why [it] was bad. Here in Namibia it was not like that.

56 LM: Did you have some political instruction?

57 Yes. Two days per week. I learned how to talk to the people, so that if a person was annoying, how could I go to
58 that person and tell her or him how to stay with other people and be happy. I was also trained as a platoon
59 commander. [Later] I was just commanding the soldiers to go and fight. I used to go together with the soldiers. I
60 used to come and operate in the north. I used to meet the people, those whom I knew before. I used to [get] some
61 information, I used to hear that 'there is a problem there and there are some Boers this side', and I could make my
62 decision, [how] to do my work.

63 LM: How were you chosen to go to Germany?

64 We were only chosen from the front, 'these people must [leave]', then we went to Lubango. In Lubango we were
65 told that we would leave to Germany. We had a building course. [It] was in GDR, in Berlin. In Berlin everything

66 was prepared and there was no war, everything was quite all right. I thought that maybe I can take Berlin to
 67 Namibia, Windhoek [to] be a good [place] like that. From Germany I went to Bravo battalion. I was still a
 68 commander of this big mortar but we were controlling the roads so that our cars could [pass] without problems.
 69 Sometimes you would find mines on the roads.

70 [I returned on the] 4th of July [1989]. We were told by our commanders that we should go back home. I was very
 71 happy to hear that. I wanted to get work so that I could build my family. I got married in 1989. That was [still]
 72 abroad. From the camp where I lived when I came home I went back to visit [my] family. Then I went to work
 73 with Minister Hishongwa, the Deputy Minister of Works. They were making toilets and sometimes repairing
 74 doors. I got this work from the people who were working together with me abroad. I was just called that I had to
 75 go there. I worked there for one year. [Then we] were told that the money was finished. [We] separated and I went
 76 to try to look for work. I found work with a Chinese organization which is building here in Namibia. That was in
 77 1991 when these Chinese came and started to build better housing here at Ongwediva. I was making concrete. I
 78 worked there for six months, then I left this work in January last year [when] the [it] came to an end. Then [I]
 79 stayed unemployed and now I am helping people here [with] the drought food, at the commissioner's office. I have
 80 now worked for eight months.

81 [When I returned] I found everything different because I found some main buildings which were not there before.
 82 There were also many parties in the country, which were not there before. I found some friends no longer come
 83 and [speak] to you because they are in other parties. There is a big difference between those people who were
 84 abroad and who are stayers. Some people used to talk about the returnees that they are not good. Some people
 85 here in Namibia said we have been cooked, and that is something like witchcraft, you know, that we were cooked
 86 in the pot, were cut and came together again after cooking.

87 LM: And does this attitude still continue or was it only after [your] return?

88 The translator (who also was a returnee): Yeah, still.

89 David: Yes.

90 This is not [what] I wanted. Before [my return] I thought that when I reach Namibia I will have work and I won't
 91 suffer, because I was in exile for a long time. What I have seen is not what I wanted. Maybe it came from the vote,
 92 that we didn't get the maximum. Now everybody is talking in this big meeting, they are just saying, 'no, yes, no,
 93 yes'. One is saying, 'we want to do this and this', and the other one says, 'no, that can't [be] because of what and
 94 what', in the National Assembly. I could [have been doing] something in the country [during the] years [I was in
 95 exile] but I was in the war. I got old fighting for the country which was a colony. So I lost something, wasted the
 96 time. Anyway, I have done a big thing which I brought home. So although I lost something myself it is a good
 97 thing for the nation. I know that in the future I will get work.

Joseph

1 I was born in 1956 in Uukolonkadhi, near Ruacana. **When I was young I started school at our village. I [lived]
 2 in my father's house. Then I went to the south to look for work and I found work in the farms. It was in
 3 1975. In 1977 I left Namibia to join Swapo. I joined the PLAN combatants, I was a PLAN fighter. In 1981 I
 4 was captured by the Boers when we were fighting. The Boers put me in jail in Onimwandi camp. In 1984
 5 the Boers transferred me to Tsumeb. We worked in a farm, watering things, but we were still in jail. In
 6 1988 I told the Boers that I wanted to get married. They gave me permission. In 1989 I [got] out of the jail.
 7 After that I have just been staying here.**

8 We were 20 in our family. I was helping my parents, taking care of animals like cattle and goats and sheeps,
 9 working around the house. I started school in 1967. School that time was not very good, not like today. I attended
 10 that school for five years. I just reached up to [sub-]B. That is a pre-grade. It was not a [proper] school. When I
 11 left the school I went to look after cattle for my father.

12 [In the south] I was taking care of sheep and looking for firewood, sometimes cutting firewood, that's all. [It was]
 13 in Outjo. We were forced to work even if we were sick. We were always working, no rest. [It was] like that
 14 because [Namibia] was a colony that time. We got six rands per month, just working, no rest, sick or not. We were
 15 three from Ovamboland and the rest were Damaras and Namas. We were discussing about the situation, we who
 16 came from the north. [The] others, like Damaras, were just like the Boers, they couldn't see whether the condition
 17 was very bad. We used to sleep wherever we could and everyone used to be given one tin of mealie meal and no
 18 relish for food. You couldn't move very far or pass to other farms, you would be shot. You just went and stayed
 19 where the Boers put you. And we were not staying together with the others, these Damaras and others, we were
 20 separated. We were feeling very lonely and we were thin. We were praying for the year to [end] so that we could
 21 finish our work and go back to our parents.

22 From there I went back home. I stayed at the village for two months and the third month I left Namibia into exile. I
 23 left because I was colonized and I had seen it myself. There was no [way to] survive in Namibia. In the south
 24 you'd be worked [whether you] liked it or not, [whether] you were sick or not. To stay in the village, just the same.
 25 [It] was better to go and take a gun to fight for Namibia. I went outside to fight the colony — not to fight a person
 26 or a colour, but to make people understand each other. Because when I was here in the farm I was given [food in
 27 the same place] where the dog was eating. Before I left I used to hear about Swapo, sometimes the voices which
 28 were singing the struggle songs, singing [about] Swapo,¹⁸ and when I was in the south I sometimes used to see
 29 something in the newspapers. [Sometimes I also] used to see [Swapo] soldiers.

30 We were six who planned [to leave]. We left together. Swapo soldiers used to come inside Namibia, so we
 31 [agreed] to tell each other [if we saw them], then we could leave. One day we saw those soldiers. We told each
 32 other one by one. We went home to tell our parents that we would be leaving. Then we went. [My] parents didn't
 33 feel very good [but] I knew that these people were older so I could not take them with us. I had to leave them
 34 although they felt bad. I had to leave them because I wanted to go and fight. We crossed the border during the
 35 night together with the soldiers, led by the soldiers. We went up to Oshilambo camp. Then we went to a camp
 36 called Vietnam. We stayed [there] for one month. Then we went to Kassinga. I stayed there for three months. Then
 37 Kassinga was bombed. [It] was only a few days [after] I had left to Lubango. We stayed there for three months.
 38 We were doing work around the camps, cutting sticks and making houses and classes for ourselves and digging
 39 some dugouts where to put some military [stuff]. Then we left again to Omamanya camp. We stayed [there] for six
 40 months. We did not do anything, we were just resting there.

41 From there we came back to Lubango to start military training. We got blankets and some food and soaps. We got
 42 up in the morning to go to exercise and be trained. I was trained as a reconnaissance [person], somebody who
 43 could go and watch what was happening before people obeyed tactic. We were in the struggle. You cannot say that
 44 it was comfortable, some things were not there. It was difficult but I wanted to free Namibia so that I could come
 45 and be like other people who are free. I knew that the struggle would be bitter but I only wanted to be free. It was
 46 not so bad because of the burning which [had] already burned me [out] from [Namibia]. I was happy to take
 47 military training. I [had met] people who had already been trained. I hoped that I could train like them and also go
 48 to fight like those who had guns. I wanted to have a gun. At first, when we had not started training there was not
 49 enough comradeship. When we started training we were told that 'this here is your comrade, you have to do like
 50 this and this with your comrade, see, we are together and we want to fight', and so on like that. I also [learned]
 51 how to approach a person, how to talk to people.

52 [The training took] six months. Then I joined the combatants to go and fight. We were about 50 to 100 in groups,
 53 platoons, when we went to fight. Tactics [depended on] the situation, you had to think how you could go in the
 54 place [that was your target] and how you could come out. It depended on whether the place was cool or not so
 55 good. You thought how you had to do so that you could pass or fight. At first you had to go together with your
 56 group. Then you had to leave your group somewhere, then you would go all together, around six reconnaissance
 57 [people]. Then we would separate, two people or three or one [and then] when you went ahead you could be one
 58 by one, to look how the area was. We used to go up to Onamutoni, and in Ondangwa and Oshakati. We used to
 59 meet some people but we did not operate where people knew me, because they could have reported me.
 60 Sometimes we used to move in uniforms and sometimes in civil clothes. We had a chairman here inside Namibia.
 61 So when we came we just went to that person, then we heard information, got everything. Then I [was] just
 62 moving around, not very far, so long that I heard what was happening.

63 When I was captured we were on a mission as usual. One of the stayers reported that 'a soldier who came from
 64 abroad came around these houses'. The Casspirs¹⁹ came and followed my footsteps. You know these [military]
 65 shoes, they could follow. I was alone. They followed me the whole day up to five o'clock when they captured me.
 66 At first I was beaten by them. Then they took me from the car everywhere we passed and told the people to come
 67 and look at me. I was tied and my eyes were covered. Everywhere they told that 'come and see this guerrilla'. [I
 68 was taken] to Okatope. I slept there. The next day [I was taken] to Oniimwandi camp. I was questioned many
 69 times and beaten. [I was] just kept there, the Boers used to come and question me, beat and torture. The whole
 70 month I was just beaten and tortured and asked many things. I thought that the Boers would kill me. I never knew
 71 that I would be alive today.

72 Then I was taken to another place [where] I found other people who [had been] captured before me. Then I just
 73 stayed in the jail up to [19]89. We were many, about 200 people who had been captured. Sometimes the Boers
 74 used to take some people and put [them] on the Casspirs to go and kill them, one by one. I never thought that I
 75 would [stay] alive, I thought maybe one day I would also be done like that. I was just praying that maybe I would
 76 get out. I was feeling bad, I was down. We discussed about escaping from the camp but there were some people
 77 who used to report us to the Boers that 'this [one] used to say like this and this'. We were sometimes afraid to talk.
 78 We were also afraid that [we would be captured] and killed. We were transferred [to Tsumeb] because there was a

¹⁸ Joseph apparently means Swapo's radio transmissions from abroad.

¹⁹ Armoured vehicles that were widely used by the South African military in northern Namibia.

79 big garden in Tsumeb, to go and water that garden. In Oniimwandi we were better. We did not get enough food in
80 Tsumeb. I [met my wife] in Oniimwandi camp. She used to work [there]. [Later] she used to come and visit me in
81 Tsumeb.

82 LM: When did you receive the information that you were going to be released?

83 At first we heard it from the radio. We were only told when we got out. It was on the 20 June 1989. From the
84 prison I came here, made my house here. The people have welcomed me well, I have never met any problems.
85 Also my parents have welcomed me. Up to now I am unemployed. I feel very bad because I am not working. I
86 know that this government is still new, still a very small government, but anyway I am suffering, I am a poor man.
87 Although I am now suffering it was better to join the liberation struggle. I have no work but it was better because
88 we have now an independent country.

Matthew

1 I was born in 1959 in Tsumeb. That's where I grew up. My childhood was typical for any African boy of that time,
2 because I grew up at the time when the South African government implemented the Odendaal Plan which
3 indicated the separation of various races and tribes in this country. The blacks got the raw deal, they occupied the
4 lowest rank on the ladder of society. I grew up in conditions of poverty. I was taken care of by my grandmother
5 and my granddad, because my mom had to go and look for a job somewhere and my father had already left into
6 exile as a politician. That was back in 1964. He was in the oldest political party in this country, that is the South
7 West Africa National Union, SWANU.

8 I used to help my grandfather to care for the cattle. For quite a long time our forefathers came to Tsumeb to look
9 for copper which they used to make some axes and hoes to cultivate and prepare the land. Many of them were
10 coming to the area until the town developed. Then with the Odendaal commission they told that everybody should
11 either move his cattle to the homeland or sell them or eat them. My grandfather did not have money to have his
12 [cattle] transported up north so he opted to sell them and to slaughter some of them to sell the meat. We continued
13 living in the city and with the money that they had and the pension money that they were receiving, the little that
14 they received, they were trying to sustain us, getting us school fees, buying uniforms. We could sell some brewed
15 stuff called tombo²⁰ so that we could earn some additional income for the family. It was a large extended African
16 family where you had some of your nieces, your nephews, everybody was around.

17 **One of the most important turning points in my life was when I was a primary school student in Tsumeb. I**
18 **got a job to sell newspapers. Every day I had to go and collect the newspapers and sell them in town. I**
19 **developed an interest in reading newspapers, even the political developments in the country. During that**
20 **particular period doctor Escher — you remember, he was a special representative of the UN secretary**
21 **general — was sent to Namibia to meet with communities, politicians, church leaders and discuss the plight**
22 **of the people of this country, as they were always campaigning at various United Nations' forums to have**
23 **South Africa quit Namibia. So I happened to [take] part because our teacher was a Swapo member and he**
24 **was the chairman of a Swapo branch, so he organized us to go and demonstrate in front of the hotel where**
25 **doctor Escher was staying. The security police, the Special Branch, came to see who was involved, so the**
26 **next day everybody was picked up from school and given a bit of hiding with what they call a rotang, a**
27 **stick, specially made for the police. I was influenced very much by my teacher. My father too was a**
28 **politician. He had already left for exile by then. After completing my standard six in 1974 I started to**
29 **become active in the Swapo Youth League as an organizer and immediately was elected as branch**
30 **secretary of the Swapo Youth League in Tsumeb.**

31 LM: Why was it that you channeled your political awareness through Swapo?

32 At that time tribal factors did count and Swapo was quite active. I think that really made me join them. Also when
33 you are still politically immature you don't really consider the political guidelines of the party, what they are
34 fighting for [but if] your elder brother is in that particular party you get influenced and you want to get involved,
35 you want to get in company with some of these guys, you want to be associated with them.

36 **In 1975 I went to the Martin Luther High School in the Okombahe reserve, near Omaruru. Students there had**
37 **freedom to discuss political, social or any other issues that they felt needed their attention, so they were**
38 **much more free than in any other school. So there we could engage in political discussions, we could engage**
39 **in party politics also, although the teacher or the school management did not like that because that was**
40 **quite divisive because [there was] a lot of political parties, SWANU, Swapo and many others. We continued**
41 **doing that nevertheless.** We had debating nights where you discussed political issues. We discussed things like
42 resolution 435, what it meant to Namibia. We'd discuss what it means to be black, we were trying to instill some
43 kind of black consciousness within ourselves, be proud of ourselves, not to be told by others that we are inferior.

²⁰ Home-brewed beer.

44 At times we would discuss party politics privately, some of the political developments. At times we were trying to
 45 imitate a court situation because we lived in a society where the legal system was biased in favour of the status
 46 quo. We called it the court of injustice, so someone would be summoned, some were police, they summoned us
 47 and then the judge would bring the case that 'he attended a public rally', which in the eyes of the law was illegal.
 48 In the end the court would start to listen to him, but despite all the arguments the court would sentence that you are
 49 guilty, so there was no justice. It just reflected the political and legal environment in which you were living in that
 50 time. The school was labelled by the authorities a nest or a breeding ground of communism and terrorism.

51 It might be that the education system is better today, but by then the way how schooling was conducted, the way
 52 the discipline was being maintained [was better]. In today's schools there is much to be desired. You see, our
 53 schools were almost semi-military establishments where you followed discipline. You could not afford to come
 54 late to school. We [stayed in] hostels where your everyday life was regulated and you only went home during
 55 weekends. We grew up very conservative unlike today's children. We had to refrain completely from touching any
 56 lady. Social life would come after completing your studies. In our school days there was a very low rate of
 57 pregnancies at school unlike today, and most of these pregnancies happened during school holidays when [the
 58 students] were away from school. But of course we could organize a social evening where you could go dancing
 59 with ladies. But it was strictly not allowed to enter the girls' hostel. I liked rugby much and I was the captain of the
 60 school rugby team. We used to play with other high schools or other teams from Windhoek. One day in a week we
 61 had to clean up the whole school and the whole area around the classes. It was a church run school, so you had to
 62 go to church every morning. You had to go for studies twice a day, in the afternoon and late in the evening, it was
 63 compulsory there. Nowadays everybody spends time in discos. We could never go to discos or bazaars or parties
 64 but today's kids, you get them in parties, at the discos, nightclubs, they are drunk and smoking cigarettes with their
 65 teachers and all this type of things. These are some of the things that we cannot understand today. People are
 66 talking about freedom and democracy, the school has to be democratized, the rights of the students, their dignity
 67 should be respected. For the students schooling is secondary to anything else, that's a problem.

68 As I told you I grew up under conditions of poverty, under conditions of oppression, seeing at times how elderly
 69 people were beaten by young whites, police officers or army privates. I [also] grew up in a very religious family
 70 and I used to go to church where the main thrust of the sermon was always justice. These sermons contributed to
 71 my rising awareness. While I was selling newspapers I used to read, follow political developments, so I developed
 72 an interest in politics. Whenever there was a public rally I used to go there to listen to various speakers. I
 73 immediately got carried away by some of them. You thought that these guys were very brave. Getting to Martin
 74 Luther High School helped to consolidate my political views. I developed a very radical approach to all aspects of
 75 human society. Some of my friends who knew me that time say that I have undergone a complete political and
 76 ideological change. They say that [I was] as radical as Mao and Kim Il Sung. And of course after Martin Luther
 77 High School [when I] went to the party school in Hungary, took some trips to the Soviet Union, [spent] some time
 78 in Bulgaria and worked closely together with Russian political commissars my views [became] raw Marxist-
 79 Leninist.

80 Living in a society marked by repression, poverty, unemployment, cultural oppression, you tried to look [for an
 81 alternative] and you thought that the system that we had was a capitalist system. You heard that there was a
 82 communist society where everybody speaks, where the workers have a say in the running of the affairs of the
 83 country, in the production the factories, where the means of production belong to everybody, and there are no
 84 poor, there are no rich, everybody is shared to equally according to his labour. Then you tended to think that that's
 85 the best system that would be a better alternative to the one that we were having. And being exposed only to one
 86 ideology at that time also made me really believe in the basic principles and ideals of Marxism-Leninism until
 87 when my consciousness developed to that extent that I could see other literatures and then try to compare the
 88 situation and see that there should be something else that could be acceptable to all sides in life.

89 LM: But even though the situation was probably the same for almost everybody I don't think that everybody
 90 developed this kind of [an approach]?

91 No, not really. Only those who were a bit politically inclined. The party was fighting to establish a classless non-
 92 exploitative socialist society based on the principles and ideals of socialism. As members of the Swapo Youth
 93 League you wanted to acquaint yourself with that philosophy. We had some comrades in South Africa. When we
 94 travelled down there we tried to smuggle in some Marxist literature that we used to read in the evenings, then hide
 95 them somewhere so that the police would not lay their hands on them.

96 **I left school in 1977.** We were engaged in party politics. We were in the majority and the principal and some other
 97 teachers belonged to different parties. Some of them were members of the executive committee of, say, SWANU.
 98 Other teachers were Swapo members, we used to meet secretly and we had problems with the [principal], he didn't
 99 tolerate party politics at school, and by that time politics had become part of our life. I had a problem one day. We
 100 were studying in the afternoon. I had to go to the toilet, and in the meantime, when I was absent, the class was
 101 making noise and the teacher who was supervising that afternoon came to the class: 'Why are you making noise?'
 102 The whole class was punished. I came back to the class, sat down and continued studying. When the bell rang I
 103 stood up. Then the captain said: 'Where are you going?' I said: 'I'm going off.' He said that the teacher had said

104 we shouldn't go because we were being punished, so we had to sit down. I said: 'I wasn't part of that noise, why
 105 should I be punished?' So as I was moving out the teacher came in and saw that I was trying to disobey his order,
 106 he pushed me back into the class. I said: 'Why are you pushing me?' He said: 'I told you to sit after the study
 107 session.' I said I was out of the class that time. 'It is your class, it concerns everybody in the class, even if you
 108 were not there.' I said: 'No, I [will] not remain here,' so I walked out. And he went to report it to the school
 109 principal. The school principal said: 'Why are you so undisciplined? You [should] stay in the class until the
 110 teacher is satisfied.' I said: 'I cannot be punished for someone else's wrongdoing.' He said that if the teacher [had
 111 decided] to punish us he supported it. He said: 'Go back to the class.' I went to the hostel. Next morning I went for
 112 the morning devotion. After that the principal called me and said: 'I told you to go to the class yesterday and you
 113 went to the hostel. I will punish you for that. There is an area that is grown with grass, you have to clean that.' I
 114 said: 'I shall not do that.' 'If you don't do that you'll go, you'll leave the school.' 'That's fine, I will go.' Teachers
 115 came to talk to me. I said: 'I'm not doing it because of party political reasons but because I think that injustice is
 116 being done.' That Friday I travelled back home.

117 That's when I started to get actively involved in full-time politics. **I joined the National Secretary of the Swapo**
 118 **Youth League here in Windhoek, Nashilongo Taapopi. We set out organizing the first Swapo Youth League**
 119 **congress in Namibia. We held a congress in Rehoboth, that was around March 1978. I was elected to the**
 120 **Central Committee of the Swapo Youth League, I stayed on working at the headquarters.** We used to travel
 121 to various areas, try to spread some pamphlets to people in the rural areas and towns about Swapo so they could
 122 become members. We tried to tell them that 'only Swapo will rescue [us] from all this suffering', and we tried to
 123 [help] people who [wanted to] go into exile to join the liberation army. We had people who could transport them
 124 up to the border. We addressed public rallies. I addressed some public rallies so I was always in the eyes of the
 125 South African security police.

126 **Then the Herero traditional chief, Clemens Kapuuu, was assassinated and the political situation turned**
 127 **very sore with South Africa increasing its repression against Swapo because they accused Swapo of having**
 128 **assassinated [him]. So the general atmosphere between the supporters of chief Kapuuu and those belonging**
 129 **to Swapo [turned] very bad. There was fighting and people were killed, and South Africa [used this] as a**
 130 **pretext to introduce some repressive measures against Swapo as a liberation movement in general and**
 131 **specifically against Swapo activists. The AG, that is Administrator General, promulgated a proclamation**
 132 **that gave the police free hand to arrest anyone whom they deemed to have promoted or having the intent**
 133 **to promote violence in the country. The day the proclamation was issued the South African security police,**
 134 **Special Branch raided Swapo headquarters in Windhoek and arrested three senior office bearers of the**
 135 **Executive Committee of the mother body. And they said they would come back, so me and a colleague**
 136 **whom we were working with at the headquarters decided that we should go, because we met a South**
 137 **African who told us that 'you guys, you better be careful because the police will be busy picking up**
 138 **everybody whom they suspect of being a Swapo activist, so you will be in big trouble'. That's when me and**
 139 **my friend said that it wouldn't be worth it being arrested and locked up indefinitely while there was an**
 140 **opportunity to continue the struggle for liberation in exile.**

141 I could have stayed on much longer. My mother [had] the idea that I should go, because I was no more at school,
 142 and other young people were going and receiving some bursaries to go and study somewhere in other countries, so
 143 [I could] also strike that gold and get the opportunity to go and study further in exile. Apart from that I had been
 144 working with the man, Taapopi, who was the National Secretary of the Swapo Youth League. He told us he was
 145 going to Otjiwarongo to organize something. Then we received a letter from him that he had given to someone,
 146 addressed to me and members of the Central Committee. [He] apologized that he had to leave us behind, he was
 147 going to exile, he hoped that we could continue the struggle for liberation inside the country. I told my mother
 148 about this [and] my mother said: 'Look, I have been telling you that you should go, but you are a fool. Now the
 149 man who was always telling you that you shouldn't go has left you behind, now you are alone here.' I continued
 150 ignoring that but after the death of Kapuuu the situation in Windhoek was very tense. We had a lot of fighting in
 151 the streets, people got killed and the repression started and people [were] arrested.

152 **We came back home in the afternoon, I informed my mom. She told me that she had seen a man whom she**
 153 **knew [who was] going to [go to] Ovambo, so she could go and ask the man to give us a lift up to Ovambo**
 154 **where we could try and see how we could get through the border. So we drove up to Ovamboland. At**
 155 **Odiibo we were trying to get in contact with guerrillas because we had a house there. We were dropped**
 156 **[there] by a Finnish lady working at the Onandjokwe hospital and she gave us a contact person who was a**
 157 **student at Odiibo High School. That school was situated next to the border of Angola and Namibia. We then**
 158 **eventually succeeded to get in contact with the guerrillas, so one night we moved across the border into**
 159 **Angola. We got into basic military training in guerrilla warfare at the Tobias Hainyeko training centre in**
 160 **Lubango. It was the time when South Africans raided Kassinga.** I was trained as an ordinary soldier, an
 161 infantry man. In our time it took three months. It was later extended to six months. You got basic training in
 162 guerrilla warfare, some of the tactics you had to use in the battlefield, how to handle a gun, and all this type of
 163 things, if your commander said, 'do this', how you should go about doing that before the enemy is in the area, or
 164 how to crawl in the [fire]. Politics was one of the most important ingredients of the training because your whole
 165 thing had to be guided in a definite direction. Basically you got basic training on the policies of the organization,
 166 political programme of the organization, the constitution and how it functioned although you have never seen it

167 being practised when it comes to how the party is run. And you were being told about the socialist community of
 168 nations and the march of the world socialist revolution. You were being told about the crisis of the world capitalist
 169 system, this type of things.

170 [When I left] I didn't know anything about life in exile. Of course [after I arrived there] I could see the situation
 171 which the guerrillas or the fighters were living in. [And] you were told: 'This is struggle, the struggle is not a
 172 hotel. You have to sleep next to [the trunk] of a tree. And you must understand that guerrillas should stay for many
 173 [days] without eating.' I understood that that was a necessary sacrifice that one should make in the struggle for
 174 liberation. But this type of sacrifice was made by only a few while others were enjoying life somewhere in
 175 Lubango or Luanda or Lusaka. They had nice time there while the people who were doing the job had at times to
 176 go without shoes or without uniforms. Commanders were well-off and as you became a commander you controlled
 177 the logistics and you made sure that you had enough before the logistics ran out. Say, if there were only 20 pairs of
 178 shoes remaining in the base of 2000 people they would definitely be given to the commanders, or if there were
 179 uniforms, if there were a few pieces of fat left. And soldiers were told, 'there is no fat, we wait for the next
 180 supply', but [the commanders] would continue eating. Or relish, you were told that 'we are running out of relish',
 181 but you wouldn't know what there was in the logistics. But you get used to it and I got used to that type of
 182 situation as I stayed there, [it] became normal life for me because humans can adapt to situations. People who
 183 were coming from home would always complain but they were told that there was no way because they wanted to
 184 influence others also to complain, so basically you would be seen as trying to organize some kind of a revolt
 185 against the leadership, so even if you were dissatisfied with something you kept it to yourself or you shared it with
 186 the person that you trusted most.

187 **In September I left for the party school in Bulgaria. That was a school run by the Bulgarian Communist**
 188 **Party where they were teaching Marxism-Leninism.** Every year the party schools in the former eastern [bloc]
 189 countries offered scholarships to people to go for training in Marxism-Leninism. They selected people who they
 190 thought would be able to do it, then you went for a test, that was basically grammar, and they asked why you
 191 wanted to go and study, and if you answered satisfactorily you were picked for one or another country. [Life in
 192 Bulgaria] was ok because the allowance that we received was very good. They wanted us to be friends and to
 193 spread the message of Marxism-Leninism, to come and tell the people how good socialism is, how good the
 194 Bulgarian people were, their hospitality.

195 LM: Did the time in Bulgaria have any influence on your thinking?

196 Yes, most definitely. I came to accept socialism as a very good system for my country, I came to develop affinity
 197 to the whole theory of Marxism-Leninism. **I completed a one year course in August 1979 and in September I**
 198 **returned to Angola. I joined the training core at the Hainyeko training centre, I started as a political**
 199 **instructor and in 1980 I was appointed as the Chief Political Instructor in Hainyeko. Apart from the camp**
 200 **commissar I was responsible for the political training. I had a group of up to 45 political instructors, I was**
 201 **responsible for the political orientation or indoctrination of the trainees, the new arrivals from home**
 202 **(laughs). I stayed in Hainyeko as the chief political instructor until January 1983. Then I went to Hungary,**
 203 **Budapest, where I had a course in journalism. When I was the Chief Political Instructor in Hainyeko I was**
 204 **also contributing articles to the Combatant. The Combatant was the monthly bulletin of the People's**
 205 **Liberation Army of Namibia. At times I had to go for editorial board meetings, so they wanted me to get**
 206 **training in journalism. So I went to Hungary where I attended a six months course at the International**
 207 **Institute for the Training of Journalists.**

208 In the bases I could see that the way how things were done was not to my liking but I didn't have a platform to say
 209 what I thought was wrong or what I thought was good for the party and the struggle. [I had to] rethink whether I
 210 had taken the right decision to join the struggle, whether what the leadership was doing was in the interest of the
 211 struggle, in the interest of the Namibian people and the country as a whole, but of course I never had any regret
 212 that I had elected to join the struggle. [Likewise,] when I travelled to Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, I could see
 213 that life was really not that ideal. I could talk to various people and I could listen to my professor. I always tried
 214 to compare it with the actual life of the ground. But working in the liberation movement where certain ideologies are
 215 propounded it's very difficult to take a very different stand from what is being said by the ideological framers of
 216 the party. If you are working for the commissariat you tend to become a propagandist for the party and the party
 217 also, because they wanted to have a good relationship with the Russians, they defended the 'socialist community
 218 of nations', it was a natural ally in the struggle to free your country from terrorism, colonialism and racism, all this
 219 type of political jargon.

220 I remember an incident in 1982 when a Soviet lecturer, one of the commissars attached with the PLAN, came to
 221 lecture on Soviet foreign policy in Africa and he was talking about supporting liberation movements in Africa. He
 222 mentioned Namibia, he mentioned various countries in Africa. Then I asked him: 'Comrade, why don't you
 223 mention Western Sahara? I think the Polisario too are fighting for a very just cause. You are not supporting their
 224 struggle to free themselves from Moroccan occupation, is that not a double standard in Soviet foreign policy? Just
 225 because you know that Morocco is your ally you prefer supporting it and then you see that South Africa is an ally
 226 of the West, you just want to destroy it as a part of the strategy to conquer spheres of influence.' Oh, the guy got
 227 red faced: 'Hey, you cannot ask me such a question. Who told you to ask such questions here, why do you try to

228 be political here?’ I said: ‘Oh, I’m so sorry.’ He went to report me to the chief political commissar at the defence
 229 headquarters and I was summoned to the offices. He knew me for quite a long time from home. He told me: ‘You
 230 know, there is no need to ask him such questions. Some of these [things] are true, but they are embarrassing to
 231 these people. So let us not create animosity because they are supporting us.’

232 **After completing** [the course in Hungary] **I came back and joined the Defence Headquarters and became a**
 233 **full time member of the editorial board which was under the PLAN Commissariat.** I had to try and build a
 234 hut for myself, a simple dugout, and I had to make a thatch roof of grass and I tried to organize for some planks to
 235 make a bed. Coming from Hungary I had some clothes that I had bought there, a watch, I could sell them to the
 236 Angolans and buy something that I really needed. Of course I would get some supplies from the logistics but that
 237 was not enough. Sometimes you got food that was not good, at times only beans, so you would go into the nearby
 238 village, you would try and see what they had there, whether they could sell something that you could eat. [Or if]
 239 you wanted to drink something, beer, some of the locally brewed stuff, you would go to them and ask: ‘Is there
 240 something, is there some locally brewed beer?’ ‘Yeah, yeah, we have.’ You would buy a glass[ful] or two and you
 241 would go back to your base again. Or you would buy some tobacco from them or cigarettes if they had any. My
 242 duty was basically to write stories about the war, at times it was only through military briefings. You were briefed,
 243 you had never been to the spot and you had to write what you were told. Or you were issued with the war
 244 communique, you had to go and reproduce it in the paper. [It] was not professional because after [you] had written
 245 [the stories] they went to the Chief Commissar. He went through them and removed what he thought was not good,
 246 added what he thought was good, told that ‘this story cannot go into publication’.

247 **But then things were getting worse, the defence headquarters’ chief died, the Secretary of Defence Peter**
 248 **Nanyemba. And at the end of December 1983 the South Africans carried out a raid on the defence**
 249 **headquarters. Fortunately nobody was killed, but there were some people who were hurt seriously. This**
 250 **was when the man whom we have come to call the Butcher of Lubango²¹ set out to arrest what he called**
 251 **enemy agents, he told the meeting [that there were] a lot of enemy agents and that he would get rid of them,**
 252 **he knew how, and that the man who had always been protecting enemy agents was no longer there, and**
 253 **[that] he had the full order from the Commander in Chief, Sam Nujoma, to arrest all enemy agents.**

254 The situation was very tense, especially among the rank and file of Swapo in exile, at the front, in the rear and as
 255 far as in places like Luanda and Kwanza Sul where most of the refugees were living. The whole situation was
 256 characterized by confusion and mistrust. People coming from the south were of course in the minority and people
 257 from Ovamboland were in the majority. Proportionally it was the people coming from the south who were hard hit
 258 by the campaign to get rid of so-called enemy agents. People who had been your friends throughout those years
 259 that you had spent in exile were trying to keep a distance because they didn’t want to be seen with you, to be
 260 associated with you, because if they were seen with [you] then they would always [be asked:] ‘Why are you always
 261 with that guy? What are you discussing? Do you have some connections?’ The whole campaign started to prepare
 262 the people psychologically that the liberation movement had been infiltrated by dangerous enemy agents. People
 263 who did not have an independent mind could really say: ‘Our leaders have seen this, it should be true because our
 264 leaders are always telling us the truth, they know better than us.’ So some people really started believing that there
 265 were enemy agents whereas there was no rationale to their beliefs.

266 I wouldn’t want to say that there were no enemy agents [at all], of course there could have been, but I would say
 267 that if ever there were then they should have been in the top ranks of the army. At times there was a meeting of the
 268 Military Council and a day or two days thereafter you would hear South Africans reporting in their radio that ‘the
 269 military commanders had a meeting and it was like this and this and this’. [Or there would be a mission and] the
 270 commander would come to the detachment which had been given the mission of, say, infiltrating to the country at
 271 a specific point of the border and attacking a base. Then you would go with your soldiers for crossing, you would
 272 tell them to have a look at the border, whether it’s safe to cross, you would go there [and] see that the South
 273 Africans have concentrated soldiers there to block that passage. You would go back to your commander and say:
 274 ‘We can’t pass that route, it’s impossible, or we’ll lose all the soldiers.’ The commander would get back to his
 275 superiors. Then he would come back and say: ‘Your order is to pass there and you must make sure that you get to
 276 that target, if you pass anywhere else you are responsible.’

277 There were combatants who had been fighting in the front and got captured by the Boers, so these guys were
 278 virtually forced to join a counter-insurgency unit like Koevoet or any other of the tribal battalions that were
 279 operating in Namibia, or the South West Africa Territorial Forces, SWATF. They ran away and got back across
 280 the border to Angola. When these people came there they were not really welcome because commanders would
 281 say: ‘How is it possible that this man has been captured and he’s back again? He’s been recruited by the Boers and
 282 then reinfilitrated into Swapo so that he can come and spy.’ So these people were targeted too and arrested as
 283 enemy agents. And people who came from other [population groups], say coloured: ‘How is it possible for these
 284 coloured to join the struggle? After all they are treated better than us, they do not suffer like us, so there should be
 285 other motives for them to join the liberation struggle in exile.’ And the people from towns, ‘these people are
 286 accessible to being recruited easily’, the so-called mbwitis, meaning that you are not pure Ovambo. There was an

²¹ Solomon Hawala, Swapo’s Chief of Security in exile.

287 atmosphere of mistrust in the army. Even Sam, when he came to address, he said: 'I don't trust even my wife. If
 288 she's an enemy agent then she must be arrested.' That's why they arrested his wife, the first lady was arrested for a
 289 brief period. There was a slogan that 'the party intellectuals have come to hijack the revolution, to take over after
 290 many of the people have sacrificed for quite a long time, and they are most likely to betray the struggle that many
 291 people have been fighting, many have died and sacrificed.' So they decided to start a general campaign of arrest
 292 and intimidation against people whom they felt to pose a threat to their own personal interest and position.

293 **All three of my colleagues disappeared and I was the only man left in the office. I remained alone in the**
 294 **office putting out the bulletin, so I was made the acting editor of the Combatant. From April to September**
 295 **I put out the Combatant alone. On the 22nd of October police officers came and said that they had come to**
 296 **arrest me. I asked [one of] them why, he said he was given an order by Jesus.²² 'Why?' He said he didn't**
 297 **know anything, he was sent, so I should go with him and explain to the people who had sent him. So I said**
 298 **'ok', I was handcuffed, I was taken to a place they called the screening board. They put me into a dugout**
 299 **[and said that] they would come back later. [When they] came back they told me: 'We want you to tell us**
 300 **your biography.' I narrated my autobiography to them and they said: 'You have forgotten something very**
 301 **important.' I said: 'No, what, there is all, it's impossible that you say that I've forgotten something very**
 302 **important. I think I have told what were the highlights of my life.' They said: 'No, go to rest again, then**
 303 **you come and tell us again, we will come back later.' They led me into the dugout again, I stayed there, the**
 304 **sun was setting and it was getting darker. The man who was guarding came with a rope, tied my hands**
 305 **behind me and my legs together. Then he just left. I continued sleeping.**

306 **Around one [o'clock] in the night they came back in, untied my legs, but my hands were still tied, and said:**
 307 **'Follow us.' I followed them to a place that I could see was a torture chamber, there were sticks made**
 308 **especially for that purpose. They said: 'Ok, we are again requesting you friendly to narrate your**
 309 **autobiography and we want it full.' I told them again. They said: 'No, you are telling lies.' There were**
 310 **around five of them, they picked up those sticks, started beating me. Then they said: 'Ok, you have**
 311 **forgotten something. Tell us when, where, by whom and with whom you were trained.' I said: 'Oh, I was**
 312 **trained here in Hainyeko.' They said: 'No, we don't want that Hainyeko training, we know that you were**
 313 **trained in Namibia.' I said: 'No, I was not trained at any time by anyone anywhere in Namibia.' They said**
 314 **I was telling bullshit, they didn't need it, they knew that I was a political commissar and I was clever but I**
 315 **was not in a court of law, all they wanted was me to answer those questions. They were not politicians, they**
 316 **were not political commissars, all they needed was straight talk from me, just to give them what they**
 317 **wanted. I said 'no'. So they told me to undress naked, tied me up [and started] beating, beating.**

318 **The beating continued until, say, four o'clock. Then they told that I should go back. There were a lot of**
 319 **other people there so they needed to work with the others too. So I went back. The next day they gave me**
 320 **some papers and said: 'You must write everything and you [better] give those answers too.' I told them the**
 321 **same thing. I could hear the next morning that he was there, Jesus, asking: 'That guy, did he say**
 322 **anything?' They said: 'No, still refusing.' Then he left, I could hear his car. So it continued, them always**
 323 **[saying:] 'Tell us, tell us the story, tell us the story.' They were telling: 'Listen, there is no way for you, if**
 324 **you don't tell us a story and you die nobody will ever come and ask us where you are. There were other**
 325 **people who tried to be thick-headed but it did not help, they are all gone now. Can you remember the other**
 326 **commissar? He tried to be thick-headed, he was a member of the Central Committee and he died of torture.**
 327 **You can tell a story to people who wonder what is going on. We say, "no, he killed himself, apparently he**
 328 **had a poison here put in by Boers, so when he saw he was arrested he swallowed the poison".'**

329 **So it continued for almost two weeks, beatings never ended. There were some other people who were not**
 330 **very supportive of what was happening and they would come and tell: 'These people will never leave you**
 331 **alone, just tell them that you were sent and they will take you to another [prison], because if you are here**
 332 **they will only destroy your body and as time goes you will have to agree [anyway]. Give us a story because**
 333 **once they have arrested you you will never get away.' Ok, little by little: 'Ok, I was trained.' 'By whom,**
 334 **where?' I [thought:] 'Where, where? Where should that be?' I had to recall a base somewhere, I told it was**
 335 **South West Africa Military School. 'Where is that?' I said: 'On the way to the airport.' They asked when. I**
 336 **said: 'Ok, this period.' 'Yeah, we know all these things.' But I know that that base or school did not exist.**
 337 **The period that I mentioned I was at high school and working at the headquarters, actively involved with**
 338 **work and I was never away for three months. They said: 'We know all these things, we only want**
 339 **confirmation from you. You could have told us all these things a long time ago.'**

340 **They [transferred] me to another camp, detention camp, it was called Etale. There I met some friends who**
 341 **had been arrested before me. Some people were completely rejective, they felt that they would not make it to**
 342 **freedom again, that they were there to die. I still had the hope that one day the truth would prevail and justice**
 343 **could be done and I would be free. I knew that the people back home were campaigning for the release of those**
 344 **detained by Swapo, because many ran away from the organization and told that some had got arrested. It was only**
 345 **a matter of trying to boost our own morale, trying to help one another. You would go and talk to [someone], you**

²² Hawala.

346 would tell him a story that could make him laugh, that he would forget about the situation. That happened on a
 347 daily basis there. If you saw that 'this guy, why is he so quiet?', you would tell stories of, say, your childhood,
 348 what you had been doing outside or you would try to [imagine that] we were out, what you would be doing. At
 349 times we would be singing, they didn't care as long as we didn't sing very loudly, or we had a day when
 350 everybody would stand up and make a joke or a puzzle which you had to answer.

351 There were various detention camps. At a camp there were big dugouts where, say, 50 people were living, another
 352 one, 60, another one, 90. In other areas there were other camps where other people were. You would be kept here
 353 for one or two years and then be transferred to another place, because they didn't want you to get used to the area,
 354 because then if you would run away you would know which direction to take. They might not transfer all of you,
 355 they might pick some out and take them to another prison where they would join others. When they needed
 356 something they would bring us out so that we could make, say, bricks. At times it was very cold. Or we would
 357 have to go and collect some firewood for cooking or collect water in the bush, or build some houses for the
 358 guards.

359 Of course the most difficult time would come, time when there was no food and a lot of people got sick, attacked
 360 by various diseases, [like] beriberi. Their gums got swollen and bloody and the teeth were loose in the gums and
 361 [they] got thinner and thinner. The situation became so hopeless and helpless that we were always losing some of
 362 the inmates, they would die next to you. In the beginning we'd bury them ourselves but these guys [got] afraid:
 363 'These people, you should not allow them to bury these guys. Otherwise, if the situation changes one day, they
 364 come and say, "oh, we buried one here, we buried another guy, we buried another guy". We should go and bury
 365 them on our own.' After burying they camouflaged the whole area, then nobody would ever tell that there's a
 366 grave. I got sick several times, particularly beriberi, malaria and gum problems, running stomach. At times I could
 367 only crawl. My colleagues thought I would die. You got dysentery because [the place] was not hygienic, because
 368 you had to urinate there, you had to defecate [there]. The place was stinking, flies came and got to your food. At
 369 times while you were sitting here another guy would be sitting next to you and defecating because there was no
 370 other place to go. The place was so overcrowded. When there was only rice, no relish and you got [swollen] gums,
 371 you could not eat, so what you would do, you would crush the rice. Then you would leave it overnight there, it
 372 would become a bit sweet when it got a bit fermented. At times you would mix it with water, then you would drink
 373 it, because you wanted change, you were so tired of it. This ordinary rice didn't [stay in], when you swallowed it
 374 you would vomit, after eating for, say, three months just ordinary rice, no fat, no salt. I personally did not vomit
 375 but others did.

376 As far as the world is concerned we were cut off completely, only now and then, say, we saw the guards with a
 377 newspaper, the Times of Zambia or the Daily Mail of Zambia, and you tended to ask them: 'Is there anything
 378 about Namibia, something about the world?' 'Ok, we'll give it to you.' Or we would get this USSR yearbook or, at
 379 times, say once in six months or eight months, you would get the Facts and Reports.²³ You read through it, then
 380 you had to give it back to them. At times we got the Combatant, but you knew that it was mostly propaganda. It
 381 was very difficult, we were cut off completely. Access to information was a privilege. Or they would give us books
 382 on political economy, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, scientific communism, party literature. It was easily
 383 accessible. At times they would remove them. Then you stayed again without books or any reading material. Some
 384 guards were a bit sympathetic and at times they would give us some publications or a newspaper that had some
 385 information concerning the detainee issue, [about] people who campaigned. [A guard] would give it to one guy,
 386 then take it again, because he didn't want others to see it [or he would] get in trouble. And the guy [who read]
 387 would come and say: 'I read about this, about this, about this.' Other guys would tell you: 'Don't worry, you will
 388 get freed. Just don't lose hope.'

389 When you got a friend that you trusted you would go and talk to him: 'What do you think, where is the situation
 390 heading to?' There were some others inside who were trying to gain some favours from the guys outside, they
 391 would go and give them a tip. Normally you would be afraid of these guys. When you were discussing you would
 392 discuss [things of] a general nature that would not put you in danger. Because if these guys went out and said, 'you
 393 know, these guys were saying that they want to run away', [you] would be brought out and beaten up. Or if
 394 someone attempted to run away and was arrested then they would [think] that it was not only him [but] must have
 395 been organized inside there. So those whom they suspected to have been involved were taken out and tied and
 396 beaten.

397 **Every now and then they would come and take me, that I should go and complete the [story].** They would
 398 come back if they needed something from you, [if] they got someone whom they thought you knew better, and
 399 they wanted to find out whether you knew him. **They would ask: 'With whom did you come to Angola, is he**
 400 **also sent, is he also an enemy agent?' And another one, because we had been seen with him as friends**
 401 **outside, 'what were you discussing?'. They'd continue beating and beating and beating, you'd be forced to**
 402 **say: 'He is also an enemy agent.' 'Ok, was he also trained with you?' 'Yes.' [They] would pick another one,**
 403 **'yes', they would go to get the [person], 'oh, you were also trained there and did not tell us'. 'No, we don't**
 404 **know, we don't know', they would be beaten, they would take him [to you] and say: 'This one, you don't**

²³ A publication consisting of news cuttings on Southern Africa.

405 **know this guy?’ ‘Yes, we [were] trained together at that base.’** But the problem was that even if you said yes
 406 [there were other questions they would ask:] ‘Where was that? Who trained you? What were you [taught]?’ It was
 407 impossible to make out what that guy had said, you didn’t know what lies he had told these guys, so that always
 408 was the problem to us and [because of] this we suffered a lot. **To get rid [of them] we had to connect. They**
 409 **said: ‘Yeah, you could have told us a long time ago.’ So it continued but the story never ended until we**
 410 **were repatriated.**

411 We could see that 435 was coming, we knew that the time was approaching. There was a three months period that
 412 [we] had to wait [for our release] and that was almost three years for us there. And we had to wait for another
 413 three months, and that period was much longer than the entire period I had spent [there before]. **On the 9th of**
 414 **April [19]89 we got out of prison, [I was] released with a group of [over] a hundred people. As for the rest,**
 415 **I don’t know where they are, I knew many of them. When Jesus came to release us he read us the decree**
 416 **issued by the Revolutionary Council, Military Council that anyone should forthwith cooperate with the**
 417 **party and report any enemy activities to the party, and that anyone found guilty of reactionary activities**
 418 **would be dealt with accordingly. Then he just said that everyone would have to make a confession on the**
 419 **video. Then three guys said ‘no’, they would not do that, ‘forget about it’. These guys were removed from**
 420 **our group and I don’t know whether they killed them or what, we don’t know where they are.** When we
 421 were released we were given some clothes, because we had no clothes, we [wore] the underwear of the Soviet
 422 military, that’s what we had been given, and [we were] barefooted. They had to give us some tennis shoes, trousers
 423 and shirts. We stayed at a base in Southern Angola, Nakada. Nakada was a commander who died in the liberation
 424 war. We continued staying there and we could sense that these people wanted to keep us there until the elections
 425 were over, and if they [hadn’t] known that people were asking about us, to get rid of us altogether. We were
 426 anxious to be repatriated, we tried, we tried, we tried.

427 Once ya Toivo came there, he made a speech telling that in accordance with the policy of reconciliation declared
 428 by the Swapo Central Committee the movement has decided to forgive but not forget and that he wanted
 429 confirmation from us whether we agreed with that policy and continued to work for Swapo, campaigning during
 430 the elections. We were very suspicious [but we said:] ‘Yes, ok, we will do that.’ Then he said: ‘Ok, if you are
 431 prepared I will bring a group of foreign journalists, they will come and talk to you and you can talk to them.’ We
 432 said, ‘ok, thank you comrade Secretary General’, we [shouted] slogans, ‘Swapo’, ‘Namibia will be free’, ‘viva
 433 Swapo’. He came back the next day with a bunch of journalists and government officials, accompanied by Moses
 434 Garoeb. Jesus came there, because he had told them that ‘these guys are ready to stay with Swapo. People are
 435 making noise at home that these people should come back. I don’t know why they are making it. Swapo!’
 436 Everybody was [quiet]. ‘Swapo! Oh comrades, what’s going on? You are angry today.’ ‘No, we are not angry, we
 437 don’t want those slogans. We want to make a statement in front of the foreign press.’ We [had] organized
 438 ourselves in the evening and written down what we should tell these people. We told them that we didn’t need
 439 their pardon because we had done nothing wrong. [We were] initially told that we should choose between staying
 440 with Swapo or refusing and [if we refused] they would call the South Africans to come and pick us up, so we
 441 would go to the Boers. We said: ‘Since we are not South African agents we have no link with them. We are
 442 Swapo, you arrested us, you dumped us to prisons for so many years, so for us there is no sense staying in the
 443 organization unless we get insurance they will not repeat the same things again.’ People had very bad scars on
 444 their bodies and they started undressing, women and men. It was a shock. Ya Toivo asked: ‘Oh, what has
 445 happened here? Come and see. You told us that these people were never tortured, come and see.’ We showed [the
 446 scars] to the foreign journalists. Some ladies were crying, foreign journalists, because they could not just believe
 447 it. Even the Angolans were very much annoyed and embarrassed.

448 So [the journalists] said: ‘Ok, we’ll get the message across to the world, you shouldn’t worry.’ Because just before
 449 our release Moses Garoeb had come with the now Defence Minister telling us: ‘Guys, you have been pardoned by
 450 the party, but if you go to Namibia and continue, we will fight you with the same ferocity that we have been
 451 fighting the Boers and we’ll hunt you.’ When these guys left Jesus came back with the security personnel with
 452 guns and everybody [of us] ran to the bush. Then they destroyed everything that was there. Some houses with
 453 these iron sheets, they removed those things, mattresses and utensils and food, everything, and said: ‘Go and take
 454 it from the Angolans or anybody.’ So he took everything and we remained there in the bush. We could see that
 455 time was running out, so we [chose] three people [who] would go to Lubango and try and get into contact with the
 456 UN High Commissioner for Refugees. They succeeded. They called a very sympathetic British guy who was
 457 working in the office of the commissioner. The High Commissioner went to talk with the government. They gave
 458 us some food from the World Food Programme. So we ate and they came with government vehicles and took us to
 459 another base under the control of Angolan government’s security.

460 Here again they wanted to convince us to stay, not to go back, they said we would be killed by the people. We
 461 knew that [the people] would never kill us, they just wanted to delay our process. They said: ‘It’s not necessary for
 462 you to go to Namibia, just go to schools. We can offer you scholarships, you can go and study.’ We said: ‘No, we
 463 don’t want to go to school, we want to get back to Namibia.’ They called guys from the MPLA Executive
 464 Committee. We told them: ‘No, we know that you knew about these things but you never did anything. Now you
 465 want to help all of a sudden. We cannot listen to your advice, we want to get home.’ Heated discussion went on
 466 until late in the evening. [We went] back to the the High Commissioner and told: ‘These people do not want us [to
 467 go] back to Namibia.’ Eventually they had to give in, so we came with a special plane, landed here in Windhoek.

468 Then they wanted to take us to Osire again, the camp. [We said:] ‘No, we have had enough. We want to get back
469 to our parents because we have had enough suffering. We want to go and reunite with our families and friends.’
470 We told that we would not stay there. They told us: ‘Ok, the ones who want to go, you can go.’ Everybody left.
471 They drove us almost next to Okahandja and we came back to Windhoek.

472 After an emotional reunion with my father, mom and my relatives I thought that my immediate concern was
473 concentrating on politics, because we were entering a process of political transition towards independence and
474 parties were campaigning for votes. [During] 20 years of exile I learned a lesson that concentrating power into the
475 hands of a few can become very dangerous, that is what we have learned. There are people, particularly [some]
476 who have been in the military, they had all power. We knew that if we didn’t say anything Swapo could easily win
477 a two-thirds majority in the elections and then all wouldn’t go well for our country that was just emerging from the
478 repressive and oppressive South African regime. That was why we decided to form a political party, the Patriotic
479 Unity Movement, which is an affiliate to the United Democratic Front of Namibia, through which we could
480 campaign to deny Swapo a two-thirds majority. My mom is a die-hard Swapo, so I had problems convincing her
481 about my decision. She was trying to get me back, saying I must forget about that and forgive, but I think she was
482 just talking because she was emotionally and psychologically linked to the party, so she kind of tried to ignore
483 what I was telling to her, but my dad supported me, he was quite sympathetic and always behind me. With my
484 mom, until now when it comes to politics, we agree to disagree. [And of course] her fear was that when these guys
485 took over my life could be in danger here.

486 My preoccupation was to tell the story as it is, knowing that [it would be a] big mistake to give these guys
487 emerging from the bush a green light to sit down and write the constitution of this country on their own. It could
488 have been very disastrous. So we thought that it was time that we established a real democracy where there would
489 be a free flow of ideas, where government would be accountable to the people and where you guaranteed a bill of
490 fundamental human rights. I did mobilizing, travelling all over, talking to people, getting to Ovamboland which is
491 the stronghold of the [Swapo] party. I headed a team down there, because my mom is an Ovambo, I can speak
492 Ovambo, so I headed a team of some of these former detainees to mobilize there for the United Democratic Front.
493 Some were rejecting us as puppets, as collaborators, others were listening to us sympathetically as we were trying
494 to narrate our whole story.

495 So we did [what we planned]. You can get to any Swapo leader [and he] will tell you that the detainee issue denied
496 them that two-thirds majority. That gave Namibians a chance, all of them, to participate in drafting a constitution
497 that would be democratic. They had to draw up a constitution that could guarantee [that it] would be safe in
498 Namibia, [irrespective of] whether [one was] a Swapo henchman or a DTA henchman. So they had to compromise
499 and have a constitution that is unequalled in the whole of Africa. The gift that we have given to the Namibian
500 people is the kind of a multi-party democracy where we could be sure of a constitution with all the checks and
501 balances that guarantee human rights to all the citizens of this country. That was our mission and we are satisfied.
502 [Still,] Swapo will take over a two-thirds majority in the coming elections²⁴ because in African terms, particularly
503 in Namibia with no democratic culture, you don’t understand the importance of multi-party democracy. All will go
504 for one, ‘oh, these guys have been ruling us well’, forgetting what role the opposition plays in trying to keep the
505 government on its toes. They will start saying: ‘Oh, this government is doing well. Why should we have another
506 government?’

507 I think a lot of those in the leadership [of Swapo] have realized that they have made quite a lot of mistakes and
508 many of them could see [even then] that very wrong things were done but did not have the power to [do anything
509 about it], they could have lost their lives in exile. But here in Namibia people are always free to talk out their
510 minds. I think that’s a guarantee that things will be much better in Namibia than in exile. These guys are getting
511 much more responsible and have not resorted to the law of the jungle. [They] have much more freedom now to
512 speak out what they think is wrong. And they have got mixed with people who have been inside the country, so
513 they have become a bit sensitive to public opinion. We hope that the culture of respect for human rights and
514 human dignity and rule of law will finally take root in Namibia. We have been challenging them to come out, tell
515 the truth, tell the people, even on live tv coverage, why they did [what they did], even Jesus. You never see Jesus
516 in public, he’s always withdrawn. He doesn’t want to be seen because if he comes up then people will start talking
517 about him again. Everybody has called for his elimination,²⁵ the church has protested, various organizations. I
518 think that 90 per cent of the people are not in favour of him occupying such a senior position in the army because
519 they know that he messed up. And I think even these guys [in the government] are now clever, they are careful of
520 him. I don’t think that they will ever give him a position of heading any security service, because he nearly messed
521 up everything.

522 **We are always saying that they should show [the forced confessions to] the people, they don’t want to.**
523 **[They should] put out all the written confessions, all the videos, so that the people could [judge]. It was so**
524 **ridiculous. If a village boy came to extract confessions from you, he didn’t know Windhoek, people would**

²⁴ Matthew means the 1994 parliamentary elections in which Swapo indeed did acquire over two thirds of the parliamentary seats with its 72.7 per cent share of the votes cast. Simon 1995: 113-114; Weiland 1995: 349-350.

²⁵ Matthew refers to Hawala’s nomination, in 1990, as Army Commander.

525 say, ‘behind OK Bazaar,²⁶ it’s where our shooting range was’, or the Zoo park, just in the city centre,
 526 ‘that’s where we have been practising our shooting’, and every Namibian who has been to Windhoek
 527 knows exactly that it’s impossible, there was no such thing. Nobody will ever believe that because it’s still in
 528 the range of living memory. Some of [the detainees] were illiterate people with no education. I don’t know [of
 529 any secret] service that would recruit an illiterate for a mission abroad, it is just inconceivable and unbelievable.
 530 The missions ranged from the most ridiculous to some very serious things, like going to steal a Swapo constitution
 531 or political programme to, say, poisoning Swapo leaders, go to spy how many Russians were operating within the
 532 ranks of Swapo (laughs). And you know, [there was] always a reward, money, a white girl, a house (laughs). You
 533 wouldn’t go out without telling that you were promised a white girl (laughs).

534 **They know that they made a lot of mistakes, that was part of the ongoing power struggle within the ranks**
 535 **of the movement. There were some people, old guard, who had been in exile for quite a long time. Some of**
 536 **them had been contract labourers, they had travelled through Botswana, gone to Zambia or Tanzania and**
 537 **then with the arrival of new blood of young Namibians who were a bit better educated they [thought:]**
 538 **‘After [we] have stayed for a long time in exile you want to come and take over here.’ That was also the**
 539 **proposal of the late Secretary of Defence Nanyemba that he wanted to infuse the army with new blood and**
 540 **to get all these old commanders retire because they were so useless, they could not cope with the new**
 541 **military techniques brought by South Africa, so no progress could be made in the war. Unfortunately he**
 542 **died, he could not fulfill his plan. These plans were also gone with him.**

543 I was very disappointed that after having elected to join the struggle for liberation I became a victim of people
 544 whom I regarded to be my comrades, own brothers with whom I had to share the burden of the struggle, wasting
 545 away all those years in prison, [years] that I could have used to further the cause of liberation of this country or
 546 somewhere where I could have studied and then used that knowledge to come and reconstruct our country. I’m
 547 trying to forget my experiences but it’s very difficult because I have suffered a lot and I have lost a lot of my time
 548 in those detention camps and I’m struggling to acquire a house for myself. I have an eight year old boy. When I
 549 went to detention camp the mother was still pregnant. I only saw him after five years, when he was five. He’s
 550 living with my mom. So it’s very difficult to forget. I’m always thinking about it at times, trying to throw my
 551 memories back to those years, think about those who did not make it, think about those whom I left behind,
 552 whether they are still alive or whether they have been killed. I’m always thinking about it, because I know how we
 553 suffered. In the hour of our freedom these people were not able to come and reunite with their families, so I’m
 554 always thinking what happened to them. I have been asking where they are but no-one wants to give an answer.
 555 This thing will not die because we will be haunting our politicians, particularly the leadership of Swapo. People
 556 are asking, ‘where are our children?’, and I think that will remain there until they give a satisfactory answer.

557 LM: Have you been in contact with these people who had the same experiences as you?

558 They are my best friends because I trust them more than I would trust anybody else. We meet every day, we are
 559 always together. At times we sit and drink together, discuss our own stuff. Three of them have already died, so
 560 always when they die we go and bury, because that’s the last respect that you can give them. We try to keep that
 561 contact, at times we arrange a party just to get together so that we can think about the past again (laughs).

562 After the elections I [started to] work in the Times of Namibia. I worked there for two years. I was an all-rounder
 563 meaning that I had to report on anything that happened, because we had a couple of journalists who were not that
 564 experienced, so when the story was complicated the editor would usually assign me to do the job, whether it was
 565 financial or court reporting or writing a feature on anything, say, on street children. Then I was appointed as a
 566 news editor but I had to resign because the atmosphere was not good. At times we worked with people who were
 567 not satisfied with being reporters, at times with the whites whose mentality is still that of the colonial past. We
 568 would give an assignment and when it was deadline you would ask, ‘where’s the story?’, and [the reporter] would
 569 give you a lot of excuses. In the end it is your reputation that [he is] trying to destroy, so I decided that I don’t
 570 want to do this job. I went to our manager [and said:] ‘I don’t want to do this job, I want to become an ordinary
 571 reporter again.’ Then I left for the US and worked for six months in a newspaper in the state of Washington. I
 572 wanted to have some experience in another paper so I got in touch with the United States information service here
 573 so that they could [find] a counterpart for us for an exchange programme so that someone from there could come
 574 to work in a newspaper here and I could get there.

575 [After I came back I] continued working at the Times. I resigned to get to Bricks. I’m the head of the
 576 communications unit. So I’m [handling] all communications we have with other NGOs and international
 577 organizations. We are putting out a newspaper called Bricks. It is basically for local consumption but we also send
 578 it out to friends in Europe, North America and Africa. Apart from it I’m also editing another monthly bulletin,
 579 Namibia Development Briefing, that we have with the Namibia Support Committee in London. Basically our
 580 target area is NGOs and donor agencies, governmental and private, and intergovernmental organizations. So I’m
 581 writing these. After work I have to remain at office until nine o’clock, at times ten o’clock, trying to get everything
 582 done in time. I have a lot of work, not only writing articles, [because] at times I have to rent our services [when]

²⁶ A shopping mall in the city centre.

583 some people come and ask us for a professional report from a workshop or a conference. I have to go and attend
 584 and compile the report. At times I have helped the coordinator to write speeches or presentations for conferences
 585 and workshops. [I am] also compiling the annual report for the project.

586 LM: Has Namibia changed a lot during the time that you were away?

587 I should say so. A lot of schools were established, there was a general improvement in the conditions of people,
 588 particularly in the urban areas. Of course the rural areas remained basically the same but here housing did improve
 589 a bit. Much changed with the so-called Government of National Unity taking over under the Multi-Party
 590 Conference, the internal parties.²⁷ They were trying to tell the people that it's independence so they tried to
 591 introduce some changes with interracial relationships and all this type of things. The new government is building
 592 on what was started then although the pace of change was very slow.

593 Most of the whites have come to realize the inevitability of independence, of a black government in this country,
 594 so most of them have already started adapting, trying to reorient themselves. There are others who are die-hard
 595 racists and white supremacists who even now fail to read the signs of time, refusing to get anything to do with
 596 blacks, trying to resist the reintegration of schools, trying to organize their own sport club that is exclusively
 597 white, make the membership fees very high so that a black man won't be able to afford playing. But if any
 598 redistribution of wealth takes place, with blacks getting more economic power, I think the situation will change for
 599 the better.

600 The civic organizations, NGOs, CBOs and other community based institutions, I think there is a future for them.
 601 As our country embarks on the process of development these institutions and organizations have their own
 602 capacities. Of course they vary from NGO to NGO, from CBO to CBO. In the execution of projects the
 603 government has to look at the NGOs, because they are much closer to the people, they know what the people
 604 think. They know what approach to take in order to help a particular community, how [to solve] a particular
 605 problem, not only to have top-bottom approaches but bottom-up approaches. We are in the process of redefining
 606 and trying to re-evaluate our role and place in the development set-up of this country so that we will be able to
 607 play a meaningful role, trying to develop legislation that will enable NGOs in their development intervention
 608 activities. We do not want to serve as mere implementors of development projects, we want to become active
 609 partners in the whole development process. The role of the trade unions will [also] grow. After independence there
 610 was a period of relax among the workers when they felt that we have the government that we wanted, so
 611 everything will fall like manna from heaven. But now they see that we are living in a period of retrenchments,
 612 some call it rationalization, some call it streamlining, all sorts of terminology is used for one and the same thing,
 613 cutting jobs. I think workers will start to realize that their solutions do not lie with the politicians but with their
 614 own organizations. With time the trade unions will be a powerful force to reckon with in this country.

615 The Swapo political programme remains a utopia because under these conditions it will not be realized. Some of
 616 the politicians try to keep to those things [there], because those things have got some moral appeal among the
 617 ordinary people who have been disadvantaged in the past. They feel that if these policies or principles are
 618 implemented they stand to benefit and the politicians try to exploit the ignorance of the people, not telling that it's
 619 impossible to realize those goals within the next 20 or 30 years. Or it's impossible altogether unless you try to
 620 improve your situation on your own. I think we'll be having a de facto one-party state under a democratic system
 621 unless the political understanding of the people matures to such an extent [that they do] not think in terms of party
 622 politics but in terms of quality leadership that we need. The people will save this country from going down the
 623 drain [if they] forget party politics and think about the political well-being of the whole of Namibia and look out
 624 for really good leaders who will be able to lead this country to a prosperous future that everybody dreams about.

Maria

²⁷ This was a part of South Africa's attempts to solve the Namibian question by an 'internal settlement' during the 1980s.

1 **I'm a Namibian born in the northern part of Namibia in 1958.** My father had three wives and he had eight
 2 children with my mother. So it was a really big traditional peasant family. I wasn't mainly with my family, because
 3 they sent me to school when I was nine years old. We [lived] in a hostel. I only came back during weekends or
 4 holidays. **So I did my primary and secondary school at [this] Roman Catholic missionary [school].** It was run
 5 by the Germans and they had their own curriculum, which was different from the government one, and I think it
 6 was better. Afrikaans was not a compulsory subject, we learned English. The system which was used by the
 7 missionaries that time was better than the government one, because the government one was bantu education. It
 8 was a curriculum which was designed for particular groups while the missionary one was an overall system. The
 9 results from the missionary schools were better than [from] the government [schools]. So somebody from a
 10 missionary school could adapt easily to another system in Zambia or in other countries [unlike] somebody who
 11 had graduated from the government school, in terms of language or in terms of the curriculum itself. It was
 12 broader than the very limited and focused system of bantu education. I think we had all the important subjects. The
 13 main one was religious programme. You had all subjects on science, history, our history was not only the history
 14 of Jan van Riebeeck²⁸ as it was in bantu education. We learned the whole history of Southern Africa, the history of
 15 other countries, in Europe for example. And we did a lot of agriculture as well. Political subjects were limited due
 16 to the fact that it was a very sensitive issue.

17 Religion in Namibia was very important and it is still playing a very important role in people's life. It had a big
 18 impact on my thinking. I even thought that it's only religion which is important. In the morning around six thirty
 19 you had to go to the church. You had one hour in the church. At seven thirty we had to go to school. We finished
 20 at four. Then we came back for our usual day in the hostel. By six o'clock everybody had to be in. If you were out
 21 after six o'clock you were running a risk because you might be fired from the hostel. [Then] you had to go to the
 22 church again. After that you had dinner and by eight o'clock everybody had to be in the bedroom sleeping already.
 23 It was very tight. The rules and regulations were very tough and to be considered that you were a disciplined child,
 24 a Christian, you had to follow it as it was written. Once you got used to that system it was ok and when you are a
 25 Christian, a believer, it helps people to be in a good atmosphere without rebellion. Even if it was wrong you
 26 couldn't realize it. When you were nine up to 14 years old Christianity was the dominant factor in your life. We
 27 had two hostels, [one] for girls and [one] for boys. We didn't have a right to go to the boys' hostel, we only met at
 28 church or at school. You didn't go out, we were allowed to go out just to visit parents or other friends during
 29 weekends. And on Sunday by six you had to be back in. You were not allowed to talk to boys (laughs). Let's say
 30 you went out and somebody found you somewhere at these social places like cuca shops, it was very bad
 31 behaviour and could have bad [consequences]. Social life was completely nil. The only thing we used to do was to
 32 come together, girls, and sing Christian songs or Christian songs that were modernized, or [we] tried to dance
 33 traditional dances, and we had to select which ones, not every one of them could be adapted to a Roman Catholic
 34 hostel (laughs). Whenever you were doing something you had to make sure that it was not out of the religious line.

35 **I completed my junior certificate [in 19]75 and the same year I left into exile** in February or March [and]
 36 **joined Swapo in Angola.** It's very, sometimes I say it was complicated, was it complicated or is it complicated
 37 now for me to say what was the main motivation for me to leave the country? That time there was a sort of
 38 political frustration. So you heard people talking about learning English in other countries like Zambia, Tanzania,
 39 Kenya and so on. And we used to hear people talking about apartheid and colonialism, things which you couldn't
 40 really feel in a hostel, that there was apartheid or [that] we were colonized because you were in a closed
 41 environment. We were not much integrated in society [but] we used to hear of those things. Me in particular, I was
 42 very fascinated by learning English. I really wanted to learn more, to know about other countries, to know about
 43 Africa, to know about Europe, to be opened to the whole world. There are people who are always telling, you
 44 know, 'I went abroad because I wanted to liberate Namibia'. My main reason that I cannot hide even today was
 45 education, it was not a political reason. I wanted to be educated better than in Namibia. I knew that Namibia was
 46 colonized by South Africa but my knowledge was very limited. I didn't even come across with South African army
 47 or police. So it was very far from feeling that I was colonized, [that] Namibia was under foreign occupation, and
 48 to come to the extent that I would have decided myself to go so that I could fight that domination, that was not the
 49 case [with me] (laughs). So the political motivation was not really the main motivation.

50 LM: Did it take a long time to make the decision to leave?

51 No no, it was a matter of a week, I think (laughs). I heard that one of my friends in government school had left to
 52 join Swapo or whatever. And that time, [19]74, 75, there was really a sort of frustration for students and for
 53 workers. Once you heard that one of your neighbours had left last night then automatically you said: 'Why not me,
 54 I also have to go.' Without even knowing where you were going, you didn't really consider all the difficulties, all
 55 the problems you could face. I had a very vague [picture of life in exile]. I had an impression that in Zambia
 56 people spoke English and I heard that Zambia was an independent country, they had a very different system from
 57 bantu education. I thought we could study hard and [become] somebody professionwise.

58 We were three, two girls and one boy. We just crossed the border. That time it was easy [to cross, the border] was
 59 not controlled, you could just go. Especially me, half of my family was in Angola, so [you could go] as if you were

²⁸ A major founding figure in the colonial (Afrikaner) version of Southern African history.

60 going to visit your family members there. That time, [19]75, was during the ceasefire in Angola between the
 61 MPLA, UNITA, FNLA and so on, so it was a sort of transitional [period]. The Portuguese surrendered the power
 62 to the three main movements. I can say that I was unlucky because when we crossed the border we met UNITA
 63 combatants, because the whole southern Angola was occupied by Savimbi.²⁹ We met Savimbi people in Ofoti.
 64 There is Ondjiva and when you come down there is a small town called Ofoti, so that's where we met UNITA
 65 people. And they said: 'You are from Namibia.' [They didn't] say Namibia, [there] is another word, Odjoni,
 66 maybe it is a Portuguese word for Namibia. So they said, 'people from that side of the border'. 'We are friendly to
 67 Swapo, we are sisters and brothers, Savimbi is a child of Swapo', and so on, 'so you can just join us and we are
 68 going to take you to Swapo's office'. We couldn't [know whether] these people were really friends of Swapo, but
 69 there was no alternative, you had to go through UNITA.

70 We spent three days in that UNITA camp and then on the fourth day we decided to escape. We didn't ask any
 71 permission. We [tried] to go to Ondjiva, but we were unlucky. The car we stopped was driven by people [who
 72 were] dressed in civilian [clothes] but in reality were UNITA soldiers. We stopped the car. They said: 'Ok, we can
 73 give you a lift to Ondjiva.' So we took the lift. Halfway they turned to go to a UNITA military camp between
 74 Ondjiva and Ofoti. They dumped us there. It was terrible. You can just imagine, somebody from a Catholic
 75 missionary school, to find herself in that situation, it was frustrating. We found one Namibian there and he told us
 76 that the situation there was terrible: 'I think we have to make a plan so that we can escape from this camp to go to
 77 Ondjiva. Maybe there we'll meet Swapo people.' So we spent one week in that camp and then we succeeded to
 78 escape.

79 We went to Ondjiva and everywhere it was only UNITA, everywhere you went it was UNITA people. We ended
 80 up in the hands of UNITA again in Ondjiva (laughs), because the headquarters was in Ondjiva. We were there
 81 trying to explain that 'we are not Angolan, we are Namibian and we are looking for Swapo, we want to join
 82 Swapo'. Lucky enough there was somebody already in that headquarter. UNITA and Swapo were friends. There
 83 was always a Namibian whose responsibility was to trace Namibians who wanted to join Swapo. And then the guy
 84 came and said: 'Are you looking for Swapo?' We said yes. 'Let's go to Swapo office.' He was a Namibian. That's
 85 how we joined Swapo. Swapo people sent us on our way, because they wanted us to go to Zambia. So we had a
 86 very long journey and because of the outbreak of the civil war we couldn't reach Zambia. I think it was in July or
 87 August, I can't remember really, we ended up in a very big military camp, UNITA camp not far from the Angolan
 88 Zambian border. That's where I had my first military training, six or seven months. They gave us a part of that
 89 camp as a Swapo camp, Okasapa training centre. [It was not] a military training for specialized soldiers, just to
 90 know how to behave when South Africa is attacking, how to use these simple rifles like AK-47, how to plant
 91 mines, how to do some military manoeuvres. It was a first aid thing, we didn't even have enough equipments. It
 92 was only training, running, jogging, using guns from morning until evening. We didn't have enough food. We ate
 93 once a day. It was only military exercises, it was awful, when you are hungry and you are doing that type of very
 94 hard physical work (laughs). It was terrible, the hunger, no food, it was raining all the time, some insects which
 95 used to bite us, terrible ones. It was terrible, it was awful.

96 LM: Did you regret that you had left the country?

97 Yeah, I regretted very seriously.

98 LM: Did you have some kind of political training as well?

99 Yes, only on apartheid and colonialism, 'we are colonized, we have to fight South Africa', and all that type of
 100 things and countries involved in the exploitation of Namibian natural resources. I became aware that Namibia was
 101 really colonized by South Africa and the only way was to fight or, rather, to struggle to get Namibia back. From
 102 there on I knew that there was apartheid in Namibia and what apartheid was. The problem was that there was
 103 hunger, that's very important. So to make people a bit motivated was only this moral, political education. You had
 104 to tell them why [they] were suffering: '[It] is because you are colonized. And who is supposed to break that
 105 colonial rule? It's you, even if you are hungry you have to try.' It was really a moral education, political [and]
 106 moral education, which was very strong and even if we were hungry we had also that feeling that 'I don't have any
 107 choice, Namibia has to be liberated', that was the slogan.

108 The time was the starting point of civil war in Angola, the end of [19]75, and we were divided in two groups.
 109 Young people from 14 to 17 years old were in the same group with unfit people, [they] had to go to Zambia,
 110 because the situation in Zambia was better than in Angola. The second group was supposed to come back to the
 111 frontline so that we could fight. And the slogan was, 'we have to go back and fight so that we can liberate
 112 Namibia', and I thought maybe you were even going to cross the border into Namibia, so we would go back. So
 113 personally (laughs), which was stupid, ignorant, I was 17 and I refused to go in the first group which was supposed
 114 to go to Zambia, because I wanted to go back. I was tired of this bad situation, hungry and so on. I was thinking
 115 that it was true, we would go back and cross the border to Namibia and [I] would automatically go back to my
 116 family (laughs). I couldn't understand that I would have to be in the bush for so many years. I refused to go to

²⁹ Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA.

117 Zambia and said: 'I'm old enough to be in the second group, I have to go back to Namibia.' We didn't have even
 118 transport, we were footing from the Angolan-Zambian border to the Angolan and Namibian border, miles and
 119 miles. In the meantime the civil war broke out and the situation became very critical. I realized [it] and regretted
 120 not to have gone to Zambia (laughs). It was raining, Angola receives heavy rain. It was raining and it was war
 121 between the MPLA, UNITA and FNLA. Swapo had to participate and we didn't have enough military equipments
 122 to defend ourselves, so we were just running around. If South Africans were clashing with UNITA we had to hide
 123 ourselves somewhere. It was terrible, no food. We spent almost a year without eating meat. We were always
 124 depending on the civilians in the villages, if they had something they gave us to eat. Everybody was depending on
 125 them, whether it was MPLA, FNLA or UNITA, so it was terrible.

126 LM: What did the civilians think about it?

127 It was a confusion because they didn't know which side [they were] supposed to put themselves on. If they gave
 128 food to UNITA, when the MPLA came to the same place they said: 'We are hungry. Give us food.' So they had to
 129 give as well. When FNLA came they did the same thing. When Swapo came they did the same thing. If you
 130 refused, 'ah, you refused because you are a UNITA', or, 'you refused because you are a FNLA', 'you refused
 131 because you are a Swapo', so there you were in trouble. So it was a confusion for the civilian people because you
 132 didn't really support, you didn't know who was right, so what you were doing was just for survival, not to be
 133 killed.

134 So it was terrible and there was a struggle of power. UNITA was very strong in terms of human resources. [It] had
 135 a lot of soldiers and I think because of that MPLA was mainly in the Luanda area. The other areas were controlled
 136 either by UNITA or by FNLA. So they thought that they cannot make it. I think it was the MPLA which made an
 137 appeal for foreign aid first. There came then the Cuban troops under the supervision of Russia and UNITA
 138 decided to seek for military help from South Africa. That was a drama for Swapo as a movement and for
 139 individuals like me who were struggling in Angola. We found ourselves sometimes with UNITA and with South
 140 African soldiers in the same [camp] hiding ourselves not to identify that [we] were really Namibians. UNITA
 141 people used to tell us that 'the South African Defence Forces come and help us, we are now fighting MPLA with
 142 South Africa, MPLA is fighting us with Cubans. You Namibians have to make sure that you don't identify
 143 yourself as Namibians. You are Angolan and you remain in Angola during this war. If you say you are Namibians
 144 you end up in South African hands.' So that was the game and it succeeded. We didn't have any Namibian
 145 captured by South Africa, we were eating together, there were some people who were in the same camps with
 146 South African soldiers. When UNITA was defeated by MPLA and Cuban troops there was a group of Namibians
 147 captured together with UNITA in the area of Huambo, captured as Angolans. They were in the MPLA prisons.
 148 Some Namibians started identifying themselves that 'we are not Angolans'. 'You are not Angolan, who are you?'
 149 'We are Namibians.' 'You were fighting us with UNITA.'

150 The situation was complicated. Swapo was forced to break out with UNITA and to [form] a harmonious
 151 relationship with the new government. Then our colleagues were liberated. As a result of Swapo turning from
 152 UNITA to MPLA there came the war not between Swapo and South Africa but Swapo and UNITA. Two-thirds of
 153 Angola was occupied by UNITA even if UNITA was defeated. There were always subsections, groups all over,
 154 especially [near the] Angolan-Namibian border. So UNITA became angry with Swapo because Swapo became a
 155 friend of the Angolan government and all these socialist bloc [countries] supporting the MPLA government,
 156 leaving UNITA alone with South Africa, accusing [it] of being a traitor. Then we had our own war in the Angolan
 157 bush with UNITA. Wherever you went you first had to clear your way which meant fighting UNITA because there
 158 was UNITA everywhere. It was terrible, that war between Swapo and UNITA. UNITA was working with South
 159 African forces and they knew every corner of Angola. They [knew] all the Swapo locations and South Africa came
 160 with huge and heavy war machinery. They could destroy the whole forest just to hunt Swapo. UNITA was
 161 delegating: 'Swapo is there and there.' It was terrible. You could not stay permanently at any one place. Today
 162 you were here, tomorrow there. [You] just [put up] a temporary base, so you could be there for two or three days
 163 and after that you [moved]. We were divided in subgroups of ten, you could not be in a huge group because you
 164 would run a risk.

165 LM: How were the relations among you?

166 The relationship was ok. What made the relationship good was only this political morale. Otherwise there should
 167 have been a big decomposition. The factor that made us have a sort of balance [was that] there was no alternative,
 168 no choice, you had to be friendly to your comrades as we used to call ourselves, because it was only your comrade
 169 who could help when it came to difficulties. If you were sick it was your comrade who was your sister, your
 170 brother, your mother, everything for you. That was the only way.

171 **I spent five to six years in [Angola].** My choice of having education was completely out, I couldn't think that
 172 maybe one day I would be out of this situation. I was thinking that that's my life maybe up to Namibian
 173 independence. **I was working sometimes as an auxiliary nurse, sometimes as a Swapo fighter, PLAN**
 174 **combatant.** From [19]75 up to [19]78 I was right at the front working as an auxiliary nurse or as a first aid nurse
 175 (laughs). I was trained in Okasapa during that military training. Auxiliary nursing, if somebody was wounded you

176 had to know how to stop blood, how to bind, this type of things. We didn't have even medicaments, it was really
 177 first aid. After the war we came nearer and nearer the Angolan Namibian border. **I was working also as a chief of**
 178 **logistics in Swapo training headquarters, known as the Tobias Hainyeko Training Centre, not far from the**
 179 **town of Lubango, maybe ten kilometres.** I went [there] at the end of [19]78. I was trained there for six months,
 180 first aid nursing and military training at the same time. Then I was appointed as a chief logistic officer so I left the
 181 nursing system to the logistical system of the military headquarters. In terms of risk the war situation was not there
 182 anymore, there was only training and planning. It was ok, it was better. It was [still] military life, very strict. That
 183 camp was considered as Swapo military headquarters, so most of Namibians went to military training in that camp.
 184 The military activities were run by Russian military instructors, they were the ones who were really teaching us all
 185 these military activities, how to fight, how to plant mines, and all military manoeuvres. After every session, which
 186 was six months military training, they selected Namibian instructors, trained Namibian military instructors.
 187 Whatever you were doing was military. We had a parade every morning, a military parade, we had to do a lot of
 188 military exercises, we had to work hard, to dig trenches. It was a Russian system.

189 LM: What do you mean by Russian system?

190 I mean it was a socialist type of military training. I think it differs from country to country. We had to apply these
 191 KGB tactics and so on, so it was not the same thing as if you were applying the CIA system, so it was really an
 192 imported Russian military training system.

193 I don't like military life. How the military life is run, orders, instructions, it is not normal to me, that you are
 194 always bound to orders, you don't ask anything, you are just ordered to do [something] whether you like it or not.
 195 You have to do it, otherwise the consequences may be negative for you. [If] you [are] ordered to kill somebody
 196 you kill that person, you cannot say no. It is so difficult for somebody who entered [the military] without making a
 197 choice that [he or she] wants to be in that situation. It was difficult for me to accept that I was a military
 198 somebody. Complaint is not there. [It] is there maybe inside you but you can't expose it. Wherever you go in the
 199 war there is no democracy in that system, whether it is in America or in Russia or in Africa. Military is military
 200 and [there is] no democracy. If there is no democracy, [there is] no complaining. I mean we didn't expose our
 201 complaints. It cannot be easy but you are forced by the situation to adapt yourself, otherwise you'll die or you'll
 202 get frustrated and life can be finished for you. [Yet] military life is normal to a person who is engaged in that life.
 203 It was supposed to be very [strict] so that everybody can just bind her- or himself to the rules and regulations of
 204 military life, otherwise you cannot [reach] any goal. It was normal, [but] there was abuse and whatever, because
 205 sometimes military is just order, instruction, no questions, and people who can make use of that power [can] abuse
 206 rules and regulations on others. Anyway, I think it was supposed to be that way.

207 **At the beginning of 1980 I went to Lusaka for the [UN] Institute [for Namibia] programme.** I was happy
 208 because I really wanted from the beginning to go to Zambia to study. UNIN was an institution which was set up to
 209 train Namibians for the future. So every year they selected Namibians who had a better educational background so
 210 that you could cope with the UNIN curriculum. We knew each other, the camp leadership knew that 'this person,
 211 she didn't complete secondary school but her educational background can maybe allow her to cope with the
 212 curriculum at the Institute'. So I was selected just like that: 'You have [spent] many years in the bush and you have
 213 suffered a lot. I think it's better if you can have refreshment. There is this programme at the UNIN, I think you can
 214 go and learn. Maybe you'll come back after [that].' I had a language course first, English.

215 [In Lusaka] it was no more a military life. The transition from military life to civilian life was also difficult. If you
 216 are used to orders and instructions without any questions you don't ask, you have to do what [they] tell you to do.
 217 [Then] you end up in a situation where you need to ask if you don't understand or where people can complain.
 218 You felt sometimes that 'these people are not serious, how can they complain about food if food is not good?' Or
 219 how could just an ordinary somebody ask a question from the Director of the Institute, who [is now] our Prime
 220 Minister, that 'I'm not happy, I have to go and see the Director'? It took me time to adapt to civilian life, that I had
 221 the right to ask a question from the Director of the Institute, that I had the right to go out without asking any
 222 permission, that I [could] go and spend my weekend wherever I wanted to, that I could have local friends, that I
 223 could go to drink in a bar, that I could go and dance the whole night during the weekend. To me it was ridiculous:
 224 'These people are not disciplined, how can you go and spend the whole night in the bar without asking any
 225 permission?' (laughs). After I think one year [I started to think that] it's not a bad thing to do what the others
 226 [were] doing. I even started to think that military life was stupid because you could not have a taste of life. [I
 227 thought:] 'Now I'm normal.'

228 **I completed my three years course at the Institute in August [19]84. I obtained a diploma in development**
 229 **study and management. It was really a pluridisciplinary course, you did almost everything, law, sociology,**
 230 **psychology, statistics, politics, economy. It was in the field of development studies, dedicated to the future**
 231 **independent Namibia to have cadres in almost every field. The same month I went to [Europe] for**
 232 **university courses.** So I escaped completely from the military situation (laughs). **Before university I was**
 233 **obliged to learn [the local language]. It was a language course for 12 months. Then in [19]86 I started my**
 234 **first university year. I completed my first degree in two years in the field of social studies. I enrolled myself**
 235 **for the third year of university study in the same institution and I obtained a Bachelor's degree in social**
 236 **science, when was it? I'm sorry, let me check if I have my cv here, really I cannot remember anymore. So,**

237 **diploma, first degree, ok, the second degree which is a Bachelor in social science I obtained in 1989. Then I**
 238 **continued in the same university and obtained my Master's degree in 1990. Then I decided I had had**
 239 **enough of social science. During these five years of university courses I had been fascinated mainly by any**
 240 **subject in political science, political economy and development economy, especially when it came to Third**
 241 **World countries. So after the Master's I decided to deviate myself to the field of pure political science. I**
 242 **completed my degree in socioeconomic and political science, mainly in African studies, in 1991. I then**
 243 **decided to enroll in the Ph.D. programme in the same institution. I felt that there was no need for me to be**
 244 **in [Europe] anymore since my subject is on Namibia. So I decided to come back home, continue my**
 245 **research and the same time work for my Namibia.**

246 The first thing [in Europe] was to have local friends. You needed to learn the language with local people. They
 247 didn't speak English, they didn't speak foreign languages, you had to speak [their language]. Maybe I was lucky
 248 because after the language course I was alone in this institution [where I studied], I was a lone Namibian there. So
 249 I was just with either [local] friends or people who were speaking [that language]. [Life in Europe] was something,
 250 the third station of experience. Social life was different, economically it was different, politically it was different.
 251 Educationally it was different as well. My life in Lusaka, I can't compare it to life in [Europe], it was completely
 252 different in terms of development. It was also difficult to adapt to the new situation. But materially it was ok. You
 253 had money, you were sponsored by the government. Compared to the social situation in Zambia, it was very
 254 different, traditional values completely destroyed by modernity. People [were] behaving differently than what I
 255 had experienced in Zambia where traditional values are still playing a major role. It was a sort of a shock, it
 256 required a certain period to accept that people can behave that way. For example prostitution or homosexuality,
 257 very openly, I could not believe that people can live that type of life. I knew that I was [there] for a limited time
 258 and I would have to go back, so I tried to adapt myself to what I thought was positive to me in that situation and
 259 even in the future but [so that] I wouldn't have a second shock when I'd be back to my own style of life. [I was] in
 260 contact with the Swapo office. Sometimes we had Swapo meetings but it was also difficult if somebody was in
 261 [another town] and the office of Swapo was in [the capital], it was difficult to regroup all Namibians all over [the
 262 country] to come just for the meeting. So we didn't really see each other often.

263 LM: How did the Namibian independence process look like when you were observing it from a different country
 264 and different continent?

265 The country [used to be] under political violence or intimidation. We had very different groups as far political
 266 differences are concerned, we had people from exile and we had people who were just in Namibia without going
 267 anywhere and they were very hostile, the two groups. To me it was very positive to see that the two groups
 268 decided to accept each other and to proceed with the election process without any violence, without intimidation.
 269 We could find some violence, intimidation, but that could not count much, because we were always expecting that
 270 type of things but it was not very important during the election process. It was a positive thing for Namibians to
 271 accept each other whether you were a DTA or a Swapo, whether you were a PLAN fighter or a Koevoet. We
 272 accepted that it was time to install peace in Namibia and to accept each other and come together, discuss, negotiate
 273 and reach a conclusion, to me it was a positive thing. [When the election results were announced] I was just in
 274 front of my tv, listening to the radio, waiting for the results to come out, the whole day, the whole night (laughs).
 275 To me it was very positive, I cannot hide it, when I heard that Swapo didn't get the two-thirds majority, I was very
 276 happy. It was so good for the new Namibian political system to be balanced, not to be dominated by one party as
 277 Swapo wanted, to have the two-thirds majority and write its own constitution. I thought that it was better if other
 278 parties, small parties, the DTA, could gain something, a certain percentage so that the constitution could be written
 279 by each and every party.

280 H: When did you develop this kind of political opinion or did you always have this multipartyist stance?

281 When I went to [Europe] we had a choice as far as subject was concerned. You had a main subject and you had
 282 supporting subjects. And I was very fascinated by anything on international relations, geopolitics and by African
 283 politics, to know what had happened in the past, what was happening now and what could be the perspective.
 284 That's how I developed my political [opinion]. It was only [there] because [you] had a liberty of expressing
 285 yourself and writing on any subject. Whenever I'm analyzing something I first refer myself to the political system
 286 [of the country where I studied], how is this done [there] and why can't we pick certain elements. Maybe they can
 287 be adapted to Namibian situation. I can only refer myself to the [ir] system because it is the one I know.

288 LM: On the 21st of March [19]90, the day of independence, what were your feelings on that day?

289 I found myself in front of my tv and seeing Geingob who was really saying that 'now we are making Namibia a
 290 republic', it was something unimaginable. That is still in my [memory] as if I was in front of my tv. After that
 291 proclamation I picked up my phone and called everybody, friends [there:] 'Did you see, are you watching the tv,
 292 can you see?' It was very exciting, it was really a nice experience. I couldn't come here because I was supposed to
 293 defend my Master's thesis.

294 I returned on the 15th of October 1991. I was very happy to meet my family again after 16 years of absence.
 295 [When] I arrived at my father's home it was four o'clock in the morning and everybody was sleeping. I couldn't

296 even recognize that it was really the house I was born in. The small trees that used to circle the house [were] so
 297 short when I was a kid. The area was completely different. Even now if I go there I feel that something has really
 298 changed, the area, the people are no more living as we used to live in the past, [there] is a sort of infiltration of
 299 modernity. People are no more serious (laughs). In our days we were mainly bound by family rules and
 300 regulations. That is no more there, it is completely different. Everybody is just on his own, kids don't obey the
 301 elders or parents anymore, there is misinterpretation of modernity and development. We don't need just to take the
 302 [European] way of life and adopt it straight to the Namibian way of life. You need evaluation and that is lacking in
 303 our society. We adopt everything, so it is a sort of confusion.

304 The rural life is no more as it was, [there is] a lot of cuca shops and people are no more in their houses, they are
 305 just [around] these cuca shops, drinking. It is awful. That is one of the changes. And the rural area after
 306 independence is a bit empty, we can only find old people there and the young ones, I don't know where they are.
 307 We were many, especially in my village, my age group, my generation. When I went there [and asked], 'where is
 308 this person?', [I was answered], 'we don't know, maybe [he/she] is in Rehoboth.' 'Where is Johnny?' 'We really
 309 don't know, maybe [he] is in Swakopmund.' So there is migration, uncontrolled one, which makes the rural area
 310 completely empty. I had a hope to see Namibia different from other African countries socioeconomically but I'm
 311 a bit disappointed because I can't really see the difference between what was Zambia in 1980, Lusaka in 1981,
 312 [19]82, and what is developing already in Namibia. [There is] sort of a social and economic frustration, people
 313 were expecting something better than [during] the colonial time, which cannot be realized within two or three
 314 years. And [there is] the liberty that the colonial rules are no more there and unemployment is really forcing
 315 people. If we are not really trying to stop some of these [developments] we will have Namibia [like] other African
 316 countries.

317 When I came back the main objective was to find something to do, to look for employment. I was looking for six
 318 months without being employed. It was a surprise, being graduated from important institutions. I was thinking that
 319 maybe it only requires a month or so, because I knew that we need qualified people in Namibia. Maybe there is a
 320 problem with the system itself because we had a very political system. We had apartheid and a sort of division and
 321 it created hatred between various groups. The new government took affirmative action, that the group which was
 322 [disadvantaged] in the apartheid system must now have a chance. And [there is] another group which was already
 323 inside and already working. It's so difficult for Namibians to bind themselves to affirmative action, to welcome
 324 each other. You apply for a job and you make a follow-up, you find out that your application cannot be found
 325 because you are a returnee, which plays a very negative role when it comes to recruitment. Most people [in] the
 326 most important posts in the public service are underqualified, so to recruit someone who is above you can be a
 327 threat.

328 Then I got employed in the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. That is an administrative work. I'm now
 329 struggling to integrate myself in the Namibian way of life, socially and economically. My friends are returnees
 330 because we think differently, we behave differently. I don't even have a friend who [stayed in Namibia]. Maybe in
 331 the working environment, but personal friends, no, apart from the family in the north. I feel that I'm still a member
 332 of that family but my behaviour is completely different. This extended family is too big. To me it doesn't have any
 333 value to consider everybody, 'this is a sister, this is a cousin', I don't have that feeling and they can feel that I
 334 don't really care. They can see that the people from exile are completely different (laughs). When I'm talking
 335 about family I'm always referring to my brothers, same mother, same father, and to my mother and my father. Ok,
 336 cousins, I can say that [they] are my family but that concept doesn't have the same value as it used to have to me.

337 LM: Did you manage to have any personal contacts with your family during the time in exile?

338 Only in [19]87. I left in [19]75, from that time up to [19]87, [I had] no contact with my family. I had my first
 339 contact with my family just when I went to [Europe]. My elder brother left the country before me, in [19]74. He
 340 was in Zambia as well [but] I didn't meet him [until] in Namibia after independence.

341 My vision of Swapo cannot be the same now when I can make sort of an analysis as when I was in Angola and
 342 Zambia. [I now think that] Swapo was just a political movement like other political movements in Africa and the
 343 ideology, I don't like it. If somebody asked me to join Swapo, the Swapo I used to know, I couldn't. Actually I'm
 344 no more a member of any political party. I don't want to join Swapo, I [saw] many negative aspects in its politics
 345 abroad. Maybe a new party will come out between Swapo and the opposition that I can join (laughs). I think we
 346 [returnees] have sort of a syndrome, because life in exile was very much dominated by political matters. It's very
 347 difficult for many of us to get rid of that political influence, that 'we were fighting and why is [everything] like this
 348 now?' That makes a big difference between the returnees and the people who were just in Namibia. Anything we
 349 do, there is always that political influence in it. There are people who cannot make a distinction between political
 350 matters and other matters, social matters. The majority, they always inject that political influence, which is bad.

351 LM: If you would now be in a similar situation [as in 1975] would you still make the same kind of a decision, to
 352 leave the country?

353 No, I'm sorry, no (laughs). I don't think there is anybody who can say that if a similar situation occurred, he would
354 make the same decision, I don't think so. Me personally, no, I wouldn't. I had hard time, I spent 16 years in very
355 difficult situations, especially the war, and I don't think I could allow myself to engage in the same type of life. I
356 grew up in a very dramatic situation, from 16 years up to 24 years, a war situation. There we could not build a
357 personality. There was no development, there was destruction. Nobody could develop a personality, [only] a war
358 attitude. It was sort of a vacuum life, nobody can say that I developed positively. There was a cut of development.
359 Maybe I developed my personality when I went to [Europe], because it was a very different situation from what I
360 had experienced in Angola and in Zambia because they were in that situation of war. The basis was already [there
361 from the time] when I was young. I only needed to develop it further. I think I managed to recover and build
362 something so that I know that now I'm a normal person and I can identify myself as the original Maria (laughs).

Appendix 2: Background information on the interviewees

I interviewed 50 Namibians, of whom 47 were former exiles, and three had lived abroad for other reasons. Of these 47 former exiles, 7 were interviewed in Finland, 25 in Windhoek, and 15 in Ovamboland. The interviews were conducted between 18 May 1992 and 7 March 1993. 28 interviewees were interviewed once, 12 twice, 6 three times and one four times. The duration of each interviewee's interviews varied between half an hour and four hours, one and a half hours being the average.

22 of the interviewed former exiles were women and 25 were men. Two of them were 19-20 years old, eight were 25-30 years old, 25 were 32-36 years old, 9 were 38-42 years old, one was 47 years old, and two were 56-58 years old.

One of the interviewees had left Namibia in 1961, 18 in 1974, six in 1975, six in 1976, five in 1977, three in 1978, four in 1979, three in 1980, and one in 1988. Thus, all but two of them had left between 1974 and 1980. At the time of leaving one of them was five years old, five were 12-14, 29 were 15-19, ten were 20-25, one was around 29 and one was 39. These figures reflect the fact that thousands of young Namibians left the country in the wake of the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in neighboring Angola in 1974. Three of the interviewees returned before Namibian independence process got started, one voluntarily and two as guerrillas who were captured on a mission inside Namibia. 19 interviewees returned in 1989, six in 1990, seven in 1991, nine in 1992, and three have returned after 1992.

32 of the interviewees were born and raised in Ovamboland and most of them never visited any other part of Namibia before leaving to exile. 12 interviewees were born to Ovambo parents, but were raised, at least partly, in towns (mostly Windhoek, Walvis Bay, and Tsumeb) south of the Red Line. Two interviewees were from Caprivi and one from Damaraland. These figures reflect the composition of the exile population. Most of the Namibian exiles were Ovambo, and most of them came from Ovamboland.

Of the 40 interviewees who had already returned to Namibia at the time I interviewed them ten had been raised in towns or both in towns and rural areas. Except for one, who was attending a high school with a big population of former exile students, in Ovamboland, all of them were living in Windhoek. Of those 30 who were originally from rural areas, 15 were living in Windhoek and 15 in Ovamboland. Of those 15 who were living in Ovamboland,

seven lived in urban or semi-urban conditions in the quickly growing centres of central Ovamboland, two were living in rural conditions, but had formal, paid employment, one was at the high school mentioned above, and for three there is no information. Only two lived rurally and had farming as their main source of livelihood.

On the basis of this, one might be tempted to conclude that the former exiles have to a large extent gone to live where they originated or in similar conditions elsewhere. However, one should also take education and employment into account. In contemporary Namibia, as elsewhere in Africa, urbanization is taking place on extensive scale. Before independence, migration was strictly controlled, but in the few years following independence the populations of urban centres have soared. Farming in the former homelands, usually hard and unrewarding, does not seem to be a tempting alternative to many Namibians, and former exiles are not an exception. Thus, all those whose education has granted them formal employment, have taken it up, and their jobs are most often located in Windhoek or in the centres of Ovamboland. The less educated ones live in slums or squatters of Windhoek or the northern centres, depending on odd jobs or self-employment for their insecure income, and looking for a permanent job, rather than toil the land. Many of them had stayed in family farms for some time after their return before finding other employment or moving to look for it.

The figures above are not reflective of the returnee situation generally, for surely a far greater proportion of them live in the Ovamboland, both in the peri-urban centres and rural areas. My material is biased in this regard, which is related to the educational level of the interviewees. 18 of the interviewees had academic education. 14 had college or vocational education (mostly in nursing). Three (of the younger ones) had obtained senior secondary education. Five had schooled for only a few years and undergone military training in exile. In addition, seven interviewees are difficult to categorize, as they had reached various levels of schooling, undergone one or several short courses in various subjects, party education in eastern Europe, or achieved a combination of different skills. Of them, three would count as well-educated, two as poorly educated, and two as somewhere in between.

Compared to the Namibian situation in general, 25 of the interviewees would count as well educated or skilled (having full secondary education and in most cases additional education or training or almost full secondary education with considerable other education or training). 15 of them were men, and 10 were women. 15 would count as relatively well educated or skilled (having less than full secondary education with additional education or training). Six

of them were men, and nine were women. Seven would count as relatively poorly or poorly educated or skilled (having less than full secondary, most often just a few years of formal schooling with little or no additional education or training). Four of them were men, and three were women.

These categorizations are of course somewhat arbitrary, but even so they reveal the general character of the material at hand. Relative to the former exile population as a whole, the material includes the narratives of disproportionately many well educated people, and, as I stated earlier, of people based in towns or semi-urban conditions. This is because I started with a focus on the well educated, the would-be-elite, and only later extended my study to cover the whole scope of the former exiles. I do not consider this bias a handicap, since it is not my intention to make quantitative conclusions. Many important comparative insights can be inferred from the material even as it is. Still, the material can be said to give a better picture of the popular consciousness and historical imagination of well-educated urban Namibians than of that of the less educated rural ones.

Of the 47 former exile interviewees, 16 were working for the government, eight of them in the civil service. 13 were working for non-governmental organizations or in the private sector. Eight were unemployed or dependent on different forms of self-employment, part-time work, or agriculture. Two were students. Seven had not yet returned to Namibia, and one had just returned and not yet taken up employment. Of those who did not have a full-time job, seven were poorly educated, and one was well-educated. The well-educated one had returned a year before, and was still looking for full-time employment, which she later found.