

Women and the Namibian Liberation Struggle: Unquestionable Commitment

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Abstract

The experiences of women during war and liberation struggles have increasingly been a topic of scholarly focus. This dissertation enhances the scope of such scholarship by showing how women in the Namibian liberation struggle furthered the movement in vital ways as combatants, care givers, and leaders. The study furthermore delineates the direct parallels between local feminist leadership in Namibia and the global feminist movement. Moreover, the period of the struggle between the 1960s and Namibian independence in 1990 resulted in permanent ruptures of family structures and social norms that shaped Namibian societies. This study contributes to the historical record of southern Africa by providing a more complete and robust understanding of war, conflict, activism, and the representative and tactical importance of gendered symbolism within pivotal social movements during the struggle for liberation from South Africa's apartheid regime.

Keywords: Namibia, anti-apartheid, gender, conflict, and liberation movements.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress (South African political party; was previously an anti-apartheid organization)
CCN	Church Council of Namibia
COD	Congress of Democrats (Namibian political party)
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (Namibian political party; now the Popular Democratic Movement, comprised of a multi-party, multi-ethnic coalition)
GBV	gender-based violence
GDR/DDR	German Democratic Republic/Deutsche Demokratische Republik (the former East Germany; used here to refer to the “DDR Kids,” parlance for a group of children and youth who were relocated to East Germany for education and for their safety following the Cassinga Massacre in the Cassinga SWAPO camp in Angola)
GSWA	German Southwest Africa (name for Namibia under German colonial rule)
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*
LGBTQIA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, intersex, asexual
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe (the armed wing of the African National Congress)
NABSA	Namibian Black Students Association (worked in collaboration with NANSO and NANSO; was collaboratively involved in the formation of the Namibian anti-apartheid struggle in Cape Town and other parts of South Africa in the 1980s. This movement of students then returned to Namibia and fortified the movement there.)
NANSO	Namibia Students Organization (pre-cursor to NANSO)
NANSO	Namibia National Students Organization (affiliated with SWAPO)
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NNF	Namibia National Front (Namibian centrist coalition of political parties)
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organization (Namibian political party; predominantly Ovaherero ethnic group)
NWV	Namibian Women’s Voice
OAU	Organization for African Unity
OGF	Ovaherero Genocide Foundation
OPO	Ovambo People’s Organization (Namibian political party; precursor to SWAPO)
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army of Namibia
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SADF	South African Defense Force
SWA	Southwest Africa (name for Namibia under South African control)
SWANU	South West Africa National Union (Namibian political party; predominantly Ovaherero ethnic group)
SWAPO	Southwest Africa People’s Organization (Namibian political party; predominantly Ovambo ethnic group)
SWATF	South West Africa Territorial Force (arm of the South African Defense Force)
SWAPOL	South West African Police force (the police department during South Africa’s occupation of Namibia, when Namibia was referred to as South West Africa)
SWC	SWAPO Women’s Council
UN	United Nations
UNIN	United Nations Institute of Namibia
WHO	World Health Organization
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

Introduction

Situating Women's Contributions to the Namibian Liberation Movement

Namibian women's commitment to the national liberation struggle was unquestionable... They were on par, if not ... exceeding in some aspects men's commitment. Namibian women... demonstrated unquestionable commitment. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with author, February 24, 2020)

Engaging an oral history and archival research methods approach, this dissertation documents the last living generation of women freedom fighters who contributed to the Namibian liberation struggle¹. A gendered frame of analysis counters more traditional wartime accounts that tend to recognize gender as ancillary rather than central to conflict (De Volo, 2018; Palmary, 2012). This project demonstrates that gender roles played a fundamental part in Namibia's path to independence. I assert that women's labor as combatants, care workers, and leaders indelibly shaped and advanced Namibia's fight for independence.

By integrating women's life histories into an understanding of southern African historiography, several patterns emerge. First, an analysis of Namibian history over an extended period reveals that the mutually reinforcing systems of power and control present during the struggle have contributed to a continued context of violence in Namibian society. Second, Namibian women today are clearly raising their visibility and stature, claiming positions of leadership that often began with experience gained during the struggle. Third, because women's experiences of conflict and revolutionary movements are different from men's, an analysis of the life history narratives of women combatants provides insight into pernicious and understudied wartime issues such as gender-based violence (GBV).

This dissertation documents women's roles during the struggle, organizing them into categories of care, combat, and leadership, and linking them to broader global movements for liberation. Additionally, it delineates enduring ruptures from the period of the struggle that have been inflicted upon families. In doing so, I complement the work of Namibian scholars such as Martha Akawa (2014) and Ellen Namhila

¹ The project is focused on the later period of the struggle, from the 1960s until Namibian independence in 1990.

(2009, 2013) by analyzing additional oral history narratives to further recontextualize the struggle. Such research also highlights the role of Namibian women who have often been overlooked or omitted entirely in historical accounts. Due to the contested nature of Namibia's commemorative landscape, women, like other marginalized groups such as the Ovaherero and Nama that were subjected to genocide, have largely been written out of Namibia's historical narrative (Zuern, 2012). The omission of Namibian women from Namibia's official memory transcript is also evident in Heroes' Acre. This grand memorial, erected in 2002, honors the graves of fallen liberation heroes; only three out of the thirty-five honored there are women (Becker, 2011). As the current director of the SWAPO Party Women's Council, Eunice Iipinge complained, "the sacrifices of 'heroines' had been unfairly omitted from the official pictorial narrative chiseled in marble and bronze" of Heroes' Acre (Becker, 2011).

The concept of a gender regime further expands upon conceptualizations of gender by encapsulating the complicated set of interconnected norms, expectations, and pressures as well as the related performance of gender by men, women, and individuals at any point along the gender spectrum (Pickard & Robinson, 2020). This is relevant to my argument because a country's gender regime affects how battles are waged. Gender employs societal definitions of masculinity and femininity and strongly influences how we are treated by others and society as a whole (Tyson, 2006, p. 108). Naturally, an unequal gender regime would manifest in disproportionate levels of power between men and women (Pease, 2011). Therefore, the concept of a gender regime is used in the dissertation to signify the ordering force that dictates individuals' gender expressions, how their gender is read in society, and how their gender affects their lived experiences.

Chapter One presents a historical overview of Namibia as pertinent to the study, here I relied heavily on the foundational work of Marion Wallace (2011) and Lauren Dobell (2000). As the chapter presents in greater detail, the policies of South Africa's apartheid regime were aimed at maintaining the power and control of the white minority government and oppressing Black South Africans and Namibians. Following the end of German colonization of Namibia at the end of WWI, the League of

Nations authorized South Africa to govern Namibia in 1921² (Wallace, 2011, p. 205). As I outline, South Africa had invaded what was then called German South West Africa during WWI, and it was given control of the territory after the war. When the United Nations (UN) dictated that sovereignty should return to the Namibian people, South Africa refused to relinquish control. Thus began the white-ruled South African administration's illegal occupation of Namibia, as well as the struggle for the Black majority in Namibia to gain independence.

Given these dynamics, Namibians, as well as South Africans, were affected by the 1948 South African elections that brought the Afrikaner National Party to power and began to implement the apartheid system of forced segregation (Thompson, 2001). Over time, South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia meant that apartheid policies were implemented in Namibia as well (Wallace, 2011, p. 243). As opposition to the apartheid regime grew in the 1960s, Namibians launched their armed struggle in 1966, and northern Namibia became a battleground. Elsewhere in Namibia, activists held rallies, marched against the apartheid government, and generally took action to agitate against the system. These efforts were led by Namibia's principal liberation group, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and its affiliated military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). After independence in 1990, SWAPO gained formal political power and has been the governing political party in Namibia for over three decades.

In the next three chapters, I delineate the importance of women in the Namibian liberation struggle, characterize their roles, and demonstrate their enduring relevance and influence on Namibian society. These chapters follow a thematic approach. Chapter Two engages Enloe's (2000) theoretical schema of militarization to describe the interconnected nature of care and combat. The term care work is used as a concept to encompass a wide range of labor, including domestic work, medical care, childcare, teaching, and informal counseling. During Namibia's struggle for independence, women were a vital force

² For a map of central and southern Africa, please refer to Appendix B.

in SWAPO's military camps outside of the country³, providing a variety of tasks necessary for SWAPO's success as a liberation movement (Akawa 2014; Namhila 2009). For the women that remained within Namibia's borders, many in the north of the country supplied PLAN combatants with food, shelter, and information clandestinely⁴. Combat includes front-line combat, military training, and other military roles that map onto civilian work such as mechanics, engineers, teachers, tacticians, and more. In terms of combat roles, women took to the front lines of battle as PLAN soldiers, and others served at various ranks of the PLAN hierarchy, like medical or communications officers, political commissars, or on the military council. In fulfilling their duties, women strategically deployed their gendered appearance; for example, when a nurse wrapped needed medical supplies in her headscarf, or, in the case of Helena Ndapuka, a SWAPO activist who manipulated perceptions of gender to her advantage by hiding "a petrol bomb and matches in [her] handbag" (Temu & Tembe, 2014, p. 425).

Chapter Three turns to women and political leadership within the ranks of SWAPO. The chapter examines what it was like to be a woman leader in SWAPO and what related tensions female leaders were forced to navigate. The life histories of Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah and Rosa Namises provide emblematic examples of Namibian women in leadership roles during the struggle. Namises's narrative also highlights tensions often surfacing between global and local activism. During Namibia's war of independence, it became increasingly common for women to be appointed to upper-level political positions and to take on international diplomacy roles, for example, by advocating for additional support and funding for the struggle. In sum, these experiences showcase that the priority

³ SWAPO camps were located in Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola (Williams, 2015). SWAPO's first military camp was built in Kongwa, Tanzania in 1964, and remained until 1968 (Williams, 2015, p. 66). After Angola gained independence in 1975 (Khadiagala, 2005), it became possible for increasing numbers of Namibians to go into exile in Angola or Zambia. As of 1974, SWAPO managed many camps in Zambia: Senanga, Kaunga Mash, Central Base, Oshatotwa, Old Farm, Meheba, Ruakera, Nyango, Mboroma, and Nampundwe (Williams, 2015, p. 98). SWAPO also had many camps in Angola, including Huambo, Cassinga, Jamba, Efitu, Kwanza Sul, Viana, Vietnam, and Lubango (Williams, 2015, p. 135).

⁴ Northern Namibia has long been the most densely populated part of the country (Wallace, 2011). The physical features of the north also offer more arable land and are greener, receiving more rainfall than the drier southern region.

SWAPO claimed to place on gender equality did not always match the lived realities of women within the ranks of SWAPO.

Next, Chapter Four discusses the ruptures that drastically affected family structures during the apartheid years (from the 1950s until independence in 1990). These schisms were caused by several factors, including the contract labor system usually requiring work far from home, the long-distance nature of life for exiled freedom fighters, and the overt consequences of war such as death, injury, or traumatization. This vignette from Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu illustrates some of these dynamics:

[The struggle] has really affected Namibia. That change in family structure, whether it was from the genocide way back [in] 1904 to 1908, then during apartheid . . . the contract labor system, and . . . the mothers being away from their children really affected things in very important ways . . . That's one of the key aspects for me, gender issues within the liberation movement. You have these girls growing up without their parents, particularly a mother. You don't have siblings really . . . you have just others. So, you are this individual within this [exile] community and this specifically is when you really forge this strong bondage with them. (Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, interview with the author, May 29, 2020)

As Amulungu states, it was commonplace for families to be separated during certain phases of Namibian history. For example, throughout the German colonial occupation between 1884 and 1915, many women worked and lived away from their children and partners (Dobell, 2000, p. 41; Wallace, 2011, p. 276). Family divisions were also common while under South African rule from 1915 until independence in 1990, especially during the later years of the struggle, from the 1960s onwards. Men were also often forced to leave their families due to the contract labor system that compelled them to work in South Africa as well as parts of central and southern Namibia (Dobell, 2000, p. 41; Wallace, 2011, p. 276).

Combined, the chapters demonstrate the vital role of women in the Namibian independence struggle and what we gain from this knowledge, as well as set the stage for the final chapter. The concluding chapter is written as a coda that grapples with the enduring relevance of women in the struggle and how their contributions have affected society. The chapter invokes three primary scholarly interventions. One, a long-term, gendered analysis of Namibian history reveals the ongoing impact of the intertwined dynamics of violence, power, and control that were present during the struggle. Two, Namibian women

are rendering themselves legible, by increasing their social, political, and economic representation that has carried through to the present. Three, in invoking Butler's framework of livability and grievability⁵, a more complete understanding of women's experiences of war and activism can create systems and policies of accountability that foster their safety and success. This reasoning is aligned with feminist scholar Meredith Turshen (2016), who argues that to curb sexual violence, a better understanding of the context, accelerants, and perpetrators is vital (p. 26).

⁵ Butler's definition of "livability" is the "conditions that must be fulfilled for life to become life" (Butler, 2004, p. 39); Similarly, "grievability" is "whose life, if extinguished, would be publicly grievable and whose life would leave either no public trace to grieve, or only a partial, mangled and enigmatic trace" (Butler, 2010, p. 75).

Chapter 1: History

Namibian History

While the timeframe of this project is focused on the Namibian liberation struggle, from the 1960s until Namibian independence in 1990, I will first provide a chronological overview of some of the broader, national-level historical eras and events that shaped the area and its people. The historical events I discuss below, including the 1904-1908 Ovaherero and Nama⁶ genocide, South Africa's illegal occupation and implementation of the apartheid system, and Namibia's liberation struggle from the 1960s until independence in 1990, are offered in the interest of providing a long-term analysis and a sense of how past events shaped the present context. Engaging Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory, I assert that Namibia's earliest history, especially the significant ruptures originating during the 1904-1908 genocide and Namibia's protracted war to win independence, continue to exert influence over gender norms and the lived realities of Namibians today. Hirsch's theoretical framework argues that ongoing, historical trauma can be passed down from one generation to the next. Essentially, the idea of postmemory relies on an understanding that each generation passes down collective trauma of past historical events (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5).

The project centers Namibian women and thus begins with a brief discussion of women in early Namibian history⁷. In the pre-colonial⁸ era, women had ownership rights and decision-making authority (Wallace, 2011). Ovaherero and Damara⁹ women, too, played an important role at central cultural events

⁶ The Ovaherero people are an ethnic group in Namibia and Botswana; the Nama ethnic group is mostly in Namibia (Gates & Appiah, 2010). As discussed here and in Chapter Four, German colonial forces subjected the Ovaherero and Nama people to genocide between 1904 and 1908. Refer to Sprenger, Rodriguez, & Kamatuka (2017) for more information.

⁷ There is somewhat of a gap in scholarship between early Namibian history and the first European contact with the country, making an accurate rendering of the very early periods of Namibian history challenging. Unfortunately, Namibian pre-colonial history is not as well-developed as other regions of Africa, such as central and eastern Africa.

⁸ In an attempt to address the false dichotomies of before and after colonialism, I draw on the work of Najmabadi (2008) who challenge the "unavailable intersections" of post-colonial research and analysis. Najmabadi writes against the arbitrary and harmful "zero-time" imposed on historical accounts that begin with colonization. Najmabadi writes "In the colonial versus anti-, neo-, post-colonial narrative of history, there is a zero-time set at the moment of colonization. In important ways, history begins at this zero-time" (Najmabadi, 2008, p. 71).

⁹ The Damara people comprise another one of the main ethnic groups in Namibia (Gates & Appiah, 2010).

and functions, such as the holy fire¹⁰ (Wallace, 2011, p. 49). Colonialism clearly permanently altered the lives of indigenous Namibians, including women. The imposition of colonial forces and their leverage of violence and arms diminished Namibians' positions of power in society (Wallace, 2011, p. 49). This was in part due to the shift in power dynamics introduced when colonial pioneers introduced guns, which harmed all Namibians but in particular they “undermin[ed] the position of women significantly” (Wallace, 2011, p. 48). In the 1600s and 1700s, indigenous Namibians are reported to have had a number of interactions with European explorers and settlers (Silvester, 2015; Wallace, 2011). These early interactions may have set the stage for later events by establishing a reliance on or an appetite for European goods. In the 1860s, Wallace (2011) provides an account of how women were treated as pawns, prized for their reproductive capacity, and wielded as valuable assets in terms of marriage and partnerships between groups of people (p. 48). Women and children were also not immune from the violence of various battles and farm or livestock raids. The situation was further complicated for women because the legal system at that time afforded them limited legal rights (Wallace, 2011, p. 48).

As of 1870, there was increasing influence by missionaries and white traders (Wallace, 2011, p. 45). Bordering South Africa had a crucial impact on pre-colonial Namibian history; there was constant cross-border migration and thus a great deal of interaction between Namibians and South Africans. This meant that even before German colonization, Namibia had established a dependency on trade with foreign partners to acquire weapons and ammunition (Silvester, 2015, p. 41). The proximity of South Africa and the shared border between the two countries meant that Namibian people – their culture and norms, trading practices, and possibly their belief systems – were already being affected by an outsider presence. This reliance on colonial trade “created the opportunity for the colonizing power to come in and ‘divide and rule’ under the context of providing ‘protection’” (Silvester, 2015, p. 41). German colonists

¹⁰ The holy fire (or okuruuo in the Otjiherero language) is central to Ovaherero ritual life and is a tradition that is germane to the identity of the Ovaherero people (Wallace, 2003, p. 227). Wallace (2003) notes that all important Ovaherero events such as births and marriages take place at the holy fire. The fire is also thought to facilitate connection with the Ovaherero ancestors, and has an important place in healing rituals as well (Wallace, 2003).

eventually capitalized on the situation by deepening the tensions between various ethnic groups and gaining power through the insidious strategy of divide and conquer.

Far from Namibia, a meeting of European leaders in 1884 would come to affect the lives of Namibian women significantly by making decisions that would indelibly shape their lives and alter significant things like their access to land. The Berlin Conference took place in 1884-85 and was the culmination of European politicians working to divide Africa amongst themselves. In what became known as the “scramble for Africa,” European powers carved up the continent in their own national interests (Saccarelli, 2015). Subsequently, European governments began to colonize parts of Africa. Following the conference, Namibia came under German control and became known as German Southwest Africa (GSWA) from 1884 until 1915.

Under German Control: Namibia from 1884 – 1915

German colonial explorer Adolf Lüderitz landed in Namibia in 1884 (Chamberlain, 1999), and almost immediately, the occupation resulted in conflict with the Black, indigenous Namibians. The incursion of armed colonial forces changed the power dynamics in the region and put women at risk, likely shifting the power balance out of their favor and certainly putting them into physical danger. German colonialism ushered in years of deception, violence, and the theft of land and culture. Namibians were forced off their land and some were forced into camps and used as laborers for the Germans (Wallace, 291, p. 141). Even today, the descendants of Ovaherero and Nama people whose land was taken lament this earlier history that took away a foundational aspect of their livelihood and identities. For Namibians, culture is strongly tied to their land. Land has significant importance to people’s way of life, and thus land dispossession makes a deep impact (Koot, Hitchcock & Gressier, 2019). These early colonial incursions also set a precedent of mistrust between Black Namibians and external forces; German administrators’ deliberately misrepresented several treaties between colonial powers and Namibian chiefs (Erichsen & Olusoga, 2010, p. 47). Further mistrust and resentment of the German colonial administrators

simmered as colonial German forces followed the example of the South African government. Reserves¹¹ were created and Black Namibian men were expected to carry a pass wherever they went (Wallace, 2011, p. 332).

Dehumanization and Deadly Intent: The German Colonial Genocide of the Nama and Ovaherero

Again, turning to Hirsch's frame of postmemory, the violence and deception found in German colonialization is critical in understanding the subsequent context of violence in later periods of Namibian history. Many Namibians' postmemories are based in part on the past epochs of genocide and the apartheid regime. The genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people from 1904-1908 was an especially brutal period of Namibian history (Wallace, 2011). The Germans continued their violent suppression of Namibian resistance and began a full-scale genocide of the Ovaherero population (Sarkin, 2011, p. 104, 113). During this period, the Ovaherero were robbed of a great deal of their land. They also faced certain death by a German "extermination order" issued by military commander Lothar Von Trotha¹² demanding that all Ovaherero people be killed (Nielsen, 2017). At the same time, the Nama people, much like the Ovaherero, also began warring with the Germans (Wallace, 2011, p. 172-4). Ovaherero and Nama people were forced to labor on colonial railways and infrastructure projects, sometimes under such duress that it resulted in their death (Wallace, 2011, p. 175-6).

German colonial officials were ruthless in their quest to gain and maintain control over Namibia (Blackler, 2017, p. 407). The 1904 Battle of Waterburg exemplifies the violent, extreme nature of their tactics. During the conflict, the Germans pushed many Ovaherero fighters into the Omaheke desert, and they poisoned the only available waterholes and wells. In the scorching Namibian desert, this meant

¹¹ As Kössler (1997, p. 2-7) documents, the colonial land policy of the "reserve" was aimed at racial segregation. Reserve policies put Black Namibians at a strong disadvantage, requiring men to carry a pass while traveling, and mandating that they work for white farmers. At its core, reserve land policies focused on exerting control over Black Namibians.

¹² Lothar von Trotha was a notorious German military commander who took command of German colonial forces in southern Namibia in 1904 (Wallace, 2011, p. 169). Von Trotha had an especially notorious track record for deploying colonial violence in East Africa and China and was specifically deployed by the German Kaiser Wilhelm II to annihilate the Ovaherero (Sprenger, Rodriguez and Kamatuka, 2017, p. 128).

certain death (Wallace, 2011, p. 163). Only a very few of the Ovaherero escaped all the way to Botswana or to other parts of Namibia (Wallace, 2011, p. 165).

In parallel, Ovahereros were transported to multiple sites throughout Namibia where they lived in squalid, unhygienic, and dangerous concentration camps¹³. Camps were established in Windhoek, Karibib, Okahandja, Swakopmund, and Lüderitz (Erichsen & Olusoga, 2010; Stapleton, 2017, p. 18).¹⁴ Conditions in the camps were vile, and sexual violence was common at all of the camps (Erichsen & Olusoga, 2010). Occupants were malnourished to the brink of starvation and forced into hard labor. The environment was further intensified by the cold, wet climate of the coastal towns such as Lüderitz and Swakopmund (Erichsen & Olusoga, 2010; Kössler, 2015). Because no sanitation was provided, disease was also rampant in the camps, with typhoid or scurvy claiming many lives (Erichsen, 2005, p. 138).

Ultimately, the Nama and Ovaherero were subjected to a broad spectrum of abhorrent acts between 1904 and 1908. Women were trafficked and raped by German soldiers (Erichsen, 2005, p. 136). Some fell victim to Von Trotha's extermination order while incarcerated and enduring forced labor or while building the railway line to Lüderitz (Erichsen, 2005, p. 132; Sarkin, 2011, p. 124). Most prisoners sent to Lüderitz eventually died while in captivity (Erichsen, 2005, p. 133). Ovahereros were also known to be killed on sight; German soldiers did not take prisoners at this time and routinely executed any Ovaherero person that they captured (Sarkin, 2011, p. 120). While accounts vary, it is estimated that prior to the genocide, the population of the Ovaherero and Nama people was between 60,000 and 85,000

¹³ Concentration camps were also instituted during the South African War of 1899-1902. See Devitt, 1941; Forth, 2017, and Ribeiro, 2020 for more information. The British also employed camps during the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. See Brue-Lockhart, 2014, and Kobukuru, 2013. Additionally, it should also be noted that the South African War is also referred to as the Anglo-Boer War or the Boer War. Many scholars prefer the name South African War as it is more inclusive and indicates the reality that the warring parties were fighting for "alternative outcomes – different perceptions of a future South Africa" (Boje, 2015, p. 78).

¹⁴ Please refer to appendix B for a map of these locations.

(Madley, 2004). The genocide decimated both populations, sparing only between 15,000 and 20,000 survivors (Madley, 2004)¹⁵.

To fully understand how events that took place over one hundred years ago continue to have reverberations for Namibians today, I turn to a discussion of links between the German holocaust in Namibia and the Holocaust of World War II. A number of sources state that Namibia was a precursor to the genocide of the Jews in Nazi Germany (Erichsen & Olusoga, 2010; Kennedy 2017; Lilach, 2016; Madley, 2005; Stapleton, 2017). German colonial officers in Namibia later became high-ranking Nazi officials (Kennedy, 2017). Most scholars maintain that Germany's actions against the Namibians between 1904 and 1908 unequivocally constitute a genocide (Kössler, 2015; Sarkin-Hughes, 2011). Others emphasize the fact that even if the term genocide must be applied retroactively, there were other international policies in place that would have marked Germany's actions as international war crimes (Sarkin-Hughes, 2011, p. 6).

The German case, in particular, has historical underpinnings that are in contrast with other colonial regimes. German colonialism was influenced by ideologies of Aryanism, that declared supremacy of the white race (Camus & Lebourg, 2017, p. 67). It is reasonable to surmise that the confluence of this racist ideology with a colonialist mindset was further reified by the vein of Afrikaner¹⁶ nationalism when the apartheid system was put into place in Namibia. From the side of the German colonists, they were likely pursuing a new life in Namibia, perhaps seeking to escape social or economic constraints they were subjected to in Germany or lured by the promise of economic or professional gains. But from the side of the Namibians, this incursion was never a welcome one.

For Namibians, however, the result of the German colonial occupation was the loss and destruction of their land, way of life, freedom, and rights. According to Muschalek (2019) the aims of the

¹⁵ Other estimates are much smaller, but the sources also acknowledge that the figures likely underrepresent the true scope of the killing (Erichsen, 2005; Sarkin, 2011).

¹⁶ The Afrikaner ethnic group of Namibia and South Africa designate a population that descended from Dutch settlers in South Africa in the seventeenth century (Gates & Appiah, 2010).

German colonial regime were all-encompassing: “every aspect of colonial life and all subjects, settlers and indigenous peoples alike, were to be brought under complete state control” (p. 5). Policies working in favor of this aim were ordinances restricting Black Namibians from owning land, having choice in their place of residence, and the forced implementation of pass laws (Muschalek, 2019, p. 5). Muschalek (2019) makes a compelling case that, over time, the colonial administration cultivated and intensified a culture of extreme violence: “the recurring slaps in the face, the kicks, beatings, painful cuffing, shoves and forceful dragging . . . were a quotidian part of colonial life” (p. 9). Their goal in doing so was to invoke “a multitude of violent behaviors . . . [to] generate or reinforce racial and social hierarchies” (Muschalek, 2019, p. 162). Violence, Muschalek concludes, “was the daily business of [German colonial] policemen” (2019, p. 159). Violence and racism were cornerstones of the German colonial administration in Namibia¹⁷. This is key to understanding the colonial regime in Namibia and the ways that it permanently altered the trajectory of the country. Again, violence remained a key element as employed by the South African regime following German control. The apartheid system, as an inherently violent ideology, continued, built upon, and re-entrenched the violent current already established by the German colonial administration.

Because it further underscores the depth of racism that imbued German colonialism, it is important to understand phrenology. A deeply racist pseudo-science that would have informed the mindset and worldview of German colonial forces, phrenology was a sinister tool deployed by German colonial forces to intentionally “other” and dehumanize Black Namibians. Essentially, phrenology was a twisted and self-serving form of “scientific racism” implemented by nationalist and white settler colonial regimes in an attempt to lend legitimacy to their racist, white-supremacist systems (Bank, 1996, p. 391). It was also an attempt to legitimize the claim that white Europeans were superior to Black indigenous populations (Bank, 1996, p. 389; Wallace, 2011).

¹⁷ Erichsen (2005) described this as the “racist paradigm[s]...[that] pervaded the fabric of German colonialism” (p. 72).

Again returning to Hirsch's framework and revisiting the enduring and intergenerational effects of trauma, postmemory highlights the ways that the German genocide continues to reverberate in Namibian society (Becker, 2015; Hamrick & Duschinski, 2018). The forced "policy of forgetting" inflicts damage upon holocaust survivors and descendants. While the history of the genocide fades over time, there are living reminders of this chapter of Namibian history, such as !Nans'ma Tsaobeb¹⁸. Tsaobeb is a village elder and retired schoolteacher in Bethanie, Namibia, and he descends directly from Cornelius Fredericks, a well-respected, late chief of the Nama people. I asked Tsaobeb about whether he believes that the Nama people are imbued with the postmemory of the genocide. He responded affirmatively and mentioned a recent genocide memorial event. During the event, the continued trauma was on display:

For that occasion, I organized some children to [act in] . . . a play, sort of small drama. And since then, I can see that when even the youngsters when they are talking to you, you feel how they feel. You feel the tears, you can see the tears. So it's emotional. It's economical, and it's social, those traumas. I feel like we are still feeling it, as if we were part of it - and we want to get out of it. (!Nans'ma Tsaobeb, interview with the author, February 26, 2020)

Tsaobeb's description aligns with Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory, the transmission of intergenerational trauma. Tsaobeb's description of the genocide memorial event describes how younger generations are processing and learning about the trauma of the past.

Trauma does not cease to exist when the person that experienced it passes away; instead, it lingers in the memories passed on to the descendants of that person in the form of conversations, archives, or oral histories. In this case, the postmemory took shape in the theater production that the children put on to share this piece of history with their community. Tsaobeb's characterization of the trauma as "emotional, economic, and social" is powerful. Far from a shallow or one-sided trauma, his description of the enduring trauma of the Nama people evokes a sense that there has been severe damage. Trauma and events from the past have led to the near destruction of his people's way of life. It has affected their pride, culture, means of making a living, and the ways that they define themselves. Far from being singular,

¹⁸ Tsaobeb's English name is Diedrik Ruben Fredericks.

Tsaobeb and his community's trauma acts as a conduit to also better understand the reconciliation needed by Namibia on a national level. Below, I turn to another equally violent episode of Namibia's history, South African apartheid rule. As Tsaobeb recounts, German colonialism brought significant trauma; unfortunately, the same can be said about the South African occupation of Namibia.

South West Africa from 1915 until 1990

Namibia came under South African control in 1915. Namibian and South African history are so closely intertwined that a study of Namibia would be incomplete without including an overview of South Africa history. Below, I provide a brief history of South Africa as it is relevant to Namibia. Despite their interconnected history, the relationship between South Africa and Namibia has been troubled from the beginning. While there was a moment in 1915 when Namibians seemed to believe the South African regime would be preferable to the violence of German colonialization, this hope was quickly eliminated (Wallace, 2011). It became clear to indigenous Namibians that the South African regime was in Namibia to exploit the resource-rich country and that their system of apartheid rule was a deeply racist and violent one (Wallace, 2011). Perhaps this tension is best summed up by Namibian anti-apartheid struggle leader Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. Ya Toivo was a political prisoner held on Robben Island, South Africa, for twenty years for his anti-apartheid leadership and activism in Namibia. He made the following statement in a speech he gave in Cape Town prior to being transported to Robben Island where he was imprisoned (Morgan, 2018).

We are Namibians and not South Africans. We do not now, and will not in the future, recognize your right to govern us, to make laws for us in which we have no say; to treat our country as if it were your property and us as if you were our masters. We have always regarded South Africa as an intruder in our country¹⁹. (Melber, 2017)

¹⁹ Ya Toivo's quote is emblazoned on a mural near the entrance of Robben Island, off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa.

Ya Toivo's words resonate the desire of the Namibian people for sovereignty and indicate both the self-determination valued by Namibians and the resentment they felt regarding the South African occupation.

Additional points critical to the two countries' shared history include the 1948 election of the Afrikaner ethnic-nationalist political party, then known as the National Party. The National Party began imposing apartheid policies across South Africa and Namibia, eventually including the apartheid system of forced segregation of all aspects of life (Thompson, 2001). Also of note is that a certain brand of South African white supremacy, Afrikaner nationalism, had marked influence during South African history (Verwey & Quayle, 2012; Willoughby-Herard, 2007).

As World War I began, South Africa (then a British dominion²⁰), fought on the Allied side against the Central Powers²¹, including Germany (Nicolson, 2001; Wallace, 2011, p. 206). In 1914, South African troops invaded Namibia, and in 1915 Namibia became a protectorate of South Africa under a League of Nations mandate and became known as Southwest Africa, or SWA (Wallace, 2011, p. 217). SWA functioned much like a fifth province of South Africa; however, it was never formally annexed. The South African government attempted to present itself to Namibians as a benevolent presence (Katjavivi, 1988). In an attempt to curry favor with the Namibian people, the South African government enacted token reforms. This included abolishing flogging and granting permission for Namibians to own livestock (though not land) (Wallace, 2011, p. 214). It also brought about a slight easing of pass laws, a system of control that had been implemented by the Germans to regulate the movement of Namibians, who were required to present the pass at certain checkpoints in order to be able to move around the country and even within cities (Wallace, 2011, p. 153). Despite promises for a better future for Namibians following

²⁰ In 1843, Britain annexed the Natal colony; in 1852, Britain recognized the Transvaal and Orange Free State as independent Afrikaner republics (Thompson, 2001). The South African War then dominated the period of 1899 until 1902 (Thompson, 2001). Following the war and internment camps, negotiations between Afrikaner leaders and the British resulted in the Union of South Africa, that subsequently became a British dominion (Forth, 2017; Thompson, 2001).

²¹ In World War One (WWI), the Allies (also called the "Entente") refers to the initial wartime alliance of Britain and its empire, France, Russia, and Belgium (Nicolson, 2001). On the other side, the Central Powers were comprised of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, and (later) Bulgaria (Nicolson, 2001).

the German occupation, South Africa moved quickly to take advantage of the situation, exploiting both Namibian people and the country's vast natural resources (Katjavivi, 1988; Wallace, 2011).

Between 1915 and 1949, South Africa's rule over then Southwest Africa (SWA) was chaotic and underfunded (Wallace, 2011, p. 206). South Africa's shaky start quickly shifted to a more organized administration based on racist ideologies and segregation. The South African regime moved to enforce stricter pass laws, as well as a curfew for Blacks entering white areas of towns at night (Wallace, 2011, p. 221). Additionally, the South African administration established a land reserves policy that had the explicit goal of racial segregation (Wallace, 2011, p. 218-219, 221). The land reserves policy had long-lasting, detrimental effects on Black Namibians as they were often pushed off fertile land and then clustered into small pockets of infertile land that lacked water, infrastructure, and sanitation (Wallace, 2011, p. 223). Namibia experienced an economic downturn in 1928 and 1929 due to a severe drought, and this led to a shortage of workers. At this point, migration and segregation became much more strictly enforced (Wallace, 2011, p. 230). The South African government continued to tighten control over Namibia in the 1930s; Black Namibians were no longer free in their own country. The administration cracked down on local authorities. The movement of Black Namibians continued to be heavily restricted, and there were several forced removals displacing Black Namibians (Wallace, 2011, p. 236). There was also an assault on the local culture and practices. Issues such as bridewealth became hotly contested as this Owambo practice was not condoned by missionaries and the apartheid government (Wallace, 2011, p. 234).

As the South African government continued to exert robust control over Namibia through its apartheid system, the violent, inhumane treatment of Black Namibians also persisted. The apartheid system originated in South Africa, and it was solidified in 1948 (Morris, 2012) and was centered on an ideology of white supremacy and separation of Black and white South Africans. In a series of legislation, the apartheid government gradually outlawed marriages between "whites and non-whites" (Morris, 2012, p. 28). Pass laws required that Black citizens carry documentation to travel anywhere outside their designated group area. The system was intensely violent and kept Black South Africans and Namibians

living in a constant state of fear. In an alarming move to anti-imperial activists worldwide, South Africa began refusing to submit reports to the newly-formed UN in 1948 (Wallace, 2011). South Africa simultaneously implemented apartheid laws in much of Namibia. The 1950s and 1960s especially ushered in an intensification of apartheid policy in Namibia through a series of new laws, security legislation, and more thoroughly formalized racial segregation and discrimination (Wallace, 2011, p. 251). Namibia was subjected to the violence of the apartheid system until independence in 1990.

The rule of law enforced by the apartheid administration was deeply racist and violent. Forced segregation along color lines as well as extreme violence undergirded the regime. By design, apartheid policies were psychologically oppressive and deeply demeaned Black Namibians. This was indicated by Gabriella Lubowski:

When you think of the apartheid time where men were so humiliated, and people were raised with a lot of fear and lack of self-esteem . . . Then you would automatically want to keep somebody lower than you, because that way you can feel okay about yourself. (Gabriella Lubowski, interview with the author, April 14, 2020)

Her comments are typical of the type of divide and conquer strategy employed by the apartheid government. The violence of the apartheid system resulted in personal loss, weakened social networks, imprisonment, and torture (Nicholas, 2014). Scholarship has documented the psychological torture of prisoners during apartheid times and the subsequent destruction that it wrought on former detainees and their families (Kagee, 2004; Nicholas, 2014). The malevolence of apartheid policies, however, was not limited only to detainees. The specter of violence hung heavily over Black Namibians during the apartheid years, even during their daily routines.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the South African government ushered in new and progressively harsher and more dictatorial laws, further entrenching racial discrimination and segregation (Katjavivi, 1988, p. 72; SWAPO, 1981; Wallace, 2011). The Natives Proclamation of 1951 extended the pass system that limited the mobility of Black Namibians and required that they carry a pass with them wherever they went. In 1953, the Mixed Marriages Ordinance prohibited interracial marriages, and in

1958, Bantu education was established in Namibia. The 1950s also brought many forced removals of Black Namibians (Wallace, 2011, p. 252-253). However, in response to South Africa's tightened grip, a tidal wave of resistance and activism was surging beneath the surface.

Building the Liberation Movement

Activists were relentless in their pursuit of justice throughout Namibia's history. As the terror of the apartheid regime heightened, the Namibian people intensified their opposition to the many injustices of South African rule. Over time, resistance took shape in various ways: rallies, marches, strikes, boycotts, and eventually violence and all-out war. Below, I outline the founding history of various political parties and advocacy groups. This background provides the necessary context to better understand women's roles as Namibia fought for independence.

SWAPO was founded as a liberation group and went on to be the most well-known Namibian political party. It was the primary anti-apartheid liberation group, and, since independence, it has remained the governing political party in the country. SWAPO²² was founded in 1957 in Cape Town, South Africa by a group of student activists (Dobell, 2000, p. 28). A confluence of factors came together to set the stage for SWAPO's genesis. As Dobell (2000) writes, "Cape Town of the 1950s was a hotbed of political activity" (p. 29). Indeed, Cape Town was a focal point for anti-apartheid activism within South Africa, and several African National Congress (ANC) leaders with special interest and commitment to the Namibian cause were located there (Dobell, 2000, p. 29). Many Black and Coloured²³ activists from Namibia, too, were in Cape Town to pursue university studies during the later period of the struggle because there was not a Namibian university until after independence in 1990. Another complicating factor for future Namibian leaders was the detrimental effects of the rudimentary Bantu education system

²² SWAPO was initially known as the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) (Pakleppa, 2015; Wallace, 2011, p. 246).

²³ In Namibia and South Africa, the term "Coloured" refers to a specific ethnic group. The term was initially introduced by the apartheid regime to refer to people of mixed race. I use the term here because, as Britton (2020) writes, "it is a specific historical reference that still carries significant social and political meaning today" (p. 6).

(Wallace, 2011, p. 252). Due to the limited nature of educational opportunities for Black Namibians at the time, families with socioeconomic means and connections often sent their children to South Africa to study.

In addition to SWAPO, there were a number of other political players. These included the South West Africa National Union (SWANU), the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), and an offshoot of SWAPO called the SWAPO-Democrats, or SWAPO-D. Still active today, SWANU was initially formed by Ovaherero student activists, teachers, and other members of the "Black intelligentsia" (Dobell, 2000, p. 27). SWAPO and SWANU jockeyed for power until 1973 when SWAPO was officially recognized by the UN General Assembly as the authentic representative of the Namibian people (Dobell, 2000, p. 27; Wallace, 2011, p. 278). This competition for power between the two groups relates directly to their political approaches; a critical distinction between the groups was SWAPO's continued reliance and partnership with the UN, in contrast with SWANU's greater emphasis on self-determination (Dobell, 2000, p. 32). SWAPO's main political rival was SWANU, but SWANU had become significantly weakened after a brief alliance with the Ovaherero Chief's Council in 1959. At this point, the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC), which would later become the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), took advantage of this SWANU's weakened position. At this point, the OPO reconstituted itself as a formal, national political organization, and thus SWAPO was firmly established as the leading political force in the country (Dobell, 2000, p. 27; Wallace, 2011, p. 250). As I detail in an analysis of leadership in Chapter Three, SWAPO's growing power had far-reaching effects. For the women of the Namibian feminist organization, the Namibian Women's Voice (NWX), it ultimately meant that their organization had to disband.

The early days of the anti-apartheid movement also included several notable women such as Martha Beukes, Nora Schimming-Chase, and Otilie Abrahams. Like many other students at the time, Schimming-Chase and Abrahams were in Cape Town in the 1960s, studying at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The experience of these early women leaders in the Namibian liberation struggle also reflects the reality of their lives under the apartheid system of segregation. UCT was segregated under the

apartheid regime, and Black students needed a special permit to study there. Black UCT students were also excluded from the library, cafeteria, dorms, and essentially all student life organizations and activities (MaBella Cupido, personal message to author, May 21, 2021). During their studies at UCT, Schimming-Chase and Abrahams, along with Elizabeth van der Heyden, Dulcie September, and other activist students, founded a militant anti-apartheid group called the Yu Chi Chuan Club²⁴.

The Many Sides of SWAPO

SWAPO's heavy hand has shaped the Namibian historical narrative to date. Like many other liberatory parties turned governing political parties, such as the ANC in South Africa, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and MPLA in Angola, SWAPO exerts its command over much of Namibia's memory landscape (Igreja, 2010). SWAPO strives to control Namibia's historical narrative by portraying the party in a favorable light to achieve and maintain political power.²⁵ Weaving an array of women's perspectives into this later phase of Namibian history makes strides in disrupting and recontextualizing this dominant narrative.

Following the UN's recognition of SWAPO as the sole official representative of the Namibian people in 1973, SWAPO has enjoyed increased domestic and international status and recognition. After its founding in the 1950s, it was a central force of the Namibian anti-apartheid struggle. From the 1960s until independence in 1990, SWAPO was a driving power, militarily and politically, in leading Namibia's push for independence. SWAPO's goals were to terminate South African control of the country and gain self-governance for Namibia (Dobell, 2000, p. 28). Later, as Namibia inched closer to independence,

²⁴ The organization was committed to the writings of Mao and Che Guevara (Dobell, 2000, p. 29). The work of the Yu Chi Chuan Club was eventually discovered by the South African Defense Forces (SADF). SADF was South Africa's military police and commonly hunted down activists viewed as terrorists or communists. SADF jailed van der Heyden and other Yu Chi Chuan Club members. Schimming-Chase and Abrahams were fortunate to avoid jail time. Sadly, September was later assassinated in France in 1988 (Groenink, 2018).

²⁵ Here, I provide an overview of Namibian history only insofar as it is pertinent for this study. For a complete historical overview, please refer to Wallace (2011). Dobell (2000) also provides a comprehensive account of SWAPO and the liberation struggle.

SWAPO's goals shifted to establishing a government, securing international recognition of its authority, and unifying the nation (Dobell, 2000, p. 60).

Over time, SWAPO engaged a variety of techniques aimed at achieving Namibian independence. SWAPO operated at the macro-level, especially during the later period of the struggle. SWAPO waged a battle militarily via their armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), and in terms of popular opinion, fighting to win the hearts and minds of the Namibians against the South African occupation. However, in the early days, the primarily SWAPO-led anti-apartheid movement also worked at the grassroots level. Accounts of Namibian teachers in the north covertly educating their students about SWAPO and spreading anti-apartheid/anti-SADF (South African Defense Force) rhetoric are common. These activities led many Namibian youths to go into exile in neighboring Angola to support the liberation efforts (Amulungu, 2016; Shaketange, 2008; Shikola, 1998).

SWAPO enjoyed substantial assistance and allyship both domestically and internationally. Several churches supported SWAPO and granted material and financial support. The Lutheran Church is commonly mentioned in archival records and historical accounts for their staunch support of SWAPO and the anti-apartheid struggle. The Lutheran Church also worked with SWAPO to provide financial scholarships for Namibians to study abroad in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere (Kuchinsky, 2015). In that vein, the civil sector rallied tremendous support for SWAPO; anti-apartheid organizations were active globally. At the official, international level, SWAPO worked with allied Soviet countries and the UN to achieve its goals. Despite occasional alliances with Eastern-bloc nations, SWAPO also straddled the divide between East and West in the Cold War, to benefit from both sides of the Cold War ideological debates (G. Hopwood, personal communication, January 16, 2020).

While many liberatory movements are portrayed in strictly favorable terms, the reality is often much more complicated. SWAPO is no exception to this. Throughout the struggle, SWAPO faced many challenges, both internally and externally. There were a myriad of conflicts within the organization. The leader of SWAPO, eventually Namibia's first president, Sam Nujoma, set the tone of complete and unwavering loyalty and obedience (Leys et al., 1995). Some scholars have described SWAPO as

"secretive and authoritarian," and allegations of corruption have also plagued the organization (Leys et al., 1995). A key example of the complexities and shortcomings of SWAPO are illustrated by the "spy drama," discussed below.

From Ongulumbashe to Lubango

The battle of Ongulumbashe was reportedly the first military conflict between SWAPO and SADF. It took place in 1964 in northern Namibia at a site called Ongulumbashe (Dobell, 200; Els, 2007). Outnumbered and under-equipped militarily, SWAPO did not have much chance of success in this first clash. However, Dobell (2000) reports that it was nonetheless a victory for SWAPO, mainly because it directly resulted in the UN revoking South African responsibility for Namibia (p. 36). Thus, the battle was beneficial in terms of SWAPO's long-term strategy to influence public perception and its attempts to court the U.S. and other international allies. A devastating result of the battle was the imprisonment of over thirty of SWAPO's top leaders at Robben Island, South Africa. According to Dobell, this loss of leadership drastically altered the course of the struggle, requiring that the movement be led from exile, rather than in-country leadership (2000, p. 37).

More than a decade after Ongulumbashe, the Cassinga Massacre became one of the most violent and brutal episodes of the struggle. The attack took place in 1978 when SADF bombed a SWAPO camp in Angola (Heywood, 1996). Upwards of 600 Namibians were killed, and hundreds were wounded and captured (Heywood, 1996). Many recognize Cassinga as one of the most gruesome episodes in the history of the struggle because of the deaths of so many civilians, including women and children, during the air strikes.

After the bombings at Cassinga, East Germany agreed to host and sponsor Namibian children to keep them safe from any further attacks, and a group of about eighty children were sent into exile (Engombe, 2014; Kenna, 1999; Krause & Kaplan, 2015). This group became known as the "DDR kids," referring to *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, the German name for former East Germany. Eighty young children from the Cassinga military camp in Angola were transported to East Germany and housed at two sites, in Bellin and Stassfurt, Germany. While there, the children received an education, and both German

and Namibian teachers and administrators attempted to maintain their connections to Namibian culture and languages. The group remained there until Namibian independence in 1990. By then, the group had ballooned to over 300 students, and the original group of 80 had grown into teenagers. When the youth were finally repatriated, they had mixed experiences; some succeeded, but others floundered greatly under the stress and challenge of reintegration (Kenna, 1999). Because the case of the “DDR kids” was one of many situations requiring families to be geographically separated for long periods of time, I include it here as evidence of historical events that have reverberations into the present.

Additionally, an episode in the 1980s that became known as the SWAPO “spy drama” took place in the Lubango camp in Angola. During this period, SWAPO engaged in torture, interrogation, and forced confession of espionage (Groth, 1995, p. 100). As with many liberatory movements, there were undoubtedly spies that infiltrated the ranks of SWAPO; however, SWAPO committed severe human rights violations by torturing prisoners under this draconian approach. This episode involved over 1,000 SWAPO members who were tortured, put into dungeons in Lubango, Angola, and forced to “confess” to being spies (Angula, 2018; Groth, 1995; Leys et al., 1995, p. 55; Williams 2015). The launch of Siegfried Groth’s 1995 book, *Namibia - the Wall of Silence: the Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* served to interrupt the SWAPO-controlled narrative. SWAPO sympathizers responded by calling for the book to be banned. However, an activist group, *Breaking the Walls of Silence*, remains active today and continues to call for an official apology as well as reparations for these past injustices.

While this episode is often referred to as the spy drama, it may be more aptly described as a series of torture and forced confessions. During this period, women especially were accused of being spies or traitors. Williams (2015) writes in great detail about women in the Lubango dungeons who were subjected to sexual assault. Among the women I interviewed, some were survivors of the Lubango dungeons. One former detainee, Vicky Festus, described how SWAPO cadets would come and take people during the middle of the night and accuse them of collaborating with SADF:

SWAPO, our comrades, they came in the night. They take you, and then they spread a rumor that you ran away from SWAPO to the South Africans . . . they took me. But I was not the first one. I knew that that’s what they were doing. They were taking people in the night. I just think

apparently for being spies. They go and hide you wherever, in those prisons . . . And the following morning they spread a rumor. ‘She is a puppet. She’s a spy. South Africans came and took her, and she ran away from SWAPO. She went, and ran back to Namibia.’ So that is now how the spy drama was. (Vicky Festus, interview with the author, March 13, 2020)

During her time as a prisoner, Festus endured excessive violence to force a confession of being a spy:

They are forcing. Stripped naked – beaten by five men. This one is kicking you. This one is beating you, and I was breastfeeding, and you know when you don’t have a bra, the milk is also going, and obviously it’s painful. You are screaming. I missed all those torture – I could hear my baby crying, and then maybe because he was also hearing my voice. And then I tell them, “Oh, my son is crying.” I was thinking that they would feel something. And I was beaten, beaten the first day.

MS: I am sorry to make you talk about something so painful.

VF: No, it’s fine. It helps to talk also. I went back. I took my son and just gave the breast, and I fell asleep . . . The following day I thought, now it was over . . . They called me again, the way you, beating me, on top of those wounds again – with sticks and so on. It lasted for something like a week . . . People were saying, “these people will kill you. Just tell them what they’re asking, give them what they want. Then you can say bye. Otherwise, they will kill you. They will torture you until you are dead.’ . . . Two years, I was in prison. There were people that were there for five years, six years, seven, eight years. (Vicky Festus, interview with the author, March 13, 2020)

Festus’s account describes the violence inflicted upon detainees caught up in the spy drama and is emblematic of the abuse endured by many others at the hands of SWAPO. Festus and the other detainees’ plight did not come to an end until 1990 when Resolution 435 was finally put into force, granting power to the Namibian people, and ousting the South African administration (Manning, 1989). Resolution 435 reaffirmed U.N. responsibility for Namibia and demanded free and fair elections (Beaubien, 1990). While adopted in 1978, it was not until 1990 that the mandate was fully implemented. Williams (2015) details the 1989 homecoming of a group of the SWAPO detainees. The prisoners had finally been freed, and they held a press conference in Windhoek revealing their mistreatment. In a dramatic display at the end of the press conference, they revealed to the press “deep wounds on their backs, legs, breasts, and buttocks” (Williams, 2015, p. 166). International media outlets covered the event; however, despite continued advocacy efforts, SWAPO has not acknowledged the spy drama, and survivors continue to demand an official apology and compensation (Angula, 2018; Kössler, 2015; Ndeikwhila, 2014; Williams, 2015).

Conclusion

The historical legacies of colonization, genocide, apartheid, and the liberation struggle continue to shape the fabric of Namibian society. The postmemory of collective and individual trauma creates a pattern of strain and upheaval in Namibia. Unlike other post-conflict countries, Namibia has followed an unofficial policy of forgetting, rather than pursuing some form of a truth commission in order to come to terms with its past. In linking Hirsch's concept of postmemory to Namibian history, there is an incomplete, buried or unaddressed historical record which may mean that unaddressed transgressions are likely to fester and reappear. Becker's (2011) work on the role of memory in reconciliation and the societal processing of trauma offers that "memories of the past have a part in transitional justice and reconciliation," (p. 332). The people I interviewed talked in very specific and direct ways about the continued impact of the genocide, war, and torture on the generations that have come long after the atrocities themselves.

Chapter 2: Combat and Care

Date: May 4, 1978

Location: Cassinga, Angola, SWAPO Military Camp

Just when we got there, we saw just four planes . . . we heard somebody say ‘take cover!’ My goodness! [Bombs and bullets] started dropping all over! . . . I ran into the hospital . . . one of my colleagues said, ‘Ruusa, we are in danger.’ . . . Somebody was saying you must go because here you will just die . . . I—was like, ‘This is the war I heard of.’ . . . [There were] already people crying. It was all over—blood. I inhaled gas, and I was confused. (Ruusa Shaanika, interview with the author, February 14, 2020)

Ruusa Shaanika’s story encapsulates the dangers that so many Namibians encountered during the struggle. Shaanika was one of the freedom fighters who got caught up in the cross-fire of the Cassinga Massacre.²⁶ She was only 14 years old when she left Namibia to support the struggle, where she continued attending school in the Angolan camps. Fortunately, she survived, but her account illustrates that even those not overtly in military or combatant roles suffered the trauma and violence of war and direct combat. It also illustrates the closely interconnected roles of combat and care. In the case of Cassinga, the brutal violence of the unexpected attack caught many civilians in its cross-fires. Because it involved air-strikes, bombings, and SADF paratroopers attacking SWAPO’s military camp at Cassinga, it was most certainly a combat event (Dobell, 2000, p. 70; Heywood, 1996). Perhaps less intuitive is the identification of Cassinga as an event requiring extensive care work. Nurses and doctors were needed immediately on the scene to tend to the wounded, and psychosocial support would have been ideally provided to help survivors who witnessed the violence recover and move forward in a healthy manner.

Following the Cassinga Massacre and countless other battles, care work was a vital component to a military response. However, perhaps because care work is most often gendered as feminine, it has not traditionally received as much attention or prestige as other kinds of labor. This is, however, changing;

²⁶ For more information on the Cassinga Massacre, please refer to Chapter One.

the notion of care work in a military context is one that has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. A great deal of scholarship highlights the labor of women nurses and caregivers, emphasizing care work as an essential part of conflicts (Byrski, 2012; Davis, 2013). Godfrey and Brewis (2017) refer to the “specific emotional regime” necessary during war and outline the “emotional labor soldiers report undertaking [during] combat operations” (p. 653). The scholars outline a range of emotions experienced during war, including fear and excitement, regret over killing enemy combatants, an intense focus on not letting down fellow soldiers, and living up to military expectations. There was also an intense friendship and camaraderie that developed amongst soldiers (Godfrey & Brewis, 2017, p. 660–661). Moreover, combatants were subjected to a set of “feeling rules” dictated by militarized norms that sometimes demanded positive, negative, or a complete void of feelings (p. 663). In analyzing a series of military memories, Godfrey and Brewis ultimately assert that there is a certain, militaristic “emotional regime” inherent to military culture and that soldiers adhere to “managed social performances” that contribute to the success of the mission (Godfrey & Brewis, 2017, p. 663). This regulation of emotion is important to military norms because it attempts to facilitate or ensure soldiers’ ability and willingness to fight and kill and to prevent cadres’ impulsive behavior (Godfrey & Brewis, 2017, p. 663).

The militarized emotional regime described by Godfrey and Brewis (2017) would have also certainly been imposed on PLAN fighters in the SWAPO military camps during the struggle. Typical caregivers such as nurses, teachers, and parents provided emotional labor in the form of medical care, while teaching, and in caregiving. Additionally, other less formal types of care work contributed to the success and forward momentum of each camp. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was an ongoing struggle. In the absence of formal counseling or psychological support, care for PTSD was often handled informally, amongst friends or family members. These support networks become all the more critical during times of war, as studies have shown heightened levels of trauma, stress, and psychological complications during unsettled contexts of conflict (Paardekooper, 1999).

Women in Care and Combat Roles

Namibian women played a wide range of roles in the struggle. As the apartheid regime tightened its grip, and violence directed at Black Namibians heightened, Namibians began mobilizing to resist the violent, racist policies. Between the 1960s and independence in 1990, SWAPO waged a battle for Namibian independence both from in-country and while in exile. SWAPO's ideology was inspired by nationalist and anti-colonial movements (Dobell, 2000, p. 22). Below, I discuss how Namibian women served in combat and care roles. While these two particular roles are not often conceptualized together, I will analyze in this chapter the closely interconnected nature of combat and care during the struggle.

Combat encompasses a wide range of militarized roles, including frontline battle. I define care work broadly to include domestic work, emotional labor, “morale-boosting” roles such as political commissar, and more (Duffy, 2011; Duffy, 2015; Romero, Preston & Giles, 2014; Van Hook, 2019). Much like a Möbius strip,²⁷ combat and care are two sides of the same coin, closely connected and mutually reinforcing. Similarly, it would be difficult to tease out the success of a combat mission without incorporating the related and necessary care work required. All combat missions require extensive care work, often occurring behind the scenes. Like gender itself, care and combat were mutually dependent roles that reinforced one another during the struggle. One could not exist without the other, and both elements supported and strengthened the other. Whether soldier, combat tactician, nurse, or mother, all of these freedom fighters in their various combat and care roles moved through the sides of the mobius strip, mutually reinforcing and facilitating each other's labor and roles in the struggle.

²⁷ The Möbius strip, a mathematical and optical phenomenon, is a three-dimensional infinite loop with only one side. This metaphor is borrowed from Fausto-Sterling (2000), who applied the metaphor of the Möbius strip to conceptualize the interconnected quality of biological traits and socially conditioned behaviors. Fausto-Sterling (2000) engaged the image to explain that gender expression is not a simple matter of nature vs. nurture; instead, there is an ongoing exchange and flow between them. This operates as on a Möbius strip: As we navigate socially constructed norms and expectations and our manifestation of gendered expressions, we “move from outside to inside and back out again, without ever lifting our feet from the strip's surface” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 29).

Finally, at a fundamental level, combat was being waged in order to create a free and independent Namibia. Without fighting for and demanding liberation, Namibians would continue to live their lives in fear and be unable to care for and build their society. After having exhausted other options, the leadership within the liberation struggle had made the decision that an armed offensive was necessary to achieve independence. At this point in the liberation struggle, war was necessary to end apartheid and to thus ensure control over basic social processes that make society function. Until Namibia was free, the specter of violence and the oppressive machinery of apartheid made it impossible for Black Namibians to live and work in peace.

“The Revolution is in the Everyday”: Blurring the Lines Between Quotidian and Extraordinary

Far from being routine and unremarkable, the quotidian (or in other words, the ordinary, everyday events that comprise a life) can at times hold remarkable power. Scholars from a diverse range of fields have in recent years included the everyday as a meaningful lens of analysis (Camp, 2017; Enloe, 2011; Kaufman & Williams, 2010; Moran, 2005). In cultural studies, scholars have begun to analyze the everyday “primarily as a space for individual creativity and subcultural resistance” (Moran, 2005, p. 11). Enloe (2011) writes about growing to respect the mundane as a site of connection between citizens’ private lives and the macro-level power structures of “national and inter-state public spheres” (Enloe, 2011, p. 447). In this vein, I assert that that Namibian women freedom fighters were the backbone to the struggle, especially for their deftly wielded, ingenious, seemingly invisible contributions. Perhaps because of its very omnipresence, the power and potential of the everyday is easy to overlook. Certainly, within the Namibian struggle, the women, in their everyday labor, made marked contributions in gaining Namibian independence. The quotidian lacks drama and intensity; rather, it plods along with a slow, quiet potential that is easy to miss or overlook. I contend, however, that it is precisely the quiet, slow, steady progress of the mundane, everyday routine that holds tremendous power. During the struggle, the cataclysmic, revolutionary event of Namibia ousting South African political leaders and holding its first free election took decades of resilience. This flashpoint, however, which is celebrated in the history books and is recognized internationally, required steady, persistent endurance. This labor was

done not only by those in positions of formal authority and leadership but also by ordinary people who moved the struggle forward without any formal title or recognition. In the end, the small steps, the ongoing stubbornness of not giving up, accumulated over time and should be recognized as heroic actions. Eventually, after many iterations of progressive realization,²⁸ Namibians achieved independence.

There is nothing revelatory about noting that dramatic heroes are often praised, but those who assisted them along the way are often overlooked. American author and activist Helen Keller is attributed to saying, “The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker,” and her words underscore my point that in the Namibian struggle it was not only prominent men, such as Sam Nujoma and Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, but also ‘ordinary’ women who were the everyday heroes by pushing the revolution forward in ways seen and unseen. Clint Smith, a journalist writing in *The Atlantic*, echoes this in his reflections on an oral history project documenting the lives of former slaves in the U.S.:

Part of what I think is so important is to lift up and hear the voices of those who are ostensibly ordinary people. And by saying they’re ordinary, I don’t mean that they are not remarkable and exceptional in their own right, but I think to have accounts of the daily, quotidian, brutal nature of enslavement from people who did not escape, from people who did not learn to read and write, from people who were born onto a plantation that their parents had been born onto and that their children would be born onto and that their children would be born onto . . . this reflects the intergenerational violence that slavery was . . . what we see in these narratives is not simply the brutality . . . We see the violence. We see the brutality. We see the cruelty. But we also see these glimpses and these small moments in which enslaved people are saying . . . I am still human. I am still someone who falls in love. I am still someone who raises my children to be kind and to be generous. I am still someone who loves to dance with my friends on a Saturday night while the moon is shining down. (Smith, 2021)

²⁸ In the field of human rights, there are two foundational covenants, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. States that have adopted the ICESCR are mandated to take iterative steps towards the realization of the rights outlined in the covenant, with particular emphasis on local legislature (Baghdi, 2013, p. 166). I use the concept of progressive realization here to describe the protracted nature of the Namibian independence struggle and the iterative steps taken to achieve freedom.

Smith acknowledges the importance of the quotidian and the vital role of documenting this work, thereby recognizing this chapter of the United States' history. In the Namibian case, an augmented understanding of the past will better illuminate gender norms, family dynamics, community cohesion, and more.

Given the power of the everyday, it is important to examine the significance of the domestic sphere. Many scholars similarly emphasize the value and transformative potential of the domestic sphere (Muwati & Gambahaya, 2012; Palmary, 2005). Muwati and Gambahaya (2012) assert that "African women's performance space transcends the limitations imposed by a narrowly contoured private/public space dichotomy" (Muwati & Gambahaya, 2012, p. 101). Palmary (2005) also argues against viewing women and the private sphere as operating outside the realm of formal politics, refuting the parameters of the public/private dichotomy. A fusion of the public and private realms was certainly pervasive during Namibia's struggle, where demarcations between public and private, as well as political vs. domestic, were softened. An illustrative example is the many women who became a part of the struggle by sheltering, feeding, and providing information and encouragement to fellow freedom fighters.

The power of the domestic sphere is also evident in the behind-the-scenes labor of domestic partners. To further expand on women's everyday contributions to the struggle, I also point to the often invisible labor of women who were married to powerful men. This includes Gabrielle Lubowski, the former wife of the late Anton Lubowski, a prominent lawyer in the struggle who was assassinated outside his home in Windhoek under suspicious circumstances, as well as Sally Kauluma, the wife of the late Anglican Bishop James Kauluma, who was another key player in the liberation struggle. Gabrielle Lubowski and Sally Kauluma were unassuming, framing their contributions as subsidiary roles.

Lubowski described her role as mainly being a supportive spouse:

...just a wife who busied herself with the children, kept the house in order, made lunch or dinner for all the visitors and guests and trade unionists that Anton invited to the house. (Gabrielle Lubowski, interview with the author, April 14, 2020)

A sentiment similar to Lubowski's can also be heard in Kauluma's words:

I just typed up his letters and his speeches and corrected the English . . . I had a little input sometimes or [would ask] do you really want to say that? I wasn't a driving force or anything.

I've got kids. I'm a mother. I think just by our life, we probably exemplified something. By being a mixed race couple, in a country where it was few and far between. (Sally Kauluma, interview with the author, January 22, 2020)

Statements such as Kauluma's and Lubowski's communicate multi-layered meanings. To better understand Kauluma's and Lubowski's comments, I look to feminist theorists Denise Riley (2004) and Sara Ahmed (2004). In a feminist analysis of language, Riley (2004) illustrates the context of male-female relations in society and how something as fundamental as language is wrought with unequal power dynamics. Similarly, Ahmed (2004) discusses the gendering of language and highlights that language, which can be deemed neutral, is actually highly gendered and political. Despite gendered norms often putting women in a position of forced modesty or humility, it is clear that these high-profile men would not have been able to accomplish what they did without the allyship, support, and partnership of women. This transformative potential begins to emerge in the latter half of Kauluma's statement. The final segment of the quote above indicates her reticence to see the value that she is contributing to her husband's work. Kauluma is a white, American woman, and her late husband was a Black Namibian. Interracial marriages were not allowed by apartheid policy, so their very relationship was an affront to the apartheid system. In Gabrielle Lubowski's case, the invisible labor she contributed by hosting Anton's colleagues and fellow freedom fighters was indeed significant and pushed the struggle forward in its own quotidian manner, meal by meal.

More specific to the realm of revolutionary struggle, several scholars have also theorized the concept of 'the everyday' in political movements (Borland & Sutton, 2007; Sargisson, 2010). At times, crisis inspires activism, and often this enables women both to see themselves in new roles as well as to harness the revolutionary potential of themselves, their families, their homes, and the makings of their seemingly ordinary lives. Such was the case in Namibia during the struggle, where women wielded political power individually and in their domestic roles. More specifically, women in northern Namibia were thrust into political roles by doing what were traditionally domestic roles: feeding, clothing, housing, and tending to community members. The significance of domestic work, however, had greatly

shifted; it had now become politicized because women were seen as choosing sides and assisting “one side” of the struggle—either they were with SWAPO, or they were aligned with the South African regime.

In this spirit, I assert that during the war of independence, Namibian women’s everyday, domestic routines were transformed into the realm of the extraordinary. Theorizing the everyday provides a valuable schema within which to understand Namibian women’s contributions for two primary reasons. One, it undergirds how routine tasks were made remarkable in the context of war. Two, it highlights instances of how women deployed their gendered appearances to advance resistance objectives.

The War Efforts of Namibian Women in the North

The political geography of the struggle was not working in favor of those in the north; for a number of reasons, women in northern Namibia were especially susceptible to danger. As Bauer (2006) asserts, “Rural Black women in Namibia suffered disproportionately from the effects of decades-long war for national independence that largely played itself out in the country’s rural north” (p. 87). Scholars of political geography would agree that it was undoubtedly a case of politics being informed by geography (Agnew & Muscarà, 2012). Years earlier, in the 1920s, the border between northern and southern Namibia was erected by the German colonial government (Wallace, 2010, p. 8–9). The boundary became known as the “red line,” and there was tight security at the checkpoint between the north and the south (Wallace, 2010, p. 23). Eventually, during the period of the struggle, as many Namibians fled into neighboring Angola to join the struggle, the northernmost part of the country became a focal point for SADF as they tried to root out their opponents (Dobell, 2000). Because the conflict was concentrated in the north of the country, the geography of the situation dictated that women in the north were often in harm’s way, subjected to verbal threats and physical violence.

David Smuts was a human rights lawyer when the violence of the South African apartheid regime and the war to end the injustice of South Africa’s occupation of Namibia was at its most dangerous and violent. Smuts took on legal cases representing those activists fighting against the apartheid government, freedom fighters accused of terrorism, or other cases of human rights abuses. He also went on to found

the Legal Assistance Centre and has been a stalwart in the Namibian human rights community. Smuts published his book *Death, Detention, and Disappearance: A Lawyer's Battle to Hold Power to Account in 1980s Namibia* in 2019. Corroborating the intense challenge of life in northern Namibia during the war, Smuts emphasized the efforts of the women in the north who furthered the struggle in critical ways during the 1980s:

There are countless women that I remember . . . in the north who were the head of households, because either the men were migrant laborers that were working in the south at the mines or in the cities. Or their men had gone off to take up arms. And they would head the households in the remote rural areas and were often subjected to dreadful action from the security forces, because they would sometimes, if there were insurgents in the area, they would sometimes feed them, or they'd pass through an area.

And they would then be subjected to beatings and that sort of thing to find out the movements of insurgents. And those people had to deal with—there were roadblocks and everything every day. They would have to deal with huge affronts to their dignity, and there weren't women to search women . . . It was such an affront to human dignity to see what happened at those roadblocks. And those women stood up, and they stood firm, and they often headed households and really managed, often single-handedly . . . they were very brave. (David Smuts, interview with the author, May 24, 2020)

As Smuts indicates, Namibian women moved the struggle forward in quiet, inconspicuous, and often unheralded ways. Women provided SWAPO combatants with food, shelter, tactical information, and emotional support (Kudumo & Silvester, 2016, p. 92–93; Namhila, 2009, p. 59–89). Without this labor, many more SWAPO guerillas would have died or been captured by the SADF. Smuts outlines the roles women played in the north while heading households, hiding and supporting insurgents, and maintaining secrecy of troop movements. Additionally, Smuts's comments above speak to the harassment and violence that women faced at police and military checkpoints in that region. Likely there were few women soldiers at the checkpoints to search women passing through. This resulted in degrading assaults when women were forced to pass through these checkpoints, as Smuts alludes to above.

Smuts (2019) details the murder case of Frans Mweuhanga, a man brutally beaten and murdered in 1985 in northern Namibia near the Angolan border. (Smuts, 2019, p. 148). In response, his wife, Victoria Mweuhanga, filed a charge of murder against the SADF soldiers who killed her husband (Smuts,

2019, p. 148). In both his book and our interview, Smuts highlighted the role of Victoria Mweuhanga (Smuts, 2019, p. 145–160):

It took a lot of courage to act in the way [Victoria Mweuhanga] did. We went to see her, and she was prepared to stand up and challenge the refusal to prosecute those responsible for the murder of her husband. She challenged that and, in fact, we brought that application, and she forced the President of South Africa at the time, P.W. Botha, to make an affidavit in response to her application. (David Smuts, interview with the author, May 24, 2020)

Following the murder of Frans Mweuhanga, SADF refused to provide Smuts with a copy of the post-mortem exam (Smuts, 2019, p. 149). Because Frans Mweuhanga had been branded a terrorist by SADF, albeit erroneously, SADF was granted extensive latitude in how they treated him. This culminated in the South African government issuing a statement that “the acts . . . which allegedly gave rise to the death of [Frans Mweuhanga] . . . have been done in good faith . . . in connection with the prevention or suppression of terrorism” and threw out the case (Smuts, 2019, p. 151). Even former South African president P.W. Botha weighed in on the case and ultimately ruled against Victoria Mweuhanga. Botha, however, was not provided with complete information; the report he received only contained SADF’s account of the event and did not include Victoria Mweuhanga’s testimony, nor any of the other local residents who were present at the time of Frans Mweuhanga’s death. Smuts writes that the case and South Africa’s suppression of the facts did not surprise him, because SADF’s treatment of local residents was “as if they did not exist, except to be regulated or abused when in the way. They had no human face” (Smuts, 2019, p. 154). Smuts, Victoria Mweuhanga, and their team did appeal the case, but independence arrived before the appeal could be heard. Following independence, the South African courts had no jurisdiction over Namibia (Smuts, 2019, p. 159). Despite continued efforts, the perpetrators of Frans Mweuhanga’s murder were never brought to justice.

Smuts also spoke to the quotidian contributions of everyday people. He emphasized their vital contributions and the punishing circumstances they were forced to navigate:

People living in the rural areas [of Namibia], peasants really . . . had enormous bravery and courage and dealt with issues exceptionally well. And under very, very adverse, difficult circumstances. Much worse than in South Africa because it was a war zone. The law didn’t apply because there was martial law and there was a curfew, so all sorts of things happened under the cloak of the curfew. (David Smuts, interview with the author, May 24, 2020)

Smuts's comments above underscore the contributions of everyday civilians and what they were subjected to by virtue of the fact that they were thrust into a war situation overnight.

Namibian women's refusal to accept a violent and racist reality as the norm culminated in everyday efforts becoming intentional practices of rupture that would assist in realizing Namibian liberation. Their efforts are aligned with similar feminist movements across the continent. Tripp (2011), in her analysis of women during conflict, provides a number of examples such as women exhibiting "warlike-behavior" and otherwise transgressing gender norms. She presents women waging gender during war as commonly resulting in societal disruptions during and after the conflict (p. 31).

Gwen Lister, the founder of *The Namibian* newspaper and a well-known Namibian anti-apartheid activist and journalist, also spoke of the valuable work of women in northern Namibia during our interview. Lister emphasized their importance and how they provided support for SWAPO comrades by providing them with food and shelter. Lister underscored the critical work of these women who furthered the movement in ways both powerful and yet quotidian:

I have said that, quite vocally since independence, that women need to be acknowledged for their role in the struggle. If not that they were in the forefront with the power salutes, the fact that they were caught between the security forces of South Africa and the SWAPO combatants. And if they helped the combatants—you know, gave them food or anything—then the security forces would raze their homesteads. They were in a terrible position. And those were mainly the rural women. (Gwen Lister, interview with the author, March 11, 2020)

Resonating in Lister's words is the fortitude of women, especially those in the north, and their vital contributions to the struggle. One such woman, whom I will refer to here as "Sara," was a nurse in northern Namibia during the struggle. Sara is the mother of four children, and her family ultimately had to move to the U.S. with support from the Lutheran Church because her husband was on a list of activists targeted by SADF. Sara's accounts are harrowing, including nights when bullets would rain down on her family's house near the school where her husband taught. Sara's experience was due to SADF's policy of strategically placing military bases beside schools, that at times led to violence and gunfire breaking out in or nearby schools. In 1987, more than fourteen primary schools near the Angolan border were bombed,

and some students were killed (Wallace, 2011, p. 303). Sara's experience and her words below align with Lister's, emphasizing women's role in caring for combatants:

The women played a major role in the liberation of Namibia in many . . . ways. Even ordinary village women, not only their sons, the freedom fighters, they hid them. They provided hiding places for them, for their guns. They gave them information. ("Sara," interview with the author, October 10, 2017)

Such women provided countless hours of physical toil and emotional labor, and ultimately they provided the unseen work that made Namibian liberation possible.

Women at War: Gender, Violence, and a Revolutionary Spirit

In a fusion of the military realm and the world of care, activists and militants in many contexts "deploy gender" in creative ways to meet their objectives. The strategic deployment of gender during conflict is a well-documented strategy (Cock, 1992; Cockburn, 2001, 2007; de Volo, 2018; Turshen, 2016; Turshen & Twagiramariya, 1998). A deft wielding of gender presentation enabled women nurses during the struggle to engage their positions in hospitals and clinics to good effect by stealing medicine and other materials for guerilla fighters (Akawa, 2014, p. 43; Temu & Tembe, 2014, p. 170). Tactically, women may use pregnancy as a cover for smuggling weapons or be more effective at planting bombs or landmines because they attract less attention than men. A Namibian scholar shared with me that during the struggle, women would wrap boxes of medicine on their back, easily slipping past SADF soldiers who assumed they were carrying their babies on their backs. Similarly, Cock (1992) found that in opposing apartheid, "women were used a lot as decoys and couriers . . . they were used a lot to smuggle arms and explosives" (p. 230). Women cleverly manipulated gendered stereotypes, using them to their advantage to assist with the storage and movement of weapons (Nghidinwa, 2008, p. 44). One of the men I interviewed, whom I will refer to here as "Alatinius," confirmed such occurrences:

The South Africans, when they see women carrying the basket, they don't worry about that, thinking it is only men who can carry arms. But some of these women, they are carrying baskets on their head . . . taking food to SWAPO soldiers. Some would be carrying some supplies to help those people, so they can liberate the country. ("Alatinius," interview with the author, November 6, 2017)

In this, we see in ways both small and large how women capitalized on the everyday and put their seemingly innocuous routines to good use in furthering the aims of the struggle. Women were able to capitalize on gender norms to push the movement forward toward victory.

As noted above, combat encompasses a wide range of military-related roles, including frontline confrontations with enemy forces, intelligence, communications, and administrative and technical support to troops, together with keeping forces “manned, armed, fed, fueled, and maintained” (Alison, 2009, p. 3; Chambers, 2004). Combat or military-related roles in the Namibian struggle included military supervision, strategy, operations, intelligence and leadership, and medical assistance on the battlefield.

Cynthia Enloe, a feminist scholar of political science and international relations, has written extensively about women, war, and militarization around the world. Enloe asserts that militarization comes in many forms and is like peeling an onion, from the outside support roles of militarization to the core of women in combat. Militarization is “a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being in militaristic ideas” (Enloe, 2000, p. 3). Enloe emphasizes that militarization can take place in a wide variety of venues and requires the participation of men and women, but “it privileges masculinity” (Enloe, 2000, p. 4). In Enloe’s analysis, we see the subtle, crafty ways that militarization seeps into many aspects of a person’s life and of society as a whole (Enloe, 1990, 2000).

Similarly, during the Namibian struggle, militarization encroached on people’s lives and dramatically affected Namibian society. In the north of the country, there was a “hot” war, but throughout the entire country, there was a battle for the favor and support of the Namibian people. At this point, there were various ideological battles being fought. Perhaps at the center of the arena were Cold War dynamics, that intensified and complicated South Africa’s illegal occupation of Namibia. The U.S., for example, was reticent about distancing itself too much from South Africa because it feared losing ground in the Cold War to socialist-leaning movements and parties in the frontline states such as Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia (Hanlon, 1986).

A number of factors contributed to an ever-increasing militarization. Women in the north of the country had little choice but to become very directly militarized. They were thrust into an impossible situation of being forced to choose sides. Women thus either allied themselves with SWAPO and PLAN, or the South African government and its defense force (SADF), often walking a thin line of attempting to appease the opposing forces. Many stepped up to support SWAPO comrades, providing them with shelter, food, or information. Even women who didn't actively support SWAPO were still often held under deep suspicion by SADF, and virtually everyone in the north lived with a constant fear of violence regardless of the choices they made.

During the struggle, there was a strong sense of urgency and the need for “all hands on deck.” Everyone who was able to support the struggle was expected to do so—and most people I spoke with had a strong desire to contribute to the march towards independence. Their input took many different shapes and forms, as I highlight throughout this project. I now turn to the roles that women freedom fighters took on during the struggle.

Women in the Namibian struggle insisted that they “receive the same military training as the men . . . taking up arms was a crucial step for women” (Bauer, 2006, p. 97). Salome Kambala was one of the many Namibian women who trained as a PLAN fighter. During our conversation, she shared with me that she felt treated as an equal in this regard. During our conversation, she explained that “the gendered hierarchy in the struggle was not real[ly] there. We were all trained as combatants to go and fight for the liberation of Namibia. Women also were trained as soldiers to fight for the independence of the country” (Salome Kambala, interview with the author, April 1, 2020). War undoubtedly exacts significant human and material costs. However, in many ways, the war did advance women's rights and granted them access to spaces previously inaccessible to them.

I questioned Kambala about the day-to-day reality of being a woman combatant in the war. She spoke about the kind of training she received: “. . . that's the part of training, how to hold the gun, how to fire or how to divert an enemy. Once you are in an ambush, what to do . . . when you meet the enemy from the other side who are also trained” (Salome Kambala, interview with the author, April 1, 2020). I

was also curious in terms of Kambala's reflections regarding what she describes as a greatly heightened sense of gender equality during the struggle. Kambala responded with enthusiasm:

It was just a revolutionary spirit . . . in the '70s, there was sort of a revolutionary spirit that encouraged people to participate. Because everybody joined voluntarily. Nobody was forced. I was a young lady, but my aim was just one thing: to get Namibia independent. Nothing else—so I feel empowered, when accommodated with the comrades who are male, to go and fight together. I feel, you know, very, very empowered as a woman as well. And therefore, we didn't really look into the gender disparities, we just . . . wanted to make sure that Namibia is free . . . [male comrades] will never make you feel that you are a woman, and your place is in the kitchen, not in the forefront of fighting—that spirit was not there. (Salome Kambala, interview with the author, April 1, 2020)

Kambala's words are significant, indicating she found her role as a combatant to be one of empowerment and freedom. Her tone does not betray any gendered hierarchies within SWAPO's ranks when she was a PLAN fighter. This may have been a product of the pervasive Marxist ideology that was championed by many revolutionaries at the time (though SWAPO attempted to stay somewhat neutral in Cold War politics). In her enthusiasm for this time, Kambala is also not alone. Many of the people I interviewed for this project reported a great spirit of unity during the struggle, and they cited remorse that these intense feelings of camaraderie have been lost since independence.

The Biopolitics of War: Women, Gender-based Violence, and Reproductive Capacity

Despite Kambala's comments above, her feelings of revolutionary spirit were coupled with the persistent threat of GBV. The double jeopardy faced by women combatants meant that they were the target of attacks not only from enemy forces, but at times at the hands of fellow soldiers in their own troops. As Akawa (2014) has written, many women PLAN soldiers were subjected to rape and sexual assault.²⁹ In this project, too, many women shared their accounts of GBV, such as that described to me by a woman I call "Surihe":

²⁹ Butler's (2004) concept of "livability," or what makes life worth living, and "grievability," or what makes a life worth mourning, is useful here in terms of evaluating women's roles in the struggle. To some degree, gendered power hierarchies held sway over women's degree of grievability, rendering them to be wrongly deemed by others as disposable, and left to the caprice of those higher in the echelons of military power.

SWAPO had . . . a policy that looked like really advancing women because women would be also at the front. In that sense, if you look from a narrow angle, you would say that SWAPO was practicing gender equality . . . but then, when you look at the broader spectrum of that, then you would realize that women were at the front to serve the commanders and the soldiers sexually . . . I have a very good friend that is like my sister . . . She went in exile at a young age of 16 or 17 years of age . . . She was at the front. While at the front, she was abused by a senior commander. And this is something that has stuck with her. And even when you sit and maybe just relax and have a wine or whatever, she will just freak out like “what were they thinking, I was just a small child.” . . . [The man who abused her] . . . today is a retired colonel who was in parliament . . . as if nothing happened. And she has that trauma in her, where she was abused by an elder man that was way older than her – maybe 20 years difference. Just because he has the power! (“Surihe,” interview with the author, November 1, 2019)

The tension between empowerment and a unified, revolutionary spirit is at odds with the specter of coercive sex and abuse of power by superior military officers in positions of power. This conflict is reflected in Kambala’s words. Her first quote above expresses a kind of gender-equality utopia, but in our interview, she changed her tune almost in her next breath. She commented on how her reproductive capacity ultimately did change the context in which she served the struggle:

Women started, you know, getting pregnant, and of course then you [are not] able to be on the forefront, as a pregnant lady to fight. So SWAPO as a movement, they now created some camps, where once a woman, if you are in the front, and you become pregnant, you have to retreat now to come to this camp, a camp, where it was made conducive for women to give birth, for women to start raising the children as well. So that was the only difference, because then a man cannot be pregnant, but a woman can. So that was the only decision—even myself, I was at the front. And then I became pregnant. Because we are together with the men and they, you know, I became pregnant, and I retreated to the camp to come and give birth to my daughter. I had a daughter in the camps. That was the only way you can differentiate a man and a woman, because women become pregnant. And then they [are not] able to carry the gun and continue to fight. They have to withdraw at one point . . . because they have to prepare now to give birth and carry the baby, and take care of the baby. But without that if there were no pregnancy, there was no gender sort of segregation to say, “because you’re a woman, you’re not going to fight.” We were already wanting to fight the South African regime in our country—to leave our country. So that Namibia can be independent once more. (Salome Kambala, interview with the author, April 1, 2020)

Kambala’s statement, “if there were no pregnancy, there was no gender sort of segregation,” reveals several deeper themes, especially in light of many accounts of sexual abuse in the SWAPO military camps and on the front lines. Numerous scholars have studied the occurrence and resultant ramifications of wartime GBV. Meger (2015) cites gender hegemony as a contributing factor to wartime GBV and delineates the retaliation that manifests at times when men feel they fall short of (toxic) gendered

masculine expectations (p. 429). Whether it stemmed from toxic masculinity, the stress of war, or other factors, GBV was one of the hazards of war for women freedom fighters.

Biopolitics enables a more in-depth analysis of women, their bodies, sexual assault, and reproductive capacity. An expansive term, concept, and genre inspired initially by Michel Foucault,³⁰ a broad range of definitions can be attributed to biopolitics (Mills, 2018). Here, however, I engage a simplified definition that refers to “the intersection, or reciprocal incorporation, of life and politics” (Campbell & Sitze, 2013, p. 2). Philosophers have begun to incorporate a feminist analysis of pregnancy and women’s reproductive capacity during times of war; some, such as Caverero (2002), illustrate the reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between the body and the state. Overall, biopolitics’ theoretical frame risks making reproduction and pregnancy deeply impersonal and overly philosophized, ultimately running the risk of essentializing women and their reproductive capacity (Butler, 2010; Mills, 2018). That is not the intention here, but rather to recognize the additional pressure exerted on female combatants precisely because of their reproductive potential.

Scholars and activists have discussed a feminist agenda for women’s rights in the context of war and the interplay between this reality and women’s reproductive capacity. For a woman soldier, does pregnancy affect their ability to fulfill their military duties? Debates surrounding women and reproductive capacity extend far beyond the battlefield. Some even go so far as to assert that “biological motherhood drains women physically and psychologically” and assert the importance of women’s right to plan their families, remaining child-free if they so choose (Tong, 2009, p. 3–4). The words of Kristeva (1980) cut even deeper: “Procreation: the mother’s pregnancy, that unshakeable buttress of every social code, insures continued repression” (Kristeva, 1980). Such sentiments, however, were left by the wayside under the pressures of war, where women’s options are limited and questions of sexuality, intimacy, and partnership at times clash, at times provide opportunities for safety. At turns, women exert their agency in interesting,

³⁰ Another relevant definition is offered by Watson (2012): “The Foucauldian definition of biopolitics: the emergence of life as the central concern of the modern political order.”

creative ways, while other times they suffer under the violence and unequal power structures of combat, with a wide range of possibilities in between. Many of the women I spoke to, however, discussed a dual desire to win independence for their country, but equally to keep themselves and their communities safe.

In terms of reproductive rights, feminist authors argue about “the degree [that women] were deprived of control over their pregnancies . . . [or] experienced pregnancy as a mere event, as something that simply happened to them” (Tong, 2009, p. 79). As they do globally, questions of agency concerning women and pregnancy loom large. How much agency did Namibian women combatants have in terms of bodily autonomy? While above, Kambala indeed exerted her agency, by moving to the “rear lines” in the “pregnancy camp” rather than remaining on the front lines of the battlefields and risking death. However, she references her pregnancy in a passive manner—“I became pregnant. Because we were together with the men . . . and they, you know,”—with her words leaving unanswered what exactly she means by “you know.” For some, pregnancy could have been a choice, and for others it could have been the result of rape. Similar themes emerged in an interview with Maria Nghidinwa; she cited the complicated issue of pregnancy on the battlefield, a factor that could both help and hurt women soldiers depending on their goals. She discussed how some women exerted agency by becoming pregnant, thus ensuring they would be moved to the rear lines:

Some women, they had gone maybe to the front line, but if they fell pregnant, then they [were] sent back [and became] civilians. They [went] back to the refugee camp . . . they would purposely fall pregnant so that they are not sent to the front line . . . [because] we had this camp that was specifically for pregnant girls. (Maria Nghidinwa, interview with the author, January 20, 2020)

When I further prompted Nghidinwa about this, she commented that some women did not want to be on the front lines because they “knew [they] were going to die” (Maria Nghidinwa, interview with the author, January 20, 2020). Nghidinwa’s insights facilitate a deeper understanding of the situation; some women exerted their agency precisely in their choice to become pregnant. In the case of women PLAN fighters above, perhaps some chose pregnancy as an “escape hatch” away from the front lines of battles, thereby exercising their agency to escape peril (Shikola, 1998). However, for many others, the ongoing trauma of sexual assault continues to linger, making Butler’s notions of livability all the more relevant to

a nuanced conceptualization of Namibian women during the struggle. Some women may have engaged the possibility of pregnancy to keep themselves safe, while others were prepared to die on the front lines. Nghidinwa also offers the other side of the coin by mentioning that men, too, in an effort to escape the violence of war, would sometimes fabricate an illness to escape the challenging context of war.

Kambala's statement also begs a different kind of analysis around power. The SWAPO anti-apartheid struggle sought a certain kind of power: freedom from the illegal occupation of the apartheid regime. However, within that macro-level battle, other micro-level conflicts were being waged. Whether it took the form of wielding arms or harnessing their reproductive capacity women exerted control over their situation in a variety of ways. In Kambala's case, further lines of inquiry might be focused around agency and the right to bear arms. Generally, soldiers on the front lines of battle are armed and carry the (perceived) power of possessing a gun. As soon as a soldier moves to a rear camp, they are no longer armed, and thus lose power to the degree that one equates weapons with power. These are very different kinds of power, and the power of arms is often only imagined (a gun can be turned on its owner, and wielding a gun does not prepare one to kill). Nevertheless, in deeply militarized societies and times of outright war, the power of the gun is often much more valued and respected than the softer power of reproductive ability.

Namibian women, however, during the struggle, contributed care work in this case, by working in the rear camps and making them function (cooking, cleaning, laundry, nursing pregnant women and children). Women also contributed to the cause via their reproductive capacity. The labor contributed in these rear camps was indeed an important contribution to the struggle, and an example of care work. Numerous women I spoke with detailed the difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth during war:

I gave birth to my youngest daughter in a refugee camp in Zambia. That was really one of the most harrowing experiences for me being a single mother and being alone amongst people I didn't know before, but I ended up being with them. They were Namibians, and we were there all together in the struggle. So it was quite a challenge giving birth to a baby under those kind of circumstances – but again, we were all comrades and we really supported each other. (Bience Gawanes, interview with the author, March 19, 2020)

The most basic medical supplies were difficult to obtain, as illustrated in the following quote where a woman was not provided with water to clean herself and her newborn baby following childbirth:

There was one girl, she's alive, she's married now to a family member of mine, who gave birth to a baby of one of the SWAPO soldiers in Angola. She was a detainee in the Lubango dungeon. Under this blackmailing situations, she was forced to have sex with this guy, and she became pregnant. It was a very sad day, I'm told, when she was basically delivering the baby . . . Knowing that women are giving birth to a child has its challenges. You will need a lot of water for the purpose of cleaning the baby and all those things, cleaning the woman herself. The females, they were asking at least for water. Yes because it was the time that they were going for sleep. So they normally take small cans of water just for drinking and so on, but this situation was now there where they have to take a lot of water. They ask for water, and [the guards] said, "Go, you're not getting water." It was just because the person has to be degraded. The person has to be humiliated. So it was just for that reason . . . She was accused of being a spy. She was already in detention. But as I explained, those who were in detention were also blackmailed and forced to have sex with those guys, with the guards. And in this process, they become pregnant. So you see, it's one girl who become pregnant in this process . . . And then they had to take care of that woman that night with very little water. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 21, 2020)

A further challenge experienced by women who became mothers during the war was their lack of access to the social networks that would have otherwise sustained and supported them:

MS: For you, giving birth in a camp to your daughter, how was that that for you?

SK: Yeah, that one was a little scary. Because it was my first- born. And I had her when I was 20 years old. I didn't have any experience, and then I didn't have my parents with me because they were in Namibia. And to go through the process of knowing how to take care of a baby and everything, you need your immediate family, your sister, your mother to be with you. But then you can leave it in the hands of our comrades too - they are the ones who you rely on. It is not easy, because it's in a camp and in a war situation. It can't be that you just given birth yesterday, and today we need to change our location. So it was not that much easy because it was war. It's a war situation. It is not an easy experience either. Compared to compare when I came to get my other three children in in independent Namibia, yeah, you can see the difference. But now at least here, the conditions are better. You can go to the shop and buy Vaseline. In the camps, There's nothing like that. Yeah. But we are going through it. And we used to say, "All for this struggle, all for final victory." And that is the slogan, which used to give us more morale. But everything we are doing, yes, it looks awkward. But we are doing it for final victory of our country. (Salome Kambala, interview with the author, April 1, 2020).

The quotes above illustrate the hardships endured by women who gave birth in military camps during the period of the struggle. They also delineate the roles that women tasked with the functioning of the rear camps where pregnant women and children were stationed.

In a discussion of the soft power of reproductive capacity vs the hard power of arms, it is vital to acknowledge the role of guns in upholding racist systems in southern Africa (Storey, 2008). Storey (2008) outlines that in South Africa, the issue of gun ownership has historically been interconnected with citizenship. Colonial forces in South Africa saw guns as a threat to imperial control and therefore attempted to prohibit Blacks from owning guns (Storey, 2008). Storey (2008) sketches the interconnected nature of the right to bear arms with racial politics, identity, and power in South Africa. This in turn deeply affected Namibia because such dynamics spilled across the border during the South African occupation.

Here, a gendered analysis enables a deeper understanding of the situation of war by reframing women's experiences, positionalities, and unique ways they accessed fragments of power. This is apparent, for example, in the ways that Teckla Shikola (1998), a female SWAPO combatant, resists identifying coercive sex within the ranks of SWAPO as rape (p. 143). Shikola does, however, label both SADF and SWATF attacks as rape (p. 145). Shikola speaks to the insidious psychology of the apartheid system, recounting how "our lives were organized in such a way that we had to do things against one another, brothers and sisters . . . The South Africans really knew how to divide and rule. They made sure it was the black troops who raped" (1998, p. 145). Shikola's account also speaks to the troubling and interconnected nature of sexual assault and women's role in nation building. During the struggle, dynamics of gender and power were never far from the surface. A key example of this is the power imbalance and related abuse of power at the hands of the male prison guards in Lubango, Angola during the SWAPO "spy drama."

The power imbalance between a male prison guard and a woman prisoner makes consent impossible, thus rendering any sexual intercourse a coercive act. Saddiqui (2015) classifies such misconduct as rape. A telling example that reveals such widely uneven power dynamics during the war revolves around the SWAPO spy drama, introduced and explained in the previous chapter. The spy drama incident involved the incarceration of SWAPO soldiers in appalling conditions. There is a significant amount of scholarly, activist, and primary accounts detailing abuses of power that took place in these

prisons. Akawa (2014) documents marked and recurring GBV within the ranks of SWAPO during the struggle. In cases of imprisonment, normal dynamics of consent do not apply. As stated by Ashdown and James (2010), “Rape or transactional sex may take place in the form of sexual services that women prisoners are forced to provide to male prisoners and male staff in return for access to goods and privileges” (p. 136–7). Steve Swartbooi, a former prisoner himself, accounts the abuse that many women prisoners were subjected to during the spy drama:

[As prisoners] we lacked the basics that people . . . need to survive . . . Now, what the senior SWAPO leaders used to do . . . those who had access to resources, they . . . blackmailed women to . . . have sex with them. In many ways, emotionally and otherwise, they physically forced women . . . [by] brib[ing them] to have sex with them, in exchange for these basics. So, it was not really a comradely treatment. I must say that in many instances, having sex with men in exile was not a mutually agreed upon understanding. It was not. It was in many ways situational.

People who left the motherland as women and as Namibians, to proceed and fight for the national liberation struggle, were subjected to outright blackmailing in exile, and sex was used, and this was more prominent among the national leaders of SWAPO, who had access to resources, because they traveled. They were not living in the camps. They only occasionally came to the camps, so camp life did not really affect them. And when they came on those occasions and found women, they would have . . . these practices . . . unhealthy sexual practices. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 21, 2020).

In addition to the psychological trauma faced by the women who experienced this coercive sex, their physical health was endangered as they were made vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, or other sexually transmitted diseases. As Swartbooi accounts, the situation also meant that many women did not know who the fathers of their babies were, and children often grew up fatherless:

So, that was the situation. Commanders, leaders using their positions to sleep with our young girls. And that way also, in a way, it affected their education in other ways. Many of the girls, they were also sent [to] Angola, that is also what I would witness. For example, in Angola, many of our female persons, female patriots, female military persons, female girls, they were sent, and they become pregnant, because they were sent to men where they are, and in no time they would become pregnant, and they were sent again go back to the rear bases, [to] deliver the babies.

And after a while, again when the babies are grown enough, they would again be sent back under the pretext that they are going to fight. But again, pregnant, and so on. That’s why you also see that many of the children that were born in exile are fatherless, because children grow up without their fathers, and children also grow up without identifiable fathers. For example, in exile, we had also these phony names. I would not go as Steve. Maybe I would go by Cellphone, or Glass of Water, or . . . maybe the name of a gun, or whatever. So, and then if you meet me, you would only know Mr. Glass of Water. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 21, 2020)

International humanitarian law, especially that dictated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, prohibits such mistreatment (Ashdown & James, 2010). In reality, such covenants are aspirational and are usually not promulgated unless codified into domestic law (Ashdown & James, 2010). Yet, a global human rights framework does grant perspective on this particularly abhorrent and abusive chapter of the struggle, that has enduring influence and effect on Namibians and Namibian society.

At the heart of a discussion of women, war, and reproduction is consent and agency. Kambala and Nghidinwa above point to instances where women exerted their agency and charted their path toward safety by potentially choosing to become pregnant. Yet, Akawa (2014) and others have documented many cases of coercive sex and sexual abuse in the SWAPO camps. Similarly, observing the ways that women captives navigated their imprisonment in the Lubango dungeons acknowledges their agency in surviving the situation while also seeking to cast them as agents rather than victims.

Defining Care: The Realm of Nurses, Parents, Counselors, and More

I use the concept of “care work” as an umbrella term to encapsulate both formal and informal labor associated with “care.” As Ibnouf (2020) asserts, “care arrangements during wartime are complex and include a range of tasks that are essential for sustaining lives and the well-being of the family” (p. 1). Further underscoring the gendered nature of care work, Ibnouf continues, “Caregiving and household chores are gendered activities . . . women are the most burdened with care work . . . In areas affected by war, there is an increase in the demand for care due to the pressures that war puts on daily life” (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 9). Putting care work in the context of the struggle, I engage the term here as the domestic labor offered to provide medical care in military camps, childcare and teaching, morale and informal counseling, and mentoring roles (Duffy, 2011; Duffy, 2015; Romero, Preston, & Giles, 2014; Van Hook, 2019). To reiterate various examples of care roles as cited above in the definition, care work extended from nurses to parents or counselors and many other professions.

Several factors shaped the trend towards women and care work in the struggle. The care roles inhabited by women were given strong societal emphasis due to the culture and context of traditional

norms that often tied women to the private sphere of the home and, conversely, afforded men greater access to and power in the public sphere. This dimension was also reinforced by the “Bantu” apartheid educational system, that limited Namibians’ access to education. The apartheid regime wielded education as a tool of social control and oppression (Fumanti, 2006, p. 88; Tilton, 1992). Black Namibians were usually enrolled in the Bantu education system. This menial instruction provided a basic education essentially aimed at shaping Black Namibians into productive farm laborers but tried to oppress them by limiting their access to education, thereby working to hinder the development of critical thinking skills (Fumanti, 2006, p. 88; Giliomee, 2009). It also overtly held young people back from having much choice in terms of their career path (Diescho, 1992). Young women were told that their only choices were to become a nurse or a teacher (Unterhalter, 1990). So this aspect of Bantu education and the oppressive nature of education under apartheid deeply restricted the agency of young women and further entrenched them into care-related roles in the family and broader community.

Education: Teachers on the Front Lines

Teachers were a visible force during the struggle. In the SWAPO camps, life had to go on, and the children and youth living in the camps had to be educated. The teachers also needed a curriculum. Lydia Shaketange, now a professor at the University of Namibia, was one of the educators who met this need by writing content for the curriculum. Shaketange cited it as one of the things she was most proud of in terms of her contributions to the struggle. Shaketange authored several educational materials and curricula that were used by SWAPO in the camps. Her words reflect the pride she felt in carrying out this role: “I feel happy and fulfilled that I was part of it. . . I was actually lucky that I was one of the people that have written materials that were written (used) in SWAPO camps” (Lydia Shaketange, interview with the author, November 4, 2019). Shaketange’s contributions during the struggle, as a teacher and an author of curricula, and today, as an educator, are evidence of her contribution to the struggle and of her dedication to Namibia post-independence.

The SWAPO Women's Council³¹ (SWC) also took a leading role in providing education to freedom fighters in exile. As shown in the flyers below, there was a considerable effort made to ensure that Namibians were literate and educated:



Figure 1. SWAPO Women's Council material promoting literacy. SWAPO 1981. Literacy for Transformation [Booklet]. The Namibian National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia. Accessed October 30, 2019.

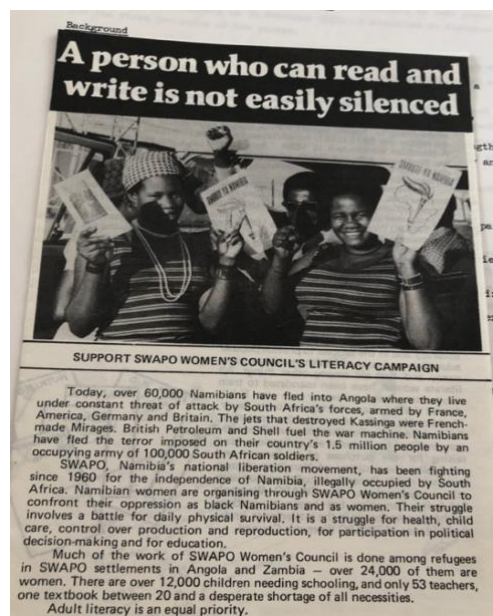


Figure 2. SWAPO Women's Council material promoting literacy. SWAPO 1981. A person who can read and write is not easily silenced [Booklet]. The Namibian National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia. Accessed October 30, 2019.

The work of an educator in a SWAPO military camp was much more than teaching just the basics. Part and parcel of the curricula were ideological and political training. This was demonstrated, for example, in the educational materials shown above that outline the oppressive nature of the Bantu education system and raise awareness about the importance of literacy and critical thinking skills. As the document states, “the system of ‘Bantu education’ imposed by South Africa in Namibia is designed to perpetuate white

³¹ The SWAPO Women's Council (SWC), the women's branch of SWAPO, was founded in 1969 and appointed Libertina Amathila (introduced in Chapter Two) as the first SWC Secretary (Wallace, 2011, p. 282).

supremacy and male domination.” Additional archival material points to a significant push for literacy in SWAPO camps. Education was a top priority, as indicated in archival materials; one report includes an interview with Susan Nghidinwa, who states that “our women want education because it is clear to everybody that education is important” (Nghidinwa, n.d.).

These documents point to the revolutionary nature of education during the struggle. Anti-apartheid activists have long viewed education as a liberatory force. Teachers in northern Namibia often surreptitiously included anti-apartheid political material in their lessons and recruited students to join the struggle in exile. Shaketange (2008) details in her memoir that it was one of her teachers who encouraged her and her classmates to fight against the apartheid government; he was in fact the motivating force she cites as she made her decision to go into exile. The front line nature of education in the struggle is also emphasized in scholarship such as that by Von Kotze, Ismail, and Cooper (2016), who recognize the long-standing traditions of radical education and the reliance of anti-apartheid organizers on revolutionary literature from Latin America, Cuba, and the U.S. civil rights movement (p. 284–6). Nadoo (2015) asserts that one main focus of the South African Black Consciousness Movement was to dismantle “‘false consciousness’ . . . through a sustained critical educational project in which each black person had to confront and transform her/his own consciousness” (p. 112). All of these factors come together to emphasize the revolutionary nature of teachers, education, and pedagogy during the struggle.

The SWC also advocated for women’s reproductive rights and access to birth control. While the SWC worked on educating women about their sexual health and reproductive rights, there were also historical barriers to overcome. The South African government had forcibly and non-consensually subjected Black Namibian women to the hormonal birth control Depo-Provera, that resulted in some of them becoming unable to conceive later in life (Hartmann, 2016; Rigillo, 2007). Hartmann (2016) writes about the coercive implementation of Depo-Provera in South Africa, where Black and Coloured women were targeted as a means to control the population, and Depo-Provera was often provided to women without any medical information or follow-up (Hartmann, 2016, p. 160). Girls as young as thirteen were injected without parental consent (Lindsay, 1991). Some women factory workers were forced to use

Depo-Provera, and others were involuntarily injected following childbirth with higher than recommended doses (Hartmann, 2016, p. 160; Lindsay, 1991). Even more disturbing, some women were forcibly sterilized, and allegedly the South African government was developing an “anti-fertility vaccine” to more drastically limit the Black population (Baldwin-Ragaven & de Gruchy, 1999). Similar policies were also implemented in Namibia given its status as a protectorate of South Africa. Against this backdrop, Namibian women had a great deal of fear and resistance to any kind of birth control. However, this hesitancy co-existed with the necessity of effective family planning and sexual, health, and reproductive rights. Thus, the SWC had to work hard to overcome hesitancy and residual fears given the historical mistreatment that Namibian women had been subjected to in terms of involuntary Depo-Provera injections and forced sterilizations.

Unfortunately, these community health challenges for Namibian women are far from over. A 2014 court case failed to recognize forced sterilizations as a human rights abuse (Durojaye, 2018, p. 721; Patel, 2017). Bakare and Gentz (2020) published a study about the severe negative psychological and socio-cultural effects of women affected by forced sterilization. Because the policy seemed to be specifically targeting women who were HIV positive, the policy doubly stigmatized women already grappling with the health and social ramifications of HIV (Bakare & Gentz, 2020; Baumgarten, 2009).

Social Workers: A Different Kind of Frontline Worker

Lindi Hartung is an activist, community leader, and social worker. Born in 1956, Hartung became part of the Black Consciousness movement while studying at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 19, 2020). She was lauded by many of the people I interviewed, including Smuts (introduced above), who had this to say about Hartung: “She was pretty amazing during those years. She was fearless and working in the community . . . She and I set up a trust together; I really respected that work that she did during those years” (David Smuts, interview with the author, June 22, 2020). Smuts’s comments reinforce the collaboration that was necessary to overcome the apartheid system.

As a social worker, Hartung was engaged in grassroots activism and community development during the struggle. Some of the key campaigns she was involved with were the anti-conscription campaign aimed at dissuading young men from joining the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) and raising awareness of the injustice of the forced sterilization and involuntary insertion of Depo-Provera, the harmful and coercive birth control discussed above (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 19, 2020). It should also be acknowledged that for Hartung as a woman from the Coloured ethnic group during apartheid Namibia, the fact that she was able to become a social worker is extraordinary. Hartung had a supportive father who recognized her strength and identified social work as a good match. Hartung explains the lack of career guidance that she and other Black or Coloured women had during those days: “We didn’t have role models, [and I thought] what is social work?” Inspired by her father’s encouragement, Hartung pursued social work. It was not an easy path; Hartung was told by a government official, “No, this is not an area for you people!” (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 23, 2020). Ultimately, Hartung won an academic competition and received a scholarship. She worked to support herself through university because the South African apartheid government would not provide her with any financial aid.

Hartung began her career working for the Association for the Handicapped. Her next position was as a social worker in Katutura.³² Of her time spent working as a social worker there, Hartung said that it “was really very difficult because I lived also in Katutura . . . What was difficult was there were no resources that you can fall back on to assist the people. There were no resources . . . so you have to improvise everything” (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 23, 2020). Hartung went on to

³² Katutura is located just outside of Windhoek and is a former township that was designated for Black Namibians during apartheid times (Schwitters, 2015). Pendleton (1996) has detailed the evolving state of Katutura from pre- to post-independence. Katutura means “the place where we do not belong” (Schott, 2016). Katutura was founded after the forced relocation of Black Namibians from a part of Windhoek closer to the city center now known as the “Old Location” (Dobell, 2000; Wallace, 2011).

be a leader in social work, successfully championing improvements that educated youth and addressed homelessness, alcoholism, and unemployment.

Several studies have documented the role of social work during the anti-apartheid struggle. In South Africa, Abdullah (2015) writes about the challenges the post-apartheid milieu has created for social workers. Abdullah goes on to cite the lingering trauma of apartheid and its effect on the role of social workers as they work with local communities, thereby also advancing national healing. While not directly addressing the Namibian context, several other studies also delineate the role of activism within social work. Van Breda and Sekudu (2019) affirm social work as a field of “transformation and liberation” based in the guiding principles of “social justice and human dignity” (p. 15). Similarly, Yu and Mandell (2015) draw attention to social workers in a variety of global contexts (Canada, Australia, the Philippines, and others) and describe social workers’ everyday feats of heroism and their subversive actions that sometimes skirt the edge of legality in support of their clients and values of social justice. South African social workers Sacco and Schmid (2015) detail how they actively opposed apartheid in South Africa. Emblematic of social work’s social-justice orientation, Sacco and Schmid write that “we share this account to encourage social workers to (re-) connect with essential social work values and take courage in collectively acting against injustice, both locally and globally” (p. 41). The authors further describe the organizing done by social workers during apartheid times in South Africa, including mobilizing against violence against children and collaborating with detainee support and counseling organizations (Sacco & Schmid, 2015).

Hartung’s anti-apartheid activism was undergirded by her training as a social worker and the fact that social work, both as an academic discipline and as a career field, has a strong activist orientation (Abdullah, 2015; Van Breda & Sekudu, 2019; Yu & Mandell, 2015). Sacco and Schmid (2015) assert that “social workers have the capacity to be forces of change and transformation” through the values of “social justice, human rights, compassion, and activist service” (Sacco & Schmid, 2015, p. 58). It is this mindset and disciplinary training that informed Hartung’s activism.

Thus, university studies focused on social work would have been the perfect toolset to approach activism and community development, Hartung's ultimate goal. Hartung's training and professional stance as a social worker was vital to her community engagement and activism during the struggle. Plus, she had a ripple effect via her spheres of influence. Hast (2014) furthers the concept of spheres of influence in the international relations realm, but here I argue that spheres of influences in the social work context extend even further on an interpersonal level. Spheres of influence are one of the societal mechanisms that are hard to gauge or measure, but that are nonetheless significant.

Long before Hartung, who identifies as a Coloured woman, began her university training to become a social worker, she was becoming radicalized. Within her own family, the divisive nature was made deeply personal, because her grandfather had children with a Black domestic worker on the farm that he owned and then proceeded to essentially disown his mixed-race family and marry a white woman:

[It was] a situation where [my grandfather] had five children with the [Black] domestic worker, and never married her. And then [went] and [married] a white woman—and then told the children not to call him father. They must call him now boss because he is a white man. (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 19, 2020)

She described what it was like to witness families being divided arbitrarily by the apartheid regime:

When they came to register us, they actually asked all those people in that community to come and show their children. And they saw most of the children had light skin. So they then informed the people that they need more whites. So they would like to register children—some of them, white.

MS: So they changed the classification from Coloured to white?

LH: There was no registration yet. So this was the first registration. So they had the children lineup and . . . [maybe even in] one family they register you white, your brother Coloured. And my father refused, he said . . . We will not let our children be [classified], because we had family on both sides. Because that would have meant that we had to split up, because at that time, social interaction between white and Blacks and non-whites was not allowed. So, it means we would not have been allowed to be with our families from the other side. So my father said “no, my children will remain Coloured just the same.” So they put us all as Coloured. But some people of my friends, they were registered as a white—and they didn't even know, because it was just written. And they never saw [the documentation] . . . the parents kept the documents. Maybe the parents couldn't even read. I don't know what happened. But—I remember one of my friend's father was a German, and their mother was a Coloured . . . And when she wanted to get married to a Coloured man, they told her, “you can't get married to a Coloured man” that time because she was—there was still the legislation of “immorality act”—because you were white. You were a white person! So she was shocked, she never knew that she was registered as a white person. (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 19, 2020)

Hartung's account above speaks to the arbitrary nature of the apartheid system and the ways that apartheid policies could divide families. It also illustrates the psychological abuse that was central to the tactics deployed by the apartheid regime. In Hartung's case, her father rebuffed the demand that she and her siblings be split up because they had slightly different skin colors, but other families may not have been so successful.

Domestic, Political, and Medical Work

Women in the struggle worked in domestic and care roles, supporting the movement, and tending to the children in the guerilla camps (Akawa, 2014, p. 60–61). It was the women who cooked, did the laundry, cleaned, and provided the childcare that made the internal workings of SWAPO's military camps function. There was also a great effort to become independent and to increase food security by planting gardens and growing their own food in the camps. Women often led this work as well, as shown in the photo to the right.



Figure 3: SWAPO Women's Council; Camp A: Kwanza Sol, Women Preparing Food. Box number 22, Folder number 05/10. NRP, A.555. Namibian National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia. Accessed October 30, 2019.

Equally important, older comrades mentored younger women activists: "As women, we also encouraged women to join the struggle. We were sort

of like role models for the younger people" (Mabella Cupido, interview with the author, December 9, 2019). In the absence of their parents, Cupido and others like her filled the vital role of parent, teacher, role model, coach, and supporter.

Linda Baumann is an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*)³³ activist who works at the Women's Solidarity Network, a feminist organization in Windhoek. Baumann shared with me the powerful ways that her predecessors acted as role models for her and shaped her future activism and leadership:

[Volunteering with the Namibian Red Cross] . . . is where I got to meet our current liberation veterans, like Rosa [Namises], and the late Nora Schimming-Chase, [and] Otilie Abrahams. Those are the ladies that really shaped who I am; that is how . . . [we] started up the Namibian Girl-Child Association. They wanted to build a new cadre of feminists and young leaders. That, at the age of 14 or 15, was the birth of my feminism. The radical women that were there [taught] us not to be fearful . . . because they went through a lot and [demonstrated that] we need to keep fighting. (Linda Baumann, interview with the author, February 4, 2020)

Baumann's reflections indicate that a key component of women's work during the struggle was educating the future generation of leaders. The ripple effect of role-modeling was a theme of Otilie Abrahams's life. Abrahams was a leader in the education sector. Both prominent anti-apartheid activists, Abrahams and her husband, Kenneth Abrahams, a medical doctor, were forced to flee Namibia during the struggle. The couple spent time in exile in Sweden; when Otilie Abrahams returned to Namibia, she founded the Jacob Morengo school in Katutura. She also spearheaded efforts aimed at vocation-technical training, fostering women and girls' rights, and advancing democracy and civil rights by launching an organization called the Namibia Women's Association (Samson Ndeikwila, interview with author, May 9, 2020).

Her daughter, Yvette Abrahams, also mentioned the lasting impact Abraham's example had on her:

In terms of role-modeling, [there was] this notion of, well if Otilie can do it, then we can do it . . . these days it's way more commonplace to have a degree . . . and have your own career. But imagine in the '50s . . . in Southern Africa, oh my god! Because women at that point were identified through their husbands. But my mom was never the Doctor's wife. They were comrades in the political struggle. (Yvette Abrahams, interview with the author, February 17, 2020)

³³ I use the term LGBT (as opposed to the broader acronym of LGBTQIA+, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, intersex, asexual) here because Baumann used this term during our interview. This is also aligned with Currier (2012) who emphasizes the importance of "us[ing] the language that activists prefer" (p. 172).

Both Baumann and Abrahams speak of the women leaders who provided them with examples of strong women's leadership. It follows that not only did they adopt and inherit these skills but also that they in turn pass along their leadership acumen to subsequent generations.

Other care labor was specific to the liberation struggle, including the role of military "commissar." Commissars boosted morale, distributed pro-SWAPO propaganda, and generally furthered the cause by uplifting the spirits of SWAPO comrades. Maria Ndighwina described her role as commissar as primarily one of boosting the morale of the troops and keeping soldiers positive and motivated:

I was trained in the political department, as a political commissar . . . to teach party politics . . . Political commissars . . . play [the] role of . . . keep[ing up] the morale of the soldiers . . . You cannot tell people that, "oh, we are really suffering. We are [being] crushed [by] the South African soldiers, and we were a lot of our people were killed." . . . our job [was] to make sure that everyone believed in this struggle, because it was tough . . . You need to be motivated, almost like motivational speakers but in a military set-up . . . keeping [fellow soldiers] informed about what is happening on the battlefield . . . There were a lot of women and women played a role. (Maria Ndighwina, interview with the author, January 20, 2020)

The term "commissar" has its roots in the Soviet lexicon. As Ndighwina indicates, the position was in the "political department" and was aimed at "indoctrinating troops" (Davies, 2001). Whether live in the flesh, or as featured in military or revolutionary group propaganda such as in war posters or flyers, feminine-gendered imagery was used to further strategic war interests. As Loken (2021) argues, there are global trends in terms of featuring iconography of women freedom fighters holding their children at their side and their guns strapped to their back. Many SWAPO freedom fighters would profess their belief in gender equality, as was expected within the Marxist framework they were using. Yet there is no denying that in Ndighwina's labor as a political commissar her gendered femininity and affect were being used in the interests of SWAPO: "Everyone believed in this struggle, because it was tough . . . You need to be motivated," says Ndighwina. This idea aligns nicely with Loken's (2021) statement that "militant organizations and other actors use visual messaging to gain supporters, legitimize violent action, and otherwise advance their political objectives" (p. 40). In a heteronormative, patriarchal context, it is unlikely that a male-presenting cadre could have motivated PLAN soldiers in the same way that Ndighwina and other women cadets did.

Healthcare was a foundational underpinning of care work during the struggle. Women doctors, nurses, and social workers shored up Namibia's liberation efforts by providing medical care and support for comrades.

There are many accounts of women nurses who supported their comrades by attending to wounded soldiers and sometimes used their positions as nurses to good effect by stealing medicine and other materials to support the struggle (Akawa, 2014, p. 43;



Figure 4: SWAPO Women's Council; Camp A: Kwanza Sol, Nurse. Box number 22, Folder number 05/10. NRP, A.555. Namibian National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia. Accessed October 30, 2019.

Nambadi, 2016, p. 103; Temu & Tembe, 2014, p. 170). While there were not many Black women who were trained as medical personnel during this time, Smuts specifically mentioned Dr. Teapolina Tuomuna's struggle efforts:

There were one or two doctors, like Dr. Teapolina Tuomuna . . . a doctor in the north . . . But the nurses in the hospital, they used to give us information and teachers in some of the outlying areas would give information; and [they] would do a lot in their communities. (David Smuts, interview with the author, May 24, 2020)

In our interview, Smuts shared these stories of Dr. Amathila, Dr. Tuomuna, and others who provided him with information to help win human rights cases against the South African government.

Given the restrictions on access to education, it was a significant accomplishment for Black Namibians to gain formal training. In an interview with Smuts, he emphasized how challenging it was for Black women to get an education during the apartheid era:

Women of color, especially, had very confined opportunities, which were presented to them when they left school. In fact, they were often encouraged not to complete school and to go and work. And there was more focus often, on boy children, firstly. And secondly, when they did leave school they had a very narrow range of opportunities which were there for them. They expected they could become a nurse or a teacher, that's about it. (David Smuts, interview with the author, June 22, 2020)

Thus, given that a career in nursing was one of few career paths that young, Black Namibians were allowed to pursue, there were many qualified nurses who supported the struggle in this way. Naturally, the work of nurses and doctors is challenging even during times of peace. During times of war, the demand for this work and its intensity are greatly accelerated.

Above, I have asserted the importance of Namibian women's struggle contributions in terms of care and combat roles. At this point in the chapter, I turn to two specific women who further corroborate my argument that women played a vital part of the struggle in the interconnected realms of care and combat.

Pioneer in Politics and Medicine: Dr. Libertina Amathila. Dr. Libertina Amathila was the first Black woman to become a doctor in Namibia. By all accounts, Libertina Amathila is a truly extraordinary leader, doctor, politician and person. Steve Swartbooi, a veteran of the struggle, affirmed Amathila's contributions:

[Dr. Amathila] did an excellent job, [providing] medical services to all . . . even the PLAN fighters that were injured at the front, and sent to the bases under her care, to numerous children and women who fell sick under her care . . . She was . . . very sharp! (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 21, 2020)

As Swartbooi attests to, medical professionals such as Amathila played an essential role during the struggle. Health is paramount, and the doctors, nurses, and first-aid personnel who were present throughout the conflict oiled the wheels of SWAPO's machinery. In Libertina Amathila's autobiography, she details the day to day life for herself as a medical doctor and her team of medical personnel. Days

were spent tending to injured PLAN fighters and attending to emergencies, such as at one point a measles outbreak, against which PLAN fighters in the camp had no immunity. Amathila also introduced family planning in the camps, working to curb the population so that the children could remain healthy, especially in such a volatile war situation. Many of the medical personal also received military training.

Amathila was sent to Poland to study medicine during the struggle, and then she went on to join the leadership of the SWC. In the mid-1970s, Amathila was appointed as SWAPO's representative to the World Health Organization (WHO). In 1974, she attended the WHO African Regional Meeting, where she delivered a speech aimed at raising awareness about the injustice of apartheid, the lack of healthcare, and the rampant poverty endemic in Namibia at that time (Amathila, 2012). Amathila took on increasing levels of leadership within the WHO, acting as the Chairperson of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa from 1999–2000 and as President of the 53rd World Health Assembly in Geneva in 2000 (Amathila, 2012). Amathila became a prominent politician in the SWAPO administration, often championing health legislation to promote women's rights to health and human services. From 1996 until 2005, she served as the Namibian Minister for Health and Social Services. Throughout her career, she has advocated for the rights of the marginalized San communities in Namibia (Amathila, 2012). Retired now, Amathila is a well-respected politician in Namibian society. Her career and vocation exemplify the competency of the work that she and other women carried out during the struggle. Finally, Amathila's work also transcends the categories used here, blurring the boundaries of political and military leadership with the care work inherent to a career in medicine.

The Mother of the Struggle: Putuse Appolus. Appolus, introduced above, was an international spokesperson for Namibia and SWAPO, shining the light on the situation in Namibia during South Africa's illegal occupation; she also worked as a registered nurse. At one point, her family was posted to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Appolus's daughter, Norah Appolus, described her mother's intense work ethic and commitment to nursing:

We ended up in the DRC—in Congo. Unfortunately, we arrived a few months before the civil war broke out and . . . we were caught up in it . . . my mother being a nurse was spending all her

days at the hospital . . . the only people that had remained behind were the monks and, the priest, and then of course my poor mother. (Norah Appolus, interview with the author, May 22, 2020)

Appolus's words highlight the professionalism that her mother dedicated to her work as a nurse. Even in a foreign country, in the midst of civil war, she remained committed to the service to others.

It bears emphasizing that becoming a nurse and achieving this level of educational training is impressive given the challenges Black Namibians faced due to the Bantu education system. Rather than teaching critical thinking skills, the Bantu education system was meant to oppress and to educate Black Namibians only insofar as they could become productive farmworkers and subservient members of society. Of course, many transcended this oppressive system, but it was challenging, daunting machinery that hindered many from fulfilling their potential. Even though nursing was one possible career path for women within the Bantu education system, there were still many barriers that stood in their way. A further complicating factor was that, in many families, due to patriarchal norms and economic hardship, boys were often sent to school before girls were given the opportunity.

Conclusion

During Namibia's struggle for independence, women provided vital work at many levels of the SWAPO organization and in many different ways. In the north, they fed and sheltered SWAPO comrades; in Windhoek, they organized and carried out intricate networks of support to resist the violence and oppression of apartheid rule. While in exile, women sustained the movement by taking up arms, adopting various leadership roles, and implementing vital "care work," such as providing childcare. In highlighting these women and their roles in combat and care work, I do not claim to exhaust Namibian women's contributions to the struggle. Rather, this chapter presents a continuum of interconnected roles of combat and care that were essential for the maintenance, survival, and effectiveness of the liberation movement. Having delineated the wide variety of roles that women played in the struggle, I now transition to an in-depth discussion of women's leadership roles during the struggle, followed by a chapter discussing the enduring ruptures to family composition and how this has continued to affect Namibian society.

Chapter 3: Women, Leadership, and SWAPO

Introduction

In the following chapter, I contrast SWAPO's professed ideals of gender equality with the lived realities of women within its ranks during the struggle. To this end, I contend with two primary questions: What was it like to be a woman in SWAPO leadership? What were some of the complexities that women in SWAPO had to navigate? In light of these aims, I write against the imaginary of SWAPO's proclaimed commitment to women's rights. For some SWAPO women during the struggle, an inherent layer of complication they were forced to navigate was due to the complexity of the global versus the local, and relatedly, the tensions between those who served the struggle in exile and those who remained in Namibia. As I will also outline, this introduced related challenges between the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) and a feminist organization called the Namibian Women's Voice (NWV).

Viewing Namibian women through an intersectional lens helps to preclude generalities. However, there are some overarching trends and patterns that emerge when viewing Namibian women during the apartheid and colonial periods, the struggle, and then post-independence. Hishongwa (1983) has outlined some of the realities for women during colonialism. Hishongwa describes the abysmal and abusive circumstances of domestic workers in the urban areas (1983, p. 36). Similarly, she describes the limited and sub-par nature of education available to Namibians during this period (Hishongwa, 1983, p. 38). Founding documents created by the Namibian Women's Voice describe Black women under apartheid as carrying "the double burden of discrimination." The document continues to state that 80% of women in Namibia at that time were illiterate, and that those in the formal economy, for example domestic workers, were severely exploited because there was no minimum wage or worker's rights established (Tibinyane, 1986).

In 1981, SWAPO's Department of Information and Publicity launched *To Be Born a Nation: The Liberation Struggle for Namibia*. The book was aimed at raising awareness and educating the broader public about the plight of Namibia. While also presenting a quite comprehensive overview of Namibian

history, it is also clearly aimed at lobbying a global audience for financial and material support. In the book, SWAPO makes bold claims about gender equality:

Within PLAN, cadres of both sexes receive equal training, and there is no restriction on women cadres holding responsible positions of authority. There are, in fact, several women commanders. One of the purposes of political education is to teach the cadres not to regard women as confined to preparing food or child-bearing and rearing. Thus, although there is some division of labour within PLAN...it is not along sexual lines and all share in actual combat. (SWAPO, 1981, p. 262)

SWAPO's words profess an unrealistic vision of gender utopia. While it is positive that they have set a solid benchmark for the progressive realization of gender equality, as I will show in this chapter, their outward statements did not always reflect their internal operations. The book goes on to quote Martha Ford, who was then Secretary of the SWC inside Namibia:

SWAPO's policy concerning women is that there is no difference as to the role they either could or should play in the struggle...both should be able to perform the same tasks...women should not have less privilege than men as a whole. (SWAPO, 1981, p. 285)

Despite SWAPO's purported commitment to gender equality, and to the full inclusion of women throughout its ranks, the reality often looked quite different. In what follows, I will analyze vignettes from the life history narratives of two women politicians who worked with SWAPO and outline some of the discrepancies between SWAPO's professed gender priorities, including the ways that these dynamics played out in reality. I will also connect global influences wielded by the growing feminist movement and the struggle to reconcile international feminisms with local priorities.

The Veneer of Feminism Versus The Lived Reality of Feminists

In this chapter, I analyze ways that patriarchal norms operate through and within SWAPO, despite the organization's claims to the contrary. As the highest-ranking woman in all of Namibian political history, Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was also one of the most prominent and successful woman leaders during the struggle who held enduring power within SWAPO and the Namibian government. Especially during the latter years of the struggle, in the 1980s, there was heavy political maneuvering taking place in the space between the battlefields and the halls of parliament. This political advocacy was done on behalf of SWAPO and allied anti-apartheid governments and organizations to gain international support and advance Namibia's march towards independence. In the

midst of these efforts was Nandi-Ndaitwah. Given her extensive track record of leadership within the party, she can speak broadly regarding the range of military and combat roles played by Namibian women throughout the struggle:

We had women who were platoon commanders. We had women who were in the military council. We had women who were working as medical officers, who were in combat with all other combatants. And even now, when the armed liberation struggle was intensified, and operations were carried inside the country, it was mostly women who were providing the fighters with food, hiding them, [and giving] them information. (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with author, May 11, 2020)

Nandi-Ndaitwah's comments describe women's participation and leadership within all levels of SWAPO. She believed that women were a vital component of SWAPO's mechanisms and were active in multiple roles on the front lines and behind the scenes.

Deputy Prime Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah's political career unfolded over many years. However, her natural aptitude for leadership was on display even early on in her life. She was involved with SWAPO from a young age. She joined SWAPO in 1966 while a student at Odibo Mission School in northern Namibia (Hopwood, 2007, p. 221). From 1966 until 1974, Nandi-Ndaitwah was the Chairperson of the SWAPO Youth League until they were forced to go into exile in 1974 (Hopwood, 2007, p. 221), at which time she continued to serve as the head of her group. Nandi-Ndaitwah said that this was a natural position of leadership for her:

We were five in our group, and I was the leader of the group, but [my leadership position in our group] came naturally because, the time I left Namibia, I was the Chairperson of the SWAPO Youth League in Ovamboland. So now when I was going with this group, they respected their chair. So then, I ended up leading the group . . . The rest were men. We were five [in all]. I was the only woman in that group. But I had to, I am a leader. I had that position. It was an elected position back home as we were leaving. (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with author, May 11, 2020)

It is noteworthy that Nandi-Ndaitwah took the helm of leadership despite being the only woman in the group. Nevertheless, as she said, she had earned the position of Chair, and her peers respected that designation.

Over time, her role within SWAPO grew, and, ultimately, she became SWAPO's Deputy Prime Minister and played an important role in diplomacy:

When I was in Dar es Salaam, there were many times when I had to go and give some talks . . . just to explain the situation in Namibia. What is that when you talk about apartheid system? Why did you leave your country? Why SWAPO was formed? What is happening now in Namibia? And in so doing, you were able to mobilize support for SWAPO from the government as well as from the citizens . . . And then in other countries like Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique was part of it, Seychelles was part of it . . . You have to explain your situation in those countries for the support . . . It's just like an ambassador, basically. It's a diplomatic work. I was also a member of the Central Committee for SWAPO. I have also contributed internationally in advocating SWAPO's case in the international body. Like when the Copenhagen [UN International Conference] was called, . . . I was invited, . . . [and prepared] a paper, which I did through UNESCO. I participated in different negotiations, especially the implementation of Resolution 435. I remember when I was part of the team that went to Geneva for the pre-implementation talks and other negotiations for Namibia's independence in which I had participated. (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with author, May 11, 2020)

Resolution 435, which ultimately resulted in Namibian independence, had a somewhat arduous negotiation, adoption, and implementation period. The process of approving the agreement was a sustained effort over a number of years between 1978 and independence in 1990. In 1978, galvanized by global pressure led by an anti-apartheid coalition, including the U.S., Canada, and several European nations, South Africa accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 435 (Wallace, 2011, p. 290). The resolution allowed South Africa to remain in governing control of Namibia, but only under the supervision of the UN. Unfortunately, it became clear that South Africa was not going to respect the directives of the resolution; thus, it took over a decade to put Resolution 435 into effect in an applied sense.

During these periods of uncertainty and negotiations in the 1980s, Deputy Prime Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah participated in the 1981 Pre-Implementation Conference in Geneva, Switzerland (Karns, 1987; Zartman, 1997). The conference was aimed at negotiating the independence of Namibia. At the table were SWAPO, the DTA, and the group known as the "Western 5," closely affiliated with the UN (Karns, 1987). At that time, Nandi-Ndaitwah was the SWAPO Chief Representative in East Africa, and a member of SWAPO's Central Committee (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with the author, April 15, 2021). While in Geneva, she was both part of SWAPO's delegation and contributed to SWAPO's contributions to the negotiations:

The point which I would make . . . when we sit in our internal consultation as a SWAPO delegation . . . As we are now going back to Namibia, having experienced the long years of the

struggle and knowing the historical reality of the gender concept, we should not forget the function of women in this whole process, as well as in an independent Namibia. (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with the author, April 15, 2021)

A number of conclusions can be drawn from Nandi-Ndaitwah's statement above. One, Nandi-Ndaitwah played a substantial role in SWAPO's negotiations to remove the South African government from power. As evidenced in her account, the efforts to build and sustain a transnational liberation movement required extensive international diplomacy. Two, her involvement indicates that SWAPO was, in some ways, pioneering norms of gender equality. To counter the global trend of many women being blocked or sidelined from international treaty negotiations, the UN Security Council responded in 2000 with Resolution 1325. Resolution 1325 reaffirms the importance of women in global negotiations pertinent to peace and security (UNSC, 2000). The fact that SWAPO included Nandi-Ndaitwah in global diplomacy and policy-making as early as 1978 suggests that, in some ways, SWAPO was working to be more gender inclusive and was ahead of other nations in this regard. Three, Nandi-Ndaitwah's participation in negotiations for Resolution 435 and in extensive international diplomacy to build support for the struggle clearly provided her with extensive training, skills, and techniques that set her up for leadership after the struggle.

As the South African government continued to refuse to comply with Resolution 435, and SWAPO and its allies rallied against the illegal occupation, Nandi-Ndaitwah's words indicate that she was resolved to keep gender equality front and center of planning and policy-making for the future of Namibia. Despite the SWAPO contingent's efforts, South Africa's increasing unwillingness to cooperate with the UN meant that the 1980s began a challenging period of dashed hopes and increased violence (Wallace, 2011, p. 296). Following the Pre-Implementation Conference of 1981, Wallace states that "talks on implementation of Resolution 435 effectively came to an end for the better part of a decade" (Wallace, 2011, p. 296). Finally, in 1988, there was a recommitment to Resolution 435, and a firm timeline was set for the retreat of South African troops. The UN Transition Assistance Group entered Namibia to assist with the transition period and help stage a free and fair election (Wallace, 2011, p. 305). While Nandi-Ndaitwah's presence at high-level political events does indicate her access to a certain level of power, it is

also unreasonable to assume that because she had access to certain spaces, that her influence was on par with her male colleagues.

Nonetheless, there are strong indications that Nandi-Ndaitwah and other Namibian women's presence made a difference. Women's rights in the constitution are protected in a number of ways (Szasz, 1994). Article 23 protects Namibian women specifically, who are recognized as having "traditionally suffered special discrimination." The Namibian constitution is one of the very first to be written in gender-neutral language (Diescho, 1994). These are indicators that the contributions of Deputy Prime Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah and her female peers are visible in Namibia's progressive constitution. Indeed, women political leaders such as Nandi-Ndaitwah and Nora Schimming-Chase were involved in drafting the new constitution. Namibia's constitution prioritized gender equality and included an affirmative action clause aimed at advancing women (SADC, 2003, p. 20). As her daughter, Afra Schimming-Chase, attested to, Nora Schimming-Chase "was doing a lot of the behind the scenes work, and wasn't president, but she was doing a lot of the work and involved in the constitution" (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019). Women's influence is also evident in other progressive gender-equality legislation, such as the National Gender Policy of 1997 and the Gender Plan of Action of 1998, that have been passed in Namibia since independence (UN, 2004).

Despite these policy successes, it is critical to acknowledge the disconnect that often exists between the constitutional and legislative ideals and the lived experience of Namibians. These aspirational policies are often not promulgated to the degree that they make an applied difference in the everyday lives of Namibian women. Bauer (2006) made several assertions regarding the status of Namibian women post-independence. Importantly, she asserts that a mandatory gender policy in Namibia would be required to make a significant difference in terms of women's political representation (Bauer, 2006, p. 106). While Namibian independence was beneficial for women politicians, and women's political success was in turn self-reinforcing, Bauer also acknowledges the significant remaining challenges for gender equality.

There have, however, been successes; as Bauer has analyzed, 29% of Namibian Members of Parliament were women as of 2004 (Bauer, 2004). These figures were up even further by 2020, with 46% of Namibian parliamentarians being women (Sampaya, 2020). Part of that success was Namibia's zebra policy. Adopted in 2013, the zebra policy³⁴ is SWAPO's voluntary quota policy, mandating that 50% of candidates are women (IDEA, 2020). There are other factors contributing to this increase. Following independence in 1990, Namibia took time to rebuild. Even after independence, health issues such as the HIV/AIDS crisis negatively affected the population. Shafuda and De (2020) assert that investments that the Namibian government made in health and education only starting showing positive outcomes in 2000 (p. 12). Likely, these investments in health and education have continued as a stabilizing force and have continued to positively impact health status and education levels of all Namibians, women included. Iiyambo (2013) also drew attention to increasing numbers of women in other leadership positions such as on corporate boards and as deputy ministers. These opportunities create political career pathways and provide women with the leadership and political experience necessary to pursue other political offices.

Several of the women I interviewed spoke to the current status of the zebra policy. Many of them are skeptical regarding the policy's effectiveness. Such policies have good intentions, but often they do not make a practical difference. Lister, for example, condemned SWAPO for only appearing to advance gender equality, when, in actuality, their efforts are often little more than window-dressing. I asked Lister about the status of Namibian women's rights, 30 years after independence:

It is developing, but it isn't there by any means. The government will talk very proudly about 50/50 representation, but I am one of those women who dismiss it if it is a meaningless exercise. If it is proxies, or women who don't have the power – who are simply in parliament as tokens to women's equality, I am not in favor of that at all. I am very critical of women parliamentarians because they have often taken the leadership role of men. They follow. So I have been very critical of that. I would like to see real empowerment of women; that is not to say there aren't a couple of strong women in the mix. But obviously you have to – you can't look at the women's struggle in Namibia without looking at the hugely rising levels of gender-based violence. And I mean that's where I think the true story is told – that women's emancipation has not happened

³⁴ The zebra policy refers to the political party list alternating between men and women (thus creating a zebra stripe of candidates).

here fully yet. Yes, it is on people's minds and there is knowledge about it – but it is certainly not where it needs to be . . . So as I say, to sum it up, SWAPO said the right things. They were conscious of the right things – but they didn't do the right things. And this is the problem that I have as a woman, where I will watch other women go on world platforms and say Namibia stands ahead of this country and that country. We've got 50-50, and I'm saying but guys, we are living in an illusion if we are going to celebrate that. Because we know that they don't have an independent voice in Parliament. We know they are not improving the plight of the girl-child in Namibia or the horrible rates of GBV. So, do we really want those tokens? I never wanted to be a token, and I don't think any woman wants to be a token. (Gwen Lister, interview with the author, March 11, 2020)

As Lister asserts above, while the content of the policy is meant to further gender equality, it has been warped into yet another tool of gender oppression. A number of women I spoke with said that the zebra policy has been weaponized against women themselves. The general consensus is that the (primarily male) leadership of the political parties cherry-pick women whom they can influence. It is possible for bad actors to intentionally select women who themselves have not been trained to speak out or to challenge the gendered status-quo. In this way, the zebra policy may actually do more harm than good. It allows Namibia internationally to claim a progressive stance on gender equality, when in reality the men in parliament continue to wield the majority of the power.

Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana is another Namibian politician who has held several high-level, ministerial positions within the Namibian government, including Secretary-General of SWAPO from 2007 until 2012. Iivula-Ithana was involved with drafting SWAPO's voluntary zebra policy legislation, and even she is disappointed with how it has turned out:

Others are using that policy to get rid of women who have the capacity and replace them with those they can control. That's what I have seen, because not only for – to get rid of women who men fear, and do not want that competition, but we also are doing it against men whom we want to get rid of, politically speaking. We replace them with women who may not even be able to say anything, and then we use the gender issue, because it's a woman and gender balance is fashionable . . . We have capable Namibian women – professionals who can stand up for issues and articulate them, but we are casting them aside and taking those who cannot say a word. It's not for the promotion of real equality and emancipation. (Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana, interview with the author, April 15, 2020)

Corroborating Nandi-Ndaitwah, Lister, and Iivula-Ithana's statements is a study conducted in 2019 that showed that despite the zebra policy mandate of gender equality, women parliamentarians in Namibia

have not been nearly as active in filing motions and drafting policies as their male counterparts have been (Amupanda & Thomas, 2019, p. 19-20).

Namibia's path towards gender equality, as well as women's political representation in Namibia, has been mixed at best. Amupanda and Thomas (2019) summarize the situation well, "It is clear that the SWAPO political elites always used gender transformation for the purposes of tokenism and to appeal to an international audience" (p. 22). While women such as Nandi-Ndaitwah and Nora Schimming-Chase did reach the upper echelons of political power within SWAPO, the reality for women during and after the struggle has been challenging at best. The shortcomings of the zebra policy offer one way to gauge this complicated reality. Namibia has a long way to go on its path towards gender equality. As Lister states above, one of the primary indicators that significant work remains to be done are Namibia's enduring high rates of GBV and femicide.

Rosa Namises

As indicated, the women's narratives here are juxtaposed against a dominant discourse of SWAPO's purported commitment to feminist ideals. While they asserted women's equality in their ranks, very few women rose to national prominence. Read somewhat in contrast to Deputy Prime Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah's experience, I will also highlight one woman leader in particular, Rosa Namises. Namises is emblematic of many of the tensions and complexities that emerged concerning women's leadership during the struggle. Her experiences also speak to broader historical questions regarding balancing the diversity of the various global, feminist movements, such as those borne out of the UN conferences, balanced with the particular, local needs and priorities borne out of local communities and their national and regional interests. Relatedly, because she is one of the anti-apartheid freedom fighters who remained within Namibia's borders during the struggle, she illustrates a vital tension that played out between returnees and remainees during and after the struggle.

Trained as a nurse, Namises is a former Member of Parliament and was a leader during the anti-apartheid struggle. Namises worked in her community, for example, educating people how to vote in

Namibia's first election (Vogel, 1990). Namises describes her work during the struggle as educating and mobilizing her fellow Namibians:

I went into the strategic planning for the party [SWAPO]. . . we would plan and draft strategies and carry them out . . . we would plan public rallies and so on . . . My role really was to create information and raise awareness and make our people understand. That was really my passion, to make sure that our people knew what they were fighting for, where we were going and our vision. I spent most of my time mobilizing the community, informing them, and then protecting them, analyzing for them what is happening and how it is happening and why . . . I would bring a deeper understanding amongst the community and my fellow comrades. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017)

Namises's quote above speaks directly to how she was involved in high-level strategy sessions with the liberation movement and how she was involved in creating a national narrative that could mobilize people to join and maintain the struggle. This again provides evidence of SWAPO's modest but notable inclusion of women in key positions of strategic power.

To a large degree, Namises's childhood and experiences early in her lifetime molded her career in activism and politics. The apartheid system was violent and cruelly unjust, eliminating contact between different groups of people, based on skin color, and forbidding marriage between whites and "non-whites" (Christopher, 1994, p. 141). It was a system ordered around a hierarchy of race, discrimination against Africans, and strict segregation (Lipton, 1985). Essentially, the apartheid administration considered Black Namibians less than human (First, 1963, p. 12). Growing up under apartheid restrictions, Namises knew very well the racial codes forced upon Black Namibians and South Africans during those years, especially given her direct involvement in the Old Location Uprising:

I am a child of the Old Location. I was born in 1958 when people were already being brutally moved from the place where they were living in such a harmonious way, but they were forcefully removed with guns and all sorts of bulldozers. Their houses were bulldozed down and separated, like my Dad and my Mom were really separated. People were just picked up and thrown somewhere to live, not knowing where the other partner or husband and wife or children have gone. So I was left with my Father, and I only met my Mother when I was seven. So to me, that tearing apart of people boils down to making people nothing. My work was really to stop the nothing-ness and to claim our being and to make us people, to make us somebody. And now I know that it was to change the system that was there. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017)

When Namises refers to The Old Location Uprising, she references one of the most dramatic of a series of forced evictions in Namibia in the 1950s (Wallace, 2011). As of 1954, Black Namibians were forcibly

evicted from a part of Windhoek, now known as the Old Location. Many of them moved to Katutura, a former township that was designated for Black Namibians during apartheid times located just outside of Windhoek (introduced in Chapter Two). In 1959, discord between SADF and local Black Namibian residents came to a head when SADF fired into a crowd of protestors, killing upwards of sixty people (Dobell, 2000, p. 31; Wallace, 2011). This episode had marked effects on the radicalization of anti-apartheid strugglers, and apparently it was one of the main motivations for Sam Nujoma and other SWAPO leaders to go into exile (Dobell, 2000, p. 31; Wallace, 2011).

Namises grew up accustomed to spending time with a diverse group of people. As a result, her childhood exposed her to an expansive view of racial justice. This early sensitization to diversity, and her family's transgressive stance towards apartheid policies of segregation, meant that she was prepared to be a dissident. Later, as an adult, while Namises was working as a nurse in the Katutura State Hospital, Namises experienced apartheid policies first-hand:

In the hospital, there was division [along] the color line. And I really felt basic things—like sharing [a kettle] to boil water to drink was done separately, that we could not have one kettle for both white and Black nurses, it was rather to be separate—those were the things that really irritated me. Also . . . the white nurses were treated very differently than the Black nurses in the hospital. . . it was also making me feel that our people were really nothing . . . [this] “nothingness” really disturbed me. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017)

While Namises decries the difficulties inherent to living with the racist laws of apartheid, she also found ways to navigate these challenges. For example, apartheid policies strictly outlawed interracial relationships. Namises, however, had a relationship with a white doctor at the hospital where she was working as a nurse: “For me it was just so normal! Although it was making people freak out because how can this Black nurse love this white man? And that was the story, but for me it was really not so big!” (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017). This phase of Namises’ life, however, did not end well; she was ultimately fired for her relationship with a white man (Melville, 2020). While at the time, it would have been challenging to navigate the financial insecurity of suddenly losing her job, the episode was also opportune in that it brought Namises to politics. As Namises said, “the thing that disturbed me – why I wanted to express myself – I didn’t know then that it was the political way, but it

was a way for me to express and tell the world there is this oppression," (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017). This opened up a new opportunity for Namises in politics, and, despite the indignities of the apartheid system wearing her down, her experiences also launched her career in politics.

Namises's first political engagement was with the SWAPO Youth League:

That was the first platform that I had. When I came there, I really came in not knowing myself as a woman and 'knowing my place' kind of a position. When I came there, I came as me – and knowing this, and knowing that! I came wanting to do things and wanting to really change the situation and so on. And also with that brought me to a point where I think the men were really looking at me very strange. But I didn't pay attention to that. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017)

Namises was not intimidated by the men in the organization. She "created a camaraderie amongst the men who were my peers and also a little bit older than me . . . They didn't even think, that is what I realized later . . . they didn't even try, they didn't even attempt to [proposition] me" (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017). Knowing that, as elsewhere, occurrences of sexual harassment were an issue within SWAPO, Namises navigated this terrain carefully. In a wide variety of situations, Namises was forced to adopt strategies, such as adopting a "tomboy" personality as she described it, to better fit in with male colleagues, or in choosing her battles, as she did at the hospital when she chose to make a point with her interracial relationship and ended up losing her position.

Despite Namises's attempts to balance all of these factors, she was facing firmly entrenched structural barriers. Later in life, she became disillusioned with the gender discrimination she faced within SWAPO:

The biggest challenge and the biggest frustration, anger, and pain came when one had to meet up with the elderly leadership and the elderly men in the SWAPO party. That's where the same kind of "no women." The men were looking at them as a "non-matter," because if I was to do most of the things in the Youth League, then I could serve on the national committee in the country because I never went out of the country. But I never led the party from that branch level – from the Windhoek branch – because that was dominated by most of the men . . . It was really also mostly mainly men to take over and really be the person in charge and not recognizing the strength of the women and the role that we were playing. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 19, 2017)

Namises was deeply dissatisfied that she was blocked from upper-level leadership positions within SWAPO. Between Namises' growing disappointment and the gender inequality she witnessed within SWAPO, her confidence in the party was shaken.

In 1990, Namises left SWAPO. She describes this decision as largely based on what she perceived as a lack of value placed on the contributions of those, like herself, who remained within Namibia during the struggle:

I left because SWAPO was not really the party that I believed in. It was also not having the values, principles and vision that they were telling me and many other people, on which we were selling SWAPO here in the country. [SWAPO] became individualistic, very tribal and also very arrogant. Didn't want to listen to anybody. Did not want to take advice from those of us who stayed in country. Also they didn't want to recognize our hardship and that . . . we were living in the belly of the beast and . . . they dismissed it, and they questioned us – how far and where and what were we doing in this country. And that hurts me really, making people nobodies after they have really sacrificed themselves to a level of where their lives were even lost. (Rosa Namises, interview with the author, October 3, 2017)

The skepticism directed at remainees when returnees came back to Namibia is evident in Namises's words above. Her frustration at this lack of value placed on her contributions is clear and speaks to broader challenges faced by many Namibians.

Namises has shown leadership during and after the struggle in politics, in organizations, and within her community. While emblematic of women's leadership during the struggle, Namises is also an illustrative example of the related complexities, contradictions, and challenges women in leadership positions within SWAPO faced. Several epochs of Namises's life are representative of the broader times that she lived through. Namises's identity as a Black Namibian woman of the Damara ethnic group also exemplifies how women during and after the struggle were subjected to double jeopardy due to their various identities. The discrimination faced by Namises and many others results from the sanctioned racism of the apartheid regime and can also be attributed to lingering factions built up between ethnic

groups continuing to favor some and disadvantage others. In Namibia, this tends to play out in politics because SWAPO has historically been predominantly affiliated with the Ovambo³⁵ ethnic group.

Returnees Versus Remainees

Also at play, in addition to her outspoken activism against sexism and racism, Namises's identity as a "remainee" was another element of her identity that had significant influence on her life. "Remainee" is a term used by Namibians during and after the struggle to designate those who stayed within Namibia's borders during the struggle versus those who furthered the aims of the struggle while in exile and were dubbed "returnees" (Fikeni, 1992). As a remainee who spent the struggle within Namibia's borders, Namises represents the tension between remainees and returnees. The friction between the two groups was due to a mutual distrust often borne out of widely divergent experiences – remaining in Namibia versus garnering international education and experience. The strain between returnees and remainees is directly related to the tension of the global versus the local. While there were indeed exceptions, many returnees had spent time not just abroad, but overseas, often in Europe, Scandinavia, or the US. This meant they changed their outlooks and broadened their wealth of experience, and, upon return to Namibia, often clashed with remainees.

Connecting back to Namises, the returnee versus remainee tension was one that she experienced first-hand. As a remainee, Namises often felt misunderstood and under-appreciated. Namises and others I spoke with express a marked wariness and distrust between the two groups. The tension exists for several reasons. First, there is the (often unfair) assumption that if one were "radical" enough in their anti-apartheid views, they were forced into exile because it became too dangerous to remain in the country. Second, similar lines of thinking led to accusations hurled at those who remained in-country as being "puppets" of the South African regime. Finally, there is a powerful fraternity built around exile

³⁵ The Ovambo people comprise the largest ethnic group in Namibia and southern Angola (Gates & Appiah, 2010).

connections that firmly persist amongst SWAPO power structures. Likewise, there is wariness toward the exiled held by those who remained in-country during the struggle.

Namises was not alone in her lived experience of the tensions felt between remainee and returnee populations. The late Putuse Appolus was a leader in SWAPO, and, as one of the first women to join the struggle in exile, she is often given the unofficial title of “Mother of the Liberation Struggle” (NBC, 2015; Nel, 2000). In an interview with her daughter, Norah Appolus echoed Namises’s experience. Appolus shared the substantial role that her mother played in the struggle for independence, including as a “mouthpiece” for the struggle. She often traveled, advocating for the cause of the Namibian liberation struggle and for women specifically. Thus, as a returnee, Appolus reflects a different side of the coin than Namises, a remainee:

In terms of the political gains that women made in exile . . . they've managed to hold on to [them]. But the women that come from exile are a very small minority, and the men that come from exile are a very small minority, and their way of thinking, their forward-thinking, doesn't always resonate well with men and women throughout the country. (Norah Appolus, interview with author, May 22, 2020)

Appolus's observations again reference the clash between outside views, perspectives, and norms adopted by Namibians educated abroad during the struggle and those who remained inside the country. Indeed, having a different worldview and shifting away from certain parts of Namibian culture would create points of contention for these two populations. In this, Appolus both declares that those who participated in the “external struggle” were part and parcel of the liberation struggle, and she also identifies and acknowledges the tension present between those who served the struggle in exile and those who served the struggle while remaining inside Namibia's borders.

Maria Nghidinwa, who is trained as a journalist and now works in international development, served as a political commissar in exile, also recounted being hectored upon her arrival home in Namibia. She attributed this to resentful, jealous feelings on behalf of some of their fellow Namibians due to the overseas opportunities and experiences that many returnees were provided. This led to some people feeling left behind and alienated from the alternative worldviews adopted by returning Namibians who had spent the struggle overseas in exile:

This is one thing in Namibia, you can tell – even now to some extent, you can still tell people who were in exile and people who were called “returnees.” You probably heard that term several times. It’s been many years; it’s been almost 30 years now. You know, but still, our behaviors. They will say, “Ach – that one driving a big car like she must be from exile. She must be a returnee.” They say we are like men . . . that we lack protocol, like the village protocol where you are supposed to be a nice, good wife. And we are doing - we have our own homes. I’m not married – no kids. The people look at you, ‘What kind of a woman is this?’ . . . But it was usually people from exile – because this thing that you must be married, it wasn’t embedded in us – it’s not. The young women from here are being socialized to get married and to have kids and to, you know, but us – we do things ourselves. (Maria Nghidinwa, interview with the author, January 20, 2020)

When Nghidinwa talks about the conduct of women like herself who were in exile during the struggle, she references a broader swath of issues, including socioeconomic class, level of education, and access to a more cosmopolitan worldview. As a woman, though, her newfound freedom was not accepted by many of those who stayed in Namibia and who wondered why she was not the "nice, good wife" she was expected to be.

A similar sentiment was voiced by Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana, who cites her international exposure as cementing her gender-progressive outlook:

I never allowed anybody to trample over my rights. So obviously, men had an attitude. And traditional men had a serious attitude, but I didn't care much because I knew that I occupied my place. I didn't occupy any other place. This debate – the debate on equality and women's emancipation didn't start when I was in the army. At school, at our secondary school we used to have debates over that issue. So, when I joined the military, there was already that debate going on. Luckily enough I found it also internationally . . . the world was changing. (Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana, interview with the author, April 15, 2020)

Iivula-Ithana emphasizes the importance of her international exposure in recognizing the sea-change of gender norms and women’s positions in society. As she states, she has always stood up for her rights and says that her exposure to other parts of the world reified her independence. Iivula-Ithana also draws attention to an interesting theme: the fact that debates about gender equality and women’s place in society were becoming a widespread occurrence. Namely, women’s rights were being discussed in schools and the military. The fact that women’s rights were being discussed in these spaces is significant because educational environments are spaces where ideas can be challenged, reconstructed, and reshaped. Military spaces are often masculinized environments, yet even here ideas about gender were changing. Iivula-Ithana’s emphasis on a rapidly-changing world and the widespread nature of women demanding equality

maps onto a broader growing national and international consciousness of women's rights. Together, Nghidinwa and Iivula-Ithana's accounts illustrate the divergent experiences, and thus perspectives, of those who furthered the aims of the struggle while in exile. The struggle not only targeted the end of white-minority rule but also it created fissures in existing gender norms and ideas.

Evidence of the inherent tensions of global versus local feminisms is also evident in the oral history of Otilie Abrahams (introduced in Chapter Two). Like many of her peers who spent time in exile, Abrahams's time spent living in Sweden changed her perspective. One of Abrahams's relatives, a woman I call "Nadiesta" said that when Abrahams returned to Namibia, she shunned patriarchal norms and gender roles. The influence of Abrahams's time spent in Sweden and her attitude toward gender norms are evident in Nadiesta's words:

[Abrahams] wanted to ingrain the fact that her daughters don't have to be confined to kitchen service, and her sons don't have to be confined to hard labor. And I think Sweden also helped that because my parents, my father and his siblings were allowed to learn these things at school. Because in Sweden you learn home economics, you learn carpentry and everything, and kids aren't separated by gender. ("Nadiesta," interview with the author, January 20, 2020)

Nadiesta attests to how her time in Sweden changed Abrahams's perspective on women's rights.

Nadiesta confirmed what Abrahams shared with me in an interview in 2017:

When we were in exile, I spent 10 years in Sweden. And there, women are human beings and not just things. We were brought up as children. All the boys could cook, and girls could work with cattle. We were brought up to believe in equality. When we came to Sweden, I found that this was a country that was in sympathy with the way I was brought up. (Otilie Abrahams, interview with the author, October 3, 2017)

Both women emphasize the affinity that Abrahams felt towards Sweden's gender-progressive stance and underscore the formative nature of the time Abrahams spent there. Sweden is recognized internationally for its gender-progressive legislation, and it began implementing a legal framework to promote gender equality in the 1980s (Aseskog, 2003; Bloomberg, 2017). While Abrahams and her husband were in Sweden from 1968 until 1978 (Whittaker & Boesak, 2012), prior to the adoption of most of Sweden's gender equality laws, women's rights still would have been at the forefront of Swedish society. Especially given the oppressive nature of the apartheid regime, women's rights in Sweden at that point in time would

have far surpassed the reality of feminism for women in Namibia. Thus it follows that the decade Abrahams spent in exile in Sweden strongly shaped her stance on feminism and her subsequent career in education.

Finally, Lydia Shaketange, a professor at the University of Namibia and author of her exile memoir *Walking the Boeing 707* echoed the other women's accounts. After she mentioned a noticeable sense of distrust between returnees and those who stayed home in Namibia during the struggle, I asked her if the two "sides" eventually came to see eye to eye:

It took a while. Because, if you were not in exile, then [returnees wondered] what were you doing here? It means you were collaborating with the Boers³⁶. But not everyone was actually doing that! . . . Either you were there, or you were not. But, eventually it all melted together, and we are fine now. (Lydia Shaketange, interview with the author, November 4, 2019)

Again, Shaketange's statement evokes a strong division, emphasizing the differences that remainees and returnees had to negotiate as they entered a new chapter of Namibian independence.

Since the end of the war, the status of returnee versus remainee has also taken on greater importance because it dictates who receives veterans' compensation and who does not. The Ministry of Veterans Affairs only provides benefits to those who fought for independence while in exile; those who remained in-country are not privy to veterans' benefits such as housing benefits or financial compensation. This has further intensified the divide between the former exile community and those who remained within Namibia. This tension was evident in my conversation with Gabriella Lubowski, the former wife of the late human rights lawyer and anti-apartheid activist Anton Lubowski, who was assassinated in 1989. Lubowski shared with me her reservations about the exile community:

There was a big difference between the people that were exiled and the people that were inside the country during the struggle, because, remember, the people outside pretty much continued living a normal life, and they were doing business, they were enriching themselves. They had no clue what was going on inside the country. (Gabrielle Lubowski, interview with the author, April 14, 2020)

³⁶ "Boer" is an Afrikaans word for "farmer;" also used historically to connote white, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who aligned themselves with nationalist Afrikaner politics.

Lubowski's comment about those in exile "enriching themselves" is also meaningful. To some degree, returnee versus remainee distinctions are code for class. Those with greater socioeconomic privilege and connections had more access to scholarships overseas than others. This segment of society would also have had access to the upward mobility afforded by educational opportunities due to the financially rewarding career path they provided. High-ranking SWAPO officials also had access to financial and material wealth in international monetary and supply donations. Throughout this project, I heard many accounts of the elite SWAPO leadership traveling freely to and from the military camps, while the more ordinary ranks of the organization led a more austere life and were not granted the same economic and travel privileges. Naturally, there were exceptions. Especially in the north, SWAPO supporters would leave on foot and cross the border into SWAPO camps in Angola, thereby joining the struggle even with very little economic stability. However, as those sent abroad gained both education and became more cosmopolitan due to their studies abroad, the divide between returnees and remainees widened. These tensions are also emblematic of broader tensions within the struggle.

The SWAPO Women's Council and the Namibian Women's Voice

A wide variety of diverse forms of global feminisms as well as a variety of global feminist movements were inherent to the zeitgeist of the 1980s and 1990s. This was on display at the global UN Women's Conferences³⁷ and an expanding feminist consciousness in many parts of the world, all of which contributed to and bolstered Namibian women's leadership prospects (Tripp, 2009, 2015; Bauer & Britton, 2006). Tripp (2009) underscores that African women, however, were not merely following

³⁷ The UN Women's conferences took place in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995 (World Conferences on Women, 2015). The broad themes of the UN Women's Conferences were education, human rights, women's empowerment, health care, HIV/AIDS, environmental conservation, food security, and sustainable human development (Report of the UN, p. 60). The conferences gathered women from around the world, and were focused on furthering gender equality, a global feminist agenda, and international solidarity. Namibia, too, was caught up in this hopeful tide; formal statements issued by the Namibian Office of the President affirmed a solid commitment to gender equality and the potential of global organizing and activism (Office of the President, p. i).

Western influence; much to the contrary, African women's activist groups were at the vanguard of shaping the multiple contours of global feminisms (Tripp, 2009, p. 64). Nevertheless, despite these growing opportunities and the tidal wave of global feminism, there were still significant challenges and barriers for women leaders to navigate and overcome.

While the global forums of the UN Women's Conferences were being planned, feminists in Namibia were navigating domestic tensions. In 1985, Namises joined forces with Lindi Hartung, a social worker by training who was a leader and an activist during the struggle, and other activists to form a non-partisan feminist organization called the Namibian Women's Voice (NWV). NWV was a grassroots women's rights organization with momentum and power in the 1980s. NWV was founded in 1985 at a national conference with over 300 women in attendance. The women gathered to "tackle the problems experienced by Namibian women" (Namibian Women's Voice, 1987). NWV launched projects aimed at leadership development, literacy and education, income generation, health, and helping women to realize their human rights (Namibian Women's Voice, 1987). In addition, the organization rallied against the poor working conditions under the apartheid system for Black women, in which they were "exploited for cheap labor and seen as labour units and not as people" (Namibian Women's Voice, 1986). Reports distributed by NWV speak to the double jeopardy and dire situation faced by Namibian women during the heightened tensions and violence of 1980s Namibia under apartheid rule:

The socioeconomic, cultural, political and religious pressure led many women to take submissive and subordinate positions that reduced them to minors in our society . . . Black women are the underdogs of society . . . classified as third class citizens and treated accordingly. (Namibian Women's Voice, 1986b)

NWV quickly gained power, supported by the Council of Churches of Namibia. The organization set out to gain visibility for women in Namibia and to present a united front, demanding justice and expanded rights for women (Namibian Women's Voice, 1986b).

The NWV and SWC were decidedly different organizations with varying priorities and agendas. The SWC, as part of SWAPO, was composed of women both in exile and those who remained in Namibia. It was also decidedly dependent on SWAPO, whereas the NWV was autonomous and non-

partisan (Bauer, 2006, p. 88; Becker, 1995). The NWV was comprised of women who remained in Namibia (remainees). The NWV also placed the priorities of women's rights at the forefront of their agenda, whereas SWAPO and therefore the SWC were exclusively focused on gaining Namibian independence. Ultimately, NWV's upward trajectory and increasing influence, was not welcomed by SWAPO. SWAPO and the SWC feared competition with the NWV, and speculation grew that NWV had aspirations to become a political party, though no evidence speaks to that allegation.

Given these differences, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was a schism between the NWV and the SWC at the 1985 UN Women's Conference in Nairobi, where both groups were in attendance. The NWV faction was not welcomed by the SWC group at the Nairobi conference. NWV was present to represent the perspectives of remainee women, rather than only the exile experience being represented at the UN conferences. The contingency of NWV women, however, were not warmly welcomed by SWC. This was clear in my conversation with Lindi Hartung:

LH: SWAPO was very angry that we were there. They were telling the people that we were not supposed to be there.

MS: Was it that they didn't like the fact that you were representing Namibia on an international stage? They thought they should rather be there?

LH: Yeah, they felt they are the people who should be representing Namibia. We didn't care - we were there. But they treated us very badly at the conference. They were saying all these years they were the ones that were representing Namibia women. Suddenly, there were 20 women from Namibia, and they didn't want us. Each country had to work on its own program. And they don't want to meet with us. It was negotiation, negotiation, until later they came. But they didn't want to actually; they gave us the cold shoulder all the time . . . So, you say you represent us, but you don't want to speak to us. It's very strange, neh? So we were there, and they didn't like it. (Lindi Hartung, interview with the author, February 19, 2020).

The friction between SWC and NWV is indicative of broader tensions between SWAPO and NWV, and SWAPO's desire for complete dominance. In considering the brush-off given to the NWV representatives by the SWC, we can see a reflection of global forces at play. Similar tensions surfaced in my interview with Gwen Lister, a journalist known for her anti-apartheid stance. Lister, speaking about maintaining an independent perspective as a journalist, considers herself to be in the category of remainee:

So obviously it was essential to the SWAPO struggle what we did and what we were doing. And the outside people perceived us to be part of the struggle, so there was that jealousy of anything that looked like there was any kind of challenge to SWAPO. And the Women's Voice again, and a lot of the SWAPO Women's Council would have thought – okay, hang on, what is this now? Are we not doing good enough job that there needs to be –? So yeah I am certain that those suspicions played a role in the collapse. (Gwen Lister, interview with the author, March 11, 2020)

Lister's point seems to be that there was indeed a noticeable tension between SWC and NWV, and she establishes that any other party that presented any kind of threat to SWAPO would have come under attack from SWAPO as it worked to maintain control. As a member of the remainee community, her reflection also establishes the sense of distrust that was present between those in exile and those that remained in Namibia.

The accounts of the NWV and the SWC at the UN conference in Nairobi reflect the complexities of global organizing and feminism. Not an issue unique to Namibia, activists worldwide can attest to the challenge of balancing local advocacy with international alliances. Because most NWV members were remainees, and, while SWC had representation both within Namibia and in exile, the SWC had a strong international focus. This was in large part why, even though NWV and the SWC both represented Namibian women, factions had been created. The women who had stayed within Namibia's borders during the struggle did not feel that women who had been in exile were in touch with their lived realities, needs, and priorities. This led to a sense of alienation between the two groups of women. As mentioned above, global women's movements are often criticized for essentializing women and overlooking, dismissing, or minimizing the critical differences between various women. Women who lived abroad for many years in exile often adopted a more western approach to feminism. In short, the tensions of a wide variety of global feminisms were on full display at the UN conferences. The challenge of balancing diverse feminist priorities was also mirrored in the conflict between the NWV and the SWC. This came to a fore when SWAPO asked NWV to either come under its organizational umbrella or to cease operation. However, rather than falling under the complete power of SWAPO, NWV chose to disband.

Efforts coming out of the UN conferences were not completely fraught with discord; however. As Tripp (2009) asserts, the UN conferences were in many ways highly effective and impactful,

especially insofar as the gatherings put pressure on domestic governments to consider local women's organizations and provided a conceptual and policy framework to advance women's rights and priorities (Tripp, 2009, p. 3, 24). Aligning with Tripp's argument is the example of Oillie Abrahams. Abrahams, discussed earlier in Chapter Two, was a leader in the education sector and opened a school in Katutura, not far from Windhoek.

During my fieldwork, I spoke with one of Abrahams's former colleague's, Marcus Salomon. Salomon is an activist and NGO (non-governmental organization) worker based in Cape Town, South Africa. Salomon has been a long-time friend of the Schimming-Chase and Abrahams families. He related Abrahams' work back to the UN Women's Conferences and emphasized the influence that the conferences had on Abrahams, and their advocacy work furthering the rights of women and girls:

[She] attended the Beijing Summit on Women. She came back from there and as part of her work that summer in Beijing, there was a decision that women's organizations would also work with girls. She came back to Namibia, and started the Girl-Child Movement, and [as a result] I have been active in . . . Cape Town for more than 40 years, building a movement of children. We also started a girl-child movement . . . I think that is the legacy she left as part of her work on gender and women's issues. So, the main point I want to make is that our association has stretched for more than 50 years. . . Tillie is one of the few people who actually went back to her country to implement what she learned at the UN. I didn't know of any others – Tillie was one of the few who went back to her country and took action. (Marcus Salomon, interview with the author, January 6, 2020)

Salomon's comments bring the legacy of the UN Conferences into focus. Together, Abrahams and Salomon and their colleagues launched the Girl-Child movement. The initiative resulted from Abrahams using the knowledge and connections she gained at the UN conference to affect local change and transformation. One of the strategic objectives of the Beijing conference was to eradicate discrimination against, and to further the rights of, the girl-child (UN, 1995). Abrahams' attendance at the conference enabled her to wield the resources that she gained in Beijing to create a trans-national project furthering the status of women and girls, an endeavor that has endured for over 30 years.

The Challenge of Being a Feminist in SWAPO

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, membership in SWAPO for women provided opportunities, but being a feminist member of SWAPO was fraught with contradictions and challenges. In

an interview with Afra Schimming-Chase, daughter of the late Nora Schimming-Chase³⁸, a politician and diplomat, Afra Schimming-Chase described a notable gendered hierarchy within the movement:

MS: Was there a gender hierarchy within the movement?

ASC: Definitely, in terms of the positions they were able to get within SWAPO. And I think part of the reason why they moved from certain movements was because they were not being heard. So I think Mom left SWAPO and went to SWANU because she wanted to be a bit more at the forefront. And that was maybe not possible because along tribal lines also, you know, as much as we are deculturalized, the movements weren't necessarily. So along deculturalized lines, how do you move forward? So, I think if you look at Mom's trajectory, she moved around a lot in terms of parties. She went to SWANU, then she went to NNF, and never first on the list always second or third or fourth. And I know you know, leading up to independence and afterwards, that was a thorn in her side because you were not considered able to lead in the same way as a man could. And so you always get the second position; you get relegated to the back. And then she went to the Namibian National Front, and they only get one seat, and that one seat goes to a guy. Then, you become the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, you are clearly number one, but they put someone else in front of you. So in terms of that, I definitely felt that frustration closer to, and after the movement. Maybe because I was older, and I could experience it more, but I think that definitely came through, I think part Auntie Tillie's [referring to Otilie Abrahams] decision to kind of just go and do education and make a difference there was not having to compete and contend over there. (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019)

In Schimming-Chase's evocation of her mother's experience as a leader in Namibian politics, a disconcerting phenomenon reveals itself. While Schimming-Chase did "a lot of the behind the scenes work," the reality was that she was never promoted to the upper echelons of political power. Despite her hard work and achievement, Schimming-Chase nonetheless faced a very real glass ceiling. Afra Schimming-Chase above re-emphasizes the structural barriers both her mother and aunt (Nora Schimming-Chase and Otilie Abrahams) faced. While Schimming-Chase remained in politics, these structural barriers led Otilie Abrahams to leave politics and launch a career in education. Their experiences indicate that while there may have been the external pretense of gender equality and

³⁸ Sisters Nora Schimming-Chase and Otilie Abrahams were both leaders in the struggle and were involved since its inception in Cape Town. Nora Schimming-Chase was a politician and diplomat. Her sister, Otilie Abrahams, was a leader in education, and founded a school in Windhoek. Afra Schimming-Chase is the daughter of Nora Schimming-Chase.

opportunity in SWAPO and other Namibian political parties, the reality was that there was a distinct gendered hierarchy within Namibian politics.

To further contextualize the reality for women leaders within the ranks of SWAPO, Steve Swartbooi's comments regarding the late Martha Ford also reveal certain pressures and tensions during the struggle driven by identity. Now deceased, Martha Ford was a SWAPO activist who was at one point the leader of the SWC:

For example, if I look at the issue of for example Martha Ford in exile. Although she went into exile in a position of SWAPO Secretary for Women's Council, for women's affairs. And many of the women were not really pleased to see a woman of a different color, a woman of color I must say, occupying such a position. And the frustrations that Martha Ford had to undergo in exile was partly because of . . . [other SWAPO members] . . . They were the ones who basically spearheading . . . the frustrating campaign against her. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 25, 2020)

At this point, I clarified if Swartbooi meant that Ford was targeted because of her skin color, and he affirmed:

So Martha Ford, first of all she was Coloured woman . . . a Coloured person. She was from Rehoboth. And of course in exile, the majority of the women there were Oshivambo-speaking women. And Martha Ford basically was also challenging certain tendencies or certain ways of doing things for example. Of course her witness later becomes . . . Martha Ford's witness is . . . They brought some witnesses [against her] later because of the frustration, she started to take a lot of alcohol for example . . . People do not also have the skills or probably are not strong to manage their frustrations. And they exploited that . . . So she had to resort to alcohol also, and they exploited that and they depict that as her character which is not her character. If they would have supported her, that wouldn't have happened. (Steve Swartbooi, interview with the author, February 25, 2020)

Swartbooi's emphasis first on Ford's status as a member of the Coloured ethnic group, and the fact that she was in the ethnic minority while in exile, underscores the importance of identity. The Coloured community in Rehoboth especially was at times treated with suspicion because they were afforded a certain amount of privilege as they were seen as higher on the racial hierarchy under the apartheid system than other ethnic groups. Thus, the lack of support extended to Ford also belies a combination of ethnic tensions, sexism, and the jockeying for power between different parties within SWAPO. Certainly, the anti-apartheid struggle was fraught with danger and difficulties for all of the freedom fighters. However,

the life histories of the women above illustrate the additional burden of double jeopardy that their gendered identity introduced to their wartime experience, lives, and careers within SWAPO.

Namibian Women and Leadership

Above, I have contrasted women SWAPO politicians' experiences with the claimed commitment to gender equality professed by SWAPO. I further delineated some of the complexities that women in SWAPO were forced to navigate. In doing so, I present Rosa Namises and Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as examples of women leaders within SWAPO. To expand on tensions related to global versus local organizing, I present the case of the NWV and their challenges in finding common ground with the SWC during the Nairobi UN Women's Conference. Thus, a clear picture emerges of the barriers that some women freedom fighters faced even as there were newly emerging opportunities for women in politics during and after the struggle.

In Chapter Four, I present the ruptures that reverberated throughout Namibian families during and after the struggle and the enduring significance and impact of the struggle on gender norms in the country. As explained in this chapter, divisions between remainees and returnees, for example, cut down familial lines and created discord within families, communities, and at the national level. The next chapter further analyzes these dynamics, and delineates the interwoven nature of pre-independence dynamics with the evolving nature of an independent Namibia.

Chapter 4: The Toll of War: Ruptured Family and Social Structures

Something that really disturbed me, as a woman, meeting SWAPO women in exile, was that they were separated from their children. It was a sacrifice they were meant to make . . . without question . . . If they came to the UK to study, for example, they had to leave their children somewhere. And there were many women I met, whose children were in [the former East Germany], and weren't allowed to visit them . . . It was one of the most painful things that I felt women had to endure. And if they complained, they were unpatriotic. And I think it led to a generation of children who were disconnected from their parents, and who have struggled, many of them, since. (Jane Shituwete, interview with the author, March 12, 2020)

Introduction

As sketched in the previous chapters, Namibian history featured a series of events that caused significant ruptures.³⁹ These had a marked impact on Namibian families and societies. This chapter explores the various ruptures to the family and societal structures that were caused by the apartheid system and then extended by the liberation struggle. In the project, I found that family separations, and the related prolonged distances and divisions due to the contract labor system, created enduring ruptures not only for families, but for their broader communities. Additionally, for freedom fighters advancing the struggle while in exile, the reality of death or injury in the war and even after the war have caused lingering post-traumatic stress to continue to affect Namibians of all ages.

My findings echo other research across the continent. Wiegink (2020) found that veterans of the Mozambican liberation struggle experienced challenges within their existing families and that their wartime experiences also affected, and at times prevented, their original plans to begin a family. In post-war societies, the trauma of war may be embodied in veterans of the struggle as well as in the descendants of those directly involved in conflict. As discussed in Chapter One, in the early 1900s, a violent German colonial regime separated many families, and the Ovaherero and Nama people were subjected to the mass genocide of many of their people. Later, when Namibia was put under the control of South Africa and the violent apartheid regime, a contract labor system forced Namibian families apart because men were sent

³⁹ I use the term “rupture” here to describe the schism, change, and shift in societal norms and expectations.

to mines in remote parts of the country, far from their homes and communities. Then again during the liberation struggle, many Namibians were forced to flee into exile, pursuing military training or educational opportunities abroad, again fracturing family structures in ways that were difficult to repair.

Remnants of historical ruptures have resulted in a society where family separations and geographical divisions are more the norm than the exception. Separations differ from family to family and will vary based on a number of factors. Yet, what I argue is that the apartheid system of contract labor created forced separations that were also designed to disrupt and destroy the fabric of communities and the nation. Combined with the requirements of a transnational struggle, freedom fighters were regularly forced abroad for training, security, and combat, ripping families apart. The legacy of these separations endures until today.

Diverse Family Formations

Families are diverse and take many different forms. A growing body of literature refutes the idea of the nuclear family as the main legitimate unit of society (Cutas & Chan, 2012). Cutas and Chan (2012) contrast a more Western version of heterosexual marriage and partnership to a broader representation of family structures, such as LGBT⁴⁰ partnerships. Nicholson (1997) also contextualizes a modern analysis of families, pointing out the historically wide degree of diversity in family groupings and structures. This scholarship is further bolstered by family scholars such as Stacey (2011) who introduces a wide variety of both older and newer iterations of family types and urges readers to move on from false notions of the “normal family.” As Archard (2010) contends, family structures have often been highly prescriptive, to the point of marriage, family, and politics being highly interconnected. That being said, the historical time period of the struggle and the corresponding heteronormative cultural milieu present in Namibia during the period of study (1960s until independence in 1990) dictate that most of the families included in this

⁴⁰ As stated in Chapter Two, I use the acronym LGBT because it reflects the terminology used by the narrators in this study. As Currier (2012) asserts, it is important to respect the local context and the terms used by those in the sociopolitical context of southern Africa (p. 172).

project (at least outwardly) project a heterosexual marriage or partnership. While Namibia has made strides in the arena of LGBT rights, the country still faces a long journey towards true LGBT equality and a fully inclusive society that respects the rights of all gender identities and orientations (Currier, 2012; Frank, 2020). Especially in Namibia, sexual minorities continue to face high levels of discrimination (Frank, 2020). Due to this stigma, many LGBT individuals have remained closeted. It is for reasons such as these that many of the women and their families in this study tend towards the heterosexual side of the sexuality spectrum.

Part of the analytical grounding for this project operates around the family as a unit of analysis. That being said, it is also important to push back on an overly idealized notion of the family unit. Gupta (2018), for example, presents the family as a deeply complex and nuanced structure. The scholar asserts that when studying and working with families, “we ought to refrain from looking at stark realities through the romanticized lens of an ethics of care” (Gupta, 2019, p. 23). When analyzing families, Gupta urges the avoidance of false dichotomies; families are neither all good nor all bad—neither a perfect haven nor a bastion of dysfunction. The family structure is far from a panacea; nonetheless, the family unit as a structure of analysis provides an important and enduring facet of society that was fundamentally disrupted during the struggle. Of course, it would be misguided to claim that all would be well if there had been no family disruption. My assertion, however, is that the family is one of many important and determining factors of the individual, social, and cultural fabric of Namibian society. Historical ruptures to the Namibian family are thus an important and under-studied aspect of the liberation struggle, and families as institutions exert ongoing influence on Namibian society.

Ruptures: Collective Memory, Trauma, and Healing

Memory is disputed terrain. Collective and individual memories are in an ongoing state of being claimed, contested, and negotiated. Numerous scholars acknowledge that our understanding of the past is shifting and that the past can usually be analyzed, represented, and understood in very different ways (Fussler, 1975; Halbwachs, 1992; Lowenthal, 2015). Casey (2004), for example, describes public memory as manifest not only in the form of statues and memorials, but also in the makeshift ways that we

collectively grieve. An example would be the temporary memorials of flowers, photos, and signs that cropped up in New York City following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 of the World Trade Towers (Casey, 2004, p. 17–19). Halbwachs (1992) underpins the importance of history, asserting that community norms and expectations, the very fabric of society, are a collective understanding of the past (p. 189). While societal memory is ephemeral, shifting according to context, and constantly evolving, it nonetheless exerts great power and influence. Public memory, for example, shapes public opinion and the collective understanding of past events shapes public policy and funding priorities. Namibia's tumultuous past of colonialism, genocide, and apartheid renders its memorial landscape largely contested. This collective, disputed memory has invoked significant ruptures on the individual as well as the societal level.

Namibia appears often in scholarship as a case study exemplifying a much-debated historical narrative (Kössler, 2007; Zuern, 2012). Whether it is in the cement and stone of the commemorative landscape, in the words and images found in political speeches, or in the sanitized and romanticized history represented in the school curricula, SWAPO has maintained firm political control in Namibia since independence as well as a solid grip on the country's official historical narrative (Höhn, 2010). This control of the historical narrative by SWAPO is complicated by the fact that Namibia, unlike South Africa, did not engage in a formal truth and reconciliation process. The absence of such a process has left a muddled past that leaves questions of justice and truth smoldering and unaddressed.

I argue that public memory, while ephemeral and amorphous, is nonetheless crucial to societal reconciliation and the progressive realization of justice. As many groups assert, such as the Breaking the Wall of Silence⁴¹ advocacy group or the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation,⁴² the SWAPO administration's

⁴¹ The Breaking the Wall of Silence organization works to act as “a consistent voice for the dignity of Namibian ex-detainees of the liberation movement and the development of a more open and tolerant society in Namibia” (Dempers, 2009).

⁴² The Ovaherero Genocide Foundation is an advocacy group in Namibia aiming to achieve recognition and reparations for the Ovaherero individuals who were subjected to genocide at the hands of the German colonists.

attempts to rush forward in forced reconciliation have fallen flat. Efforts to preserve the peace and bury the truth since independence have merely papered over deeper wounds.

An abundance of research has been conducted on the effects of war and conflict on the immediate family structure as well as the broader community (Komaromy & Hockey, 2018; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2005; Van Hook, 2019; Wiegink, 2020). Komaromy and Hockey (2018) write that in post-war Britain, individuals had to make a concerted effort to integrate experiences of war, including historical omissions, into their post-conflict realities:

More striking is the way that silence played a role—so that what was not spoken remained unacknowledged—but continued to exert a powerful influence. In contrast to that silence, these accounts are a form of speaking out in order to make sense of, and make public, the impact of war on ordinary lives such as ours. (p. 211)

I include Komaromy and Hockey here to draw attention to their description of the effect of silence following World War II. It was not the significant, attention-grabbing flashpoints that affected the British public; rather, it was the noticeable silences and omissions. At first glance, it may be puzzling why a silence, rather than something that is outright spoken, would be so painful. Yet, these silences are often a key aspect of memory studies, and this speaks directly to my application of memory studies for this project. Just as Komaromy and Hockey identify the strain put on British people as the country attempted to willfully overlook aspects of its wartime past, it is similarly a national strain for Namibia to force national unity through a process of collective forgetting. This artificial coming together is at the expense of some groups' truths and the affiliated reparations for some who were wronged.

Building on Casey (2009), I employ the idea that memory and body are intrinsically linked (p.172), and I apply this to the Namibian context and argue that the body is central to the ways that individuals and society process and heal from trauma. As introduced above, the concept of post-memory is in dialogue with Casey's analysis of memory and trauma (Hirsch, 2012). Hirsch (2012) describes post-generational trauma as occurring within the descendants of those who experienced traumatic events, such as the relatives of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch argues that women in particular are likely to embody intergenerational trauma. This means that women, given their particular gendered roles in society, often

find themselves at the center of familial or community social structures. They often absorb the societal suffering and wounds from a conflict and may pass it along to subsequent generations. Intergenerational traumas are passed down via conversations, family memories, and shared reflection. In the same vein, Young (2016) argues that women's pain is often utilized as a tool for others to process their own grief. The female experience, therefore, often becomes a vehicle for others' pain.

National reconciliation and post-war reconstruction take time, both at the societal level and at the personal level. Following war, the new administration is often required to focus on "reconstituting legitimacy, re-establishing security, and rebuilding effectiveness" (Brinkerhoof, 2005). This will also vary by context; a study by de la Rey (2006) in South Africa found women to be a vital component of peacebuilding in post-apartheid South Africa and noted that women bring issues of domestic violence to the forefront in ways that may go unnoticed without their active participation in the peacebuilding process. Individually, those healing from the trauma of war may need to dedicate substantial time and resources to healing and moving on (Delić et al., 2014; Hunt, 2010; Jain, 2019; Van Hook, 2019). This process is complicated in Namibia due to a number of factors contributing to a tense atmosphere. Perhaps among the most significant of these issues are the aforementioned unaddressed historical injustices (Becker, 2015; Ndali, 2014; Torpey, 2006). The SWAPO government has urged unity over reconciliation and over sifting through past injustices, forcing an unofficial policy of forgetting (Höhn, 2010). Since independence, Namibia has succeeded in implementing a progressive constitution and maintaining relative peace, but it has teetered on the edge of reifying colonial inequalities (Tapscott, 1993). Another hotly contested issue is land redistribution. Many claim that Namibia's strategy of willing-seller/willing-buyer has not served the purpose of equitably reshuffling land rights to rectify the past injustices of colonial possession of land (Pankursy, 2000; Simon, 1993). Given all of these complicating issues, true reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding takes extensive time and resources.

Namibian Family Structure, the Contract Labor System, and the Struggle

Throughout the struggle, but most notably during the latter period of the war in the 1980s, Namibian family members were often divided geographically and denied contact with their families.

Similar to other revolutionary movements whose leaders and cadres were forced into exile, geographical divisions became a part of life for Namibian freedom fighters. This aligns with the experience of South African uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) freedom fighters who began families while in exile in Tanzania. Lissoni and Suriano (2014) detail the pressure MK fighters faced in Tanzania where women were punished for becoming pregnant, resulting in a great deal of anxiety over intimate partnerships and family formation. Namibian families faced their own kinds of strain and pressure. Parents who lived in exile to pursue military training or to further their education were not allowed to stay with their children. Before and during this period, the oppressive contract labor system was also detrimental to the traditional family structure. Below, I turn to a more complete discussion of contract labor and the ways that this negatively affected families.

One facet of Namibia's journey to independence and the subsequent family ruptures was the contract labor system. The system of contract labor was formalized in Namibia in 1925, in response to demand in the diamond industry for inexpensive labor (Cooper, 1999; Leu, 1997; Silvester, 2015). Leu describes the system as also serving a double purpose for the apartheid government: not only to provide inexpensive labor but also to maintain control and to minimize the Black population in the more desirable parts of Namibia (1997, p. 127).

From beginning to end, contract labor was a deeply dehumanizing enterprise. Cooper (1999) describes a vile process of worker selection such that potential contract laborers were lined up naked and selected on the basis of a medical examiner's assessment (p. 125). Workers were provided minimal provisions (one blanket and a shirt for up to two years of work) and were transported to their work site via cattle car (Cooper, 2001, p. 80). When workers arrived, they were forced to work in despicable conditions, often in a deafening roar and scorching heat (Cooper, 2001, p. 81). One account describes the highly unfavorable working conditions as akin to "prison camps" (Katjavivi, n.d.). Over time, growing frustration on behalf of the workers led to strikes in the 1970s (Moorsom, 1977). From 1972 until 1989, northern Namibia was a warzone, with a strict curfew implemented from dusk to dawn (Becker, 2001, p. 228). During this time, Namibia became a place where "many women were left with few options. Strikes,

trials, arrests, and harassment became everyday life. Ovamboland was in a state of chaos, in a state of war” (Soiri, 1996, p. 67). On top of the conflict, the migrant contract labor system assigned many men to work in dangerous mining positions in southern Namibia (First, 1988).

Contract labor was devastating not only in terms of human rights violations, but also in that it fractured and fragmented families. Fathers and husbands were kept from their families for months or years on end. This created marked changes in familial cohesion and breaks in norms. In archival documents, Peter Katjavivi addresses the issue of the family and contract labor directly: “The Namibian worker is a migrant worker. In order to get work he has to sign a contract for a certain period of work. During this period he is not allowed to have his family with him nor to go and visit them” (Katjavivi, nd). Gwen Lister, a journalist who took a firm stance against apartheid in the struggle years, echoes Katjavivi’s perspective and emphasizes the damage done to Namibian families due to contract labor:

The effects of the contract labor system . . . split up Namibian families—and that remains today—we have a lot of men who have a lot of problems . . . having a couple of women all over and having a couple of kids, and that is purely a result of having split up those families in the early days. Because then they only got home once a year—and that was a long time. In turn, I suppose the women themselves, although it was maybe more a male thing, maybe the women in the north created [additional] families. And so that really split up and deeply divided the women in the north. (Gwen Lister, interview with the author, March 11, 2020)

As is often the case of war in general, the Namibian war created massive shifts and ruptures for both individuals and families. Below, I discuss lives in exile, the pursuit of education abroad, death and injury during war, and the reality of children often being raised by people other than their parents.

During the struggle, gender norms⁴³ were permanently altered and shifted. Many women who were once encumbered by traditional gendered norms and expectations on the home front experienced new, more expansive realities and possibilities once they were in exile. Primarily, this took the form of higher education, vocational training, opportunities within SWAPO and PLAN, or simply the exposure to other parts of the world and travel afforded to PLAN combatants for training. Tshiwa Trudie

⁴³ To reiterate, I define gender norms as that which is expected or deemed as desirable or acceptable for men and women.

Amulungu is a representative example of such opportunities. In her autobiography (Amulungu, 2016), she details her life first as a young PLAN combatant, then going on to pursue studies in Zambia and France, and finally securing a career as a diplomat. This is not a phenomenon that is unique to Namibia; it was felt and experienced by women in many liberation struggles, such as in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere.

A number of scholars have noted the expansive changes for women in leadership positions following conflict (Bauer & Britton, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Tripp, 2015). Britton (2006) asserted that in post-independence South Africa, women politicians immediately engaged formal political positions in an attempt to usher in social change and to advance women's rights in the policy realm (p. 59). As put forward by Tripp (2015), post-conflict situations generally usher in broadened opportunities for women in the form of a new "gender regime" (p. 33). Tripp (2015) cites three main reasons as the accelerants for improved circumstances, a strengthened women's rights movement, and increased levels of women in positions of political leadership: "gender disruptions, women's movements, and the spread of new international norms" (p. 33). Tripp summarizes this phenomenon: "War inadvertently opened up new possibilities for women, creating new visions of what was possible" (Tripp, 2015, p. 34). In the Latin American context, Schwindt-Bayer also points to drastic advances in terms of women's political leadership following democratic transitions in the 1980s (2010, p. 3, 185). Such studies outline the enhanced opportunities afforded to women following wars or conflicts.

Often, women combatants experienced difficulty when this liberatory shift in gender norms was not sustained in the social culture after the war was over. Wiegink (2020) writes of women freedom fighters in Mozambique: "Women . . . experienced alternative gender configurations and a heightened sense of autonomy during the war, yet in their postwar social worlds their status as ex-combatants. . . was met with stigmatization, rejection, and tension" (Wiegink, 2020, p. 107). For female combatants, "when a conflict ends, or when a woman defects from an armed group, she often finds herself doubly stigmatized: first as a compromised or 'fallen' woman, and second as a fighter" (Darden, Henshaw, & Szekely, 2019,

p. 85). This means that the battle does not end when a woman freedom fighter returns home after the conflict; often there are residual issues and challenges that remain to be addressed.

Women's Voices: Case Studies on Families and the Struggle

Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu was in exile in Zambia during the struggle. Amulungu studied French language, worked as a French teacher, and ended up following a diplomatic career path, putting to use her expertise in French language and culture. Currently, Amulungu serves as the Ambassador of Namibia to Senegal. Her experiences are outlined in her recent memoir, *Taming My Elephant* (2016). In our interview, Amulungu spoke about familial schisms:

That's one of the key aspects for me when one thinks of the gender issues within the liberation movement. You have these girls growing up without their parents, particularly a mother. You don't have siblings really . . . you have just others. So, you are this individual within this community and this specifically is when you really forge these strong bond(s) with them . . . To your question about the families being separate . . . that certainly has affected the Namibian society in a certain way. People were separated, those who were in exile and those who remained home. And coming back and trying to get to know your siblings and your parents is quite difficult. It took me time—and I still feel I don't know my siblings as much as I know my colleagues with whom I was in exile. (Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, interview with the author, May 29, 2020)

Above, Amulungu references some key challenges and tensions faced by family members during the struggle. First, she mentions the hardship faced by children who were forced to grow up without their parents. The intimacy she felt with her exile colleagues is also noteworthy. The exile community formed lifelong, almost family-like bonds. Also of note is the strain she indicates; it was not easy to suddenly be reunited with family members following the war. It took time to get reacquainted, and some never did re-establish those bonds. All of these factors collided to shape families during and after the struggle.

In an interview with Jane Shituwete, she shared with me how troubling she found it when mothers were separated from their children. Shituwete stated that it was “something that really disturbed me, as a woman, meeting SWAPO women in exile . . . and it was a sacrifice they were meant to make. It was a sacrifice they were expected to make without question.” These women had to sacrifice their familial roles, their children's access to nurture and support, and the strength they received by being

bolstered in return by their own parents and children. Shituwete goes on to talk about how any objection to the expectation that women leave their children in the care of others was met with great hostility:

It was one of the most painful things that I felt women had to endure. And if they complained, they were unpatriotic. And I think it led to a generation of children, who were disconnected from their parents, and who have struggled, many of them, since . . . I was a new mother, and I said that I would not leave my child. And that was looked down upon with great disdain. And I knew that those women that I met and talked to about their children, that was a terrible, terrible, terrible thing they had to do. (Jane Shituwete, interview with the author, March 12, 2020)

In Shituwete's⁴⁴ words above, she found it tremendously damaging and upsetting that Namibian women freedom fighters were many times forced to live apart from their children. As a new mother herself, she can palpably feel the pain of a mother enduring a forced separation from her children and being branded as unpatriotic or not dedicated enough to the struggle. Even today, more than 30 years after independence, it can be devastating to one's career and personal life to challenge or speak out against SWAPO (Angula, 2018; Good, 1997; Ndeikwila, 2019). In the heat of the struggle—one in which dissidents were at times tortured and jailed—it would have been much more challenging. This schism in families led to many children growing up without parents and families, and many children relied instead on other “adopted” families to raise and nurture them. Shituwete shared with me the following:

So, I felt that there was very little imagination. There was like a very strict interpretation of what was patriotic. And what was in the interests of sort of, SWAPO parents, SWAPO children, and so on. And I genuinely think they thought it was the right thing to do. But, it was the men making those decisions, and the women made to feel that if they made a fuss, they . . . were unpatriotic. Yes. They were less than they should be. So, they just kept quiet, and I found that very painful . . . It was just the sort of patriarchy that drove the narrative, and the agenda, of [what family structures and dynamics during the struggle] looked like for women. Without really much regard for the particular situation of women, especially mothers. So, it lifted a lot of women up, but on male terms somehow. (Jane Shituwete, interview with the author, March 12, 2020)

The above passage is telling in that Shituwete addresses head-on the masculine style of leadership—“it was the men making those decisions.” Women were not in the SWAPO leadership, and thus the voice and

⁴⁴ It also bears mentioning that Shituwete's identity as a white, British woman likely gave her more latitude in terms of making the decision not to go into exile and to be separated from her children than her Black Namibian women peers.

perspective of the mother was not included. This also meant that the mothers' urge⁴⁵ to care for their children themselves, and the children's need for their mothers, were not taken into account. SWAPO's strict regimen of loyalty to their cause was also on the table:

[Romantic] relationships were discouraged . . . There was an expectation of absolute discipline, and absolute devotion to, and focus on the job in hand, which was . . . the struggle. And not to get sidetracked. And to keep their eye clearly on the prize. And that relationships and children were a distraction. (Jane Shituwete, interview with the author, March 12, 2020)

In this excerpt from Shituwete's oral history, she is referring to SWAPO's expectations of strict "discipline" and "absolute devotion," implying a very militant approach to enforcing family structures. Women who may have objected to this were seen as "getting sidetracked" and admonished for not keeping their eyes "clearly on the prize." A feminist analysis of the situation would demand why a female cadre would be told that her children were "a distraction." Yet, these were the sacrifices that women were expected to make, per the demands of SWAPO leadership.

The themes voiced by women such as Shituwete in this study echo a broad swath of scholarship that speaks to the challenges faced by women with children in liberation movements (Alison, 2009; Ibnouf, 2020; O'Gorman, 2011; Turshen, 2016). Alison (2009) notes in her multi-country study that "lack of available childcare is likely to be a constraining factor on the participation of many women in military roles" (p. 226). While some revolutionary movements provided childcare centers, others did not provide any childcare options (Alison, 2009, p. 173, 192). Alison (2009) indicates that during conflict, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) "made little effort to facilitate the involvement of women with children" (Alison, 2009, p. 173, 191–192). During the Zimbabwean struggle for independence, women simultaneously resented the danger they were forced to subject their children to when they sheltered them in "keeps" or protected villages in Chiweshe,

⁴⁵ While certainly there were exceptions, this would likely have been felt most acutely by the mothers, due to the traditional and cultural gender norms around parenting and family roles.

Zimbabwe, but they also welcomed the opportunity to keep their children nearby (O’Gorman, 2011). O’Gorman spoke to one woman in this situation who remarked that “she was ‘not very happy’ about having her children in the keeps” while emphasizing, “‘but they were close to me. That mattered most . . . it was good for me because I could take care of them’” (O’Gorman, 2011, p. 100). O’Gorman introduces the double-edged sword of life for many women in battle zones; mothers are faced with either being separated from their children or subjecting them to a dangerous environment.

Turshen (2016) also speaks to the macro-level harm that conflict, specifically civil wars, inflict upon the family unit, especially children: “Every time people flee . . . they lose almost everything—their homes and material assets, their jobs and schooling for their children—and they must deal with trauma, death, and physical injury . . . they may lose their social support networks as well” (p. 23). In an analysis of the conflicts related to mining in Sierra Leone, the DRC, and Tanzania, Turshen (2016) points to the “cumulative impacts on women of violent production regimes that are compounded by armed conflict” (p. 92). These “cumulative impacts” in turn adversely affect the women’s children. Turshen provides a panoramic view of the effects of war on families, referring to the ways that the displacement of war often leads to “the breakup of families, the disruption of formal and informal support networks on pregnancy and childbirth, and the physical burdens of carrying a child” (Turshen, 2016, p. 105). In reviewing a survey of relevant scholarship, it is clear that war and conflict adversely affect women and children across the world in a variety of contexts.

Identity formation is essential to nation-building. Enloe (1993) sums it up best when she points out how “women and men within nascent national communities often struggle with each other over whose experiences—of humiliation, of insecurity, of solidarity—will define the community in its new national manifestation” (Enloe, 1993). In later work, Enloe (2000) also speaks to a complicated amalgamation of nationalism and masculinity: “Nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 1993, p. 232–233). Enloe’s analysis perfectly encapsulates Shituwete’s lived experience as described above: Shituwete’s discussion of children being separated from

their mothers speaks to a “masculinized hope.” In forgoing their mother/child bond and accepting SWAPO’s demand that they live separately even from their very young children, they were subjected to a masculine vision of what war and conflict should look like and how patriotism is expressed. As she stated, if a woman objected to this separation, she was “looked down upon with great disdain” by the SWAPO leadership. Furthermore, women’s dissent at times resulted in them being branded as “unpatriotic” or “less than.”

Such an appraisal, rendering a woman’s status questionable, was not simply hurtful; it was dangerous and sometimes resulted in physical abuse. Such consequences may have meant being denied overseas educational or career opportunities. The worst-case scenarios would have resulted in violence. As I discuss in Chapter One, many women PLAN fighters were subjected to detainment and torture during the SWAPO spy drama at the hands of their own fellow soldiers after being accused of espionage. Especially during the spy drama in the 1980s, and faced with the specter of imprisonment or torture, many women did not dare to risk their lives and safety or that of their children. Rather, they were more apt to follow SWAPO’s orders and to live apart from their children. These women demonstrated significant sacrifice and vulnerability when they entrusted their children to the care of friends or families. Many were ultimately well cared for, but there was no guarantee regarding their safety and upbringing or who would be attending to their needs, education, and general care and support.

Rather than being synergistic and complementary, nationalist and feminist movements are often at odds with one another⁴⁶. Far from being an assumed or natural partnership, many nationalist movements relegate the quest for women’s rights to second-tier priorities (Alison, 2009; Beall, Hassim, &

⁴⁶ Speaking to a theme throughout this project, Bience Gawanes, an attorney who has held cabinet positions with the Government of Namibia’s Ministry of Health (Katyul, 2016), described this tension as follows: “Patriarchy . . . is everywhere . . . even within the liberation struggle. Men don’t cease to be men and women don’t cease to be women—and the gender issues are there. So it was a matter of . . . [what are] your priorities as a woman in the liberation struggle? Do you prioritize being a woman or do you prioritize being a Black, oppressed human being? That is, I think, the fundamental question” (Bience Gawanes, interview with the author, March 19, 2020).

Todes, 1989; Enloe, 1993; Enloe, 2014; Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen, 2001; Molyneux, 1984; O’Gorman, 2011). Alison (2009) laments the lack of serious scholarly attention afforded to the gendered aspects of war and highlights how women’s participation in liberation movements have “generally been hidden or marginalized” (Alison, 2009, p 101). Thus, it follows that there would have likely been tensions between Namibian nationalism and feminism.

While the challenge of family separations seemed to be part and parcel of the struggle in many ways and in many families, communities also found meaningful ways to support each other and to work toward better futures. Such is the case of the Schimming-Chase and Abrahams families. Yvette Abrahams, a feminist academic and now farmer in Cape Town, South Africa, is one of Otilie Abrahams’s daughters. Abrahams (introduced previously) was a leader in the struggle and later founded the Jacob Morengo School in Windhoek. Abrahams shared a seemingly small but significant way that her grandmother had taken her daughters’ education, and thus their futures, into her own hands. She did so by launching her own business, selling eggs. This micro-enterprise granted her some financial freedom and latitude, so she had the ability to make her daughters’ education a top priority. She advocated for them to get an education on par with the men in the family:

And she said to her husband, I’m taking all my chicken and eggs money, and “I’m spending it on educating my daughters” . . . My mother was the eldest. She sent my mother to high school in Cape Town. You can imagine what an expensive undertaking it was because they all had to come to Cape Town, and they all had to pay for accommodation and food here. They couldn’t live at home in those times. And that’s what she did. She sent my mother. She sent the next two sisters as well . . . And that is how my mother became . . . the first Black Namibian woman to ever get a university degree. And she qualified as a teacher in 1960 . . . And when she qualified as a teacher, she became the first Black Namibian woman to ever qualify with a tertiary qualification. So that’s feminism . . . maybe matriarchy’s a better word, but it was so in her and it was so generational. (Yvette Abrahams, interview with the author, February 17, 2020)

When Abrahams says, “So that’s feminism,” the resonance of her grandmother’s influence on their family is apparent. This example of pushing for her daughter’s education shows how women shaped and influenced the next generation of women leaders in Namibia. Abrahams’s reference to matriarchy is a concept created by women, that places maternal values at the forefront, and emphasizes gender-

egalitarianism, economic balance, and decisions based on consensus; thus, strong women are the norm and not the exception (Lang, 2012).

Life in Exile

The dangers on the ground for anti-apartheid activists often meant they had to escape to the relative safety of life in exile. Naturally, this created schisms and geographical distance between family members. This phenomenon surfaced, for example, in my conversation with Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu. Amulungu stated the following, depicting the extent to which separation made relationships difficult:

Then you have another dimension where you met in exile, you married, but then you could not stay at the same place because your purpose of being outside is to secure the Namibian independence . . . if you happen to be some soldier and your wife is sitting somewhere in the camp, how do you live together? You have to spend a number of months away until you come back for a break for several months, and then you must still go back. So, you don't really get an opportunity to live together as a couple. And after independence, that's when the people started having homes [together] and you really don't know each other and that's when we had also some problems. (Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, interview with the author, May 29, 2020)

The “problems” Amulungu refers to stem from an alienation grown from distance. Due to the situation of war and being forced to relocate and to fulfill the duties of the movement, it was often not possible for couples to live together. Then, to suddenly be thrust together without having had the chance to get to know one another would have introduced challenges into the relationship and thus likely the entire family system.

A survey of scholarship from various contexts around the world shows the devastating effects of exile on family structures. Specific to Namibia, Williams (2020) details the life of a child born in exile and her subsequent struggles to gain full rights of citizenship in Namibia (p. 609). The subject of Williams’s project, Mawazo Nakadhilu, was born to an exiled Namibian father and a Tanzanian mother, and in addition to her struggles to establish herself as an adult back in Namibia, she has grappled with “contestations of . . . familial belonging” that have extended into her adult life (Williams, 2020, p. 608). Thus, as Williams (2020) argues, the oral history narrative of Mawazo Nakadhilu suggests that we are only beginning to understand the extent of the long-term implications of the exile life, both for those who were themselves exiled and their children.

Studies from other geographical contexts echo Williams's findings. In Chile, during the Pinochet regime, the military used wide-ranging tactics of terror and torture, including "internal exile, in the far reaches of Chile" (Barbera, 2008, p. 74). This forced exile resulted in an erosion of trust and social cohesion and affected families because parents, too, were subjected to this "internal exile" tactic (Barbera, 2008, p. 74). A similar study, also focused on Chile, is echoed in Barbera's work: Corral (2002) notes dramatic shifts in children's relationships with their parents after one or both of them was exiled and concludes that "being the son or daughter of a political exile was a difficult process that affected an individual's life perspective and relationships with parents and social environment" (p. 47, 61).

The forced migration and deep-seated trauma of the refugee process is also well-documented (Van Hook, 2019). A refugee is defined as someone who is forced to leave their home country due to war, persecution, or other factors (McKean, 2005). Not all, but many, of the women in this study fall into the category of refugee. Many women were forced to leave Namibia due to the violent context of war in the northern part of the country. Other liberation strugglers faced extreme danger and persecution at the hands of SADF in retaliation for their anti-apartheid activism and organizing. Other women left voluntarily, motivated by the desire to serve their country and to join the liberation struggle in exile. Regardless of the particularities, these reasons are closely intertwined. Whether forced into the life of a refugee in exile or voluntarily fleeing Namibia to join PLAN, the pressure and violence of the apartheid regime and the stranglehold that SADF had over Namibia often made the choice to leave not really a choice at all, but a forced fleeing from one's home country.

As described by Amulungu (2016) in *Taming my Elephant*, Shaketange (2008) in *Walking the Boeing 707*, and Shikola (1998), many women left Namibia as young girls to join the struggle. While most of them left Namibia by choice, it was often a choice made under pressure, either due to the danger posed by the SADF or due to their conviction in the liberation struggle. Regardless, the life of freedom fighters in exile was challenging due to its transitory, uncertain, and turbulent nature. In turn, freedom fighters in exile experienced disruptions to family cohesion and related feelings of loss, especially guilt regarding family members left behind (Van Hook, 2019). With the violence of SADF and the increasing

brutality of the apartheid regime in northern Namibia in the 1980s, there were very real and legitimate fears that family or friends left behind may not survive or may be physically or psychologically wounded by the violence of the apartheid regime. This was the challenging and unrelenting reality lived by many. Whether a PLAN fighter or a civilian, refugee status resulted in heightened stress and emotional distress and at times, the development of PTSD (Van Hook, 2019).

Trauma is inherent to many experiences of war. The role of trauma is acknowledged to have important and far-reaching effects on both the individual and the family unit. During war, trauma can emanate from external forces (such as natural disasters or enemy attacks) or interpersonal violence including GBV (Van Hook, 2019). Sadly, and not unique to Namibia, families were ruptured by the stark reality that many were killed or badly injured⁴⁷ during the struggle. If the breadwinner passed away or was badly debilitated during battle, this had lasting and sometimes devastating ramifications for the family. There were also the less tangible, emotional aspects of loving a family member, such as the process of mourning and bereavement, that were elements of trauma.

In the case of the women I researched for this study, many survived both the external trauma of war as well as the interpersonal trauma perpetrated by GBV. Women combatants survived GBV at the hands of enemy combatants as well as from within the ranks of their own platoons (Akawa, 2014; Britton & Shook, 2014). Wiegink (2020) and others have also identified the patriarchal expectation or sense of entitlement that a soldier may feel toward women—“a fighter’s sense of having a ‘right’ to women [as being] observed in many . . . military contexts” (p. 96). When combined, this spurious sense of entitlement to women’s bodies combined with the power that military superiors possess in the context of war can result in interpersonal violence. Such a scenario plays out in Sinclair’s 1988 film *Flame*⁴⁸. There is a scene in the film where one of the woman soldiers is raped by her commander, and one of the main

⁴⁷ Exact casualty figures are difficult to come by, as noted by Akawa and Silvester (2012).

⁴⁸ Sinclair’s film, *Flame*, is a fictional account based on true testimonies of women freedom fighters during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle.

motifs of the film is “forgive and forget.” This is, however, not so easy; as summed up by a Zimbabwean woman who survived wartime rape, “as long as her experience remains hidden, she cannot do either” (Bryce, 2005, p. 34). Sinclair stated that the film’s purpose was “to realize and remember what a fighting woman does, what that fight does to her, and how people look at her afterwards” (Muponde & Primorac, 2005, p. 35). Thus, the psychological and physical violence endured by women combatants is complicated and eludes clear-cut description or remedy.

While naturally there is no one uniform wartime experience, it is equally important to consider the psychological and emotional, as well as the physical, toll of war. Turshen (2007) describes the specialized care necessary for women when they are being treated for trauma. The reproductive capacity of women and the need to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases, for example, are issues that need to be addressed via appropriate counseling and psychological healthcare (Turshen, 2007, p. 87). Due to region-specific belief systems and contexts, wartime injury sometimes spills over into matters of psychology; thus, the physical pain endured by survivors of GBV is at times exacerbated as they face additional stigma from their communities and their families (Turshen, 2007, p. 87). These somewhat less-tangible ramifications are just as important as the more overt consequences of war.

At times, GBV during war is used in an attempt to disintegrate bonds of social capital in entire communities. This occurs when familial and friendship bonds are shattered due to the stigma and taboo that sexual violence imparts on groups of people in the communities affected (Bartels et al., 2010, p. 39). Survivors of wartime sexual assault as well as their families face social stigma due to the perceived shame of their experiences, and thus they often face the destruction of familial and community support networks. All of these factors often manifest in underreported levels of GBV during armed conflict, due to a maelstrom of complex factors survivors must face, including shame after the incidence of GBV, fears of retaliation, or losing access to status and financial remuneration (Bartels et al., 2010, p. 41; St. Germain & Dewey, 2012, p. 165).

The negative emotional ramifications of such abuse have been well documented. GBV during times of war negatively influences women’s own self-perception and sense of identity (Bradby, 2016, pp.

82–83). Equally challenging to the actual violence is the threat of violence, an ever-present reality as the deliberate transition of HIV/AIDS has been used in the past as a weapon of war (Elbe, 2002, p. 169). These and many other forms of trauma complicated women combatants' lives in the theater of war. Moreover, even after the conflict ended, women were forced to handle any lingering trauma. This challenge was further complicated by the various social complexities detailed above, such as having to seek out new networks of support if their wartime experiences had estranged them from their previous families and communities.

Family Divisions During the Struggle

Another dimension of the struggle was family separation; the war dictated that many children were separated from their parents and siblings. Families were separated for a number of reasons: parents were sent overseas for education or training, and in the case of the DDR kids, children were sent abroad for security reasons. Subsequently, many ended up being raised by people other than their parents. Alternatively, many of the people I spoke with had left Namibia when they were very young. This meant they left their parents and were raised by fellow SWAPO cadres in military camps outside of Namibia. While the love of a guardian can certainly be nurturing, it may have a different dynamic than the bond that develops among immediate family members, especially when that family is taken away suddenly, without much explanation, or with uncertainty about reunification.

It is difficult to quantify what might have been lost by having so many families divided and having many Namibian children and youth raised by guardians other than their own immediate family. Narrators in this study described the legacy of these family divides in a number of ways. Sometimes, domestic partnerships were complicated or terminated when new relationships began while in exile or the couple was otherwise separated. For the DDR kids,⁴⁹ many of them succeeded, but others struggled with homelessness, addiction, crime, or the challenges of being teenage mothers. These complicating factors

⁴⁹ For an explanation of the “DDR kids,” please refer to Chapter One.

were so great that one woman described the family structure as being “completely broken” during and after the struggle.

Beyond the phenomenon of family separation, the effect of these long-distance arrangements revealed several themes. One, many Namibians who grew up separated from their immediate families did not develop close relationships with them. In her book, Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016) too talks about how being far from her immediate family placed a strain on her familial relationships. Though she was the oldest child, she writes about how, even now, she does not share a close relationship with her siblings. Second, women voiced concerns regarding parental care and questioned whether children living with caregivers received adequate attention and nurturing.

The patterns identified by the women in this study—patterns of family separations and the pain mothers experienced, especially when they were separated from their children—to some degree echo the findings of scholars looking at cases of familial separation or long-distance parenting across the world. Other scholarship cites the benefits of temporarily separating parents and children. Poeze, Dankyi, and Mazzucato (2017) found that migrant parents have an incentive to manage the financial and communication aspects of their long-distance relationships with their children quite well. This is motivated by both altruistic and practical reasons; they are “paying in” to social networks that will likely benefit them in the future (Poeze, Dankyi, & Mazzucato, 2017). In Indonesia and the Philippines, another study indicated that children left behind when their parents moved overseas to pursue work were quite resilient and exerted agency despite one or both parents’ absences (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Similar dynamics may have played out with the long-distance parenting and temporary fostering situations discussed by the women I interviewed in Namibia. When parents were in exile, it would follow that fostering parents were apt to care for community members’ children, knowing that they too would likely need similar support in the future.

Shifts in Gender Norms

There is a clear consensus amongst scholars that gender norms shift over time during and after conflict situations (Baur & Britton, 2006; Britton, Fish, & Meintjes, 2009; Hughes, 2009; Luciak, 2006; Tripp, 2015; Zuckerman & Greenberg, 2004). This includes increased numbers of women prime ministers and other political leaders stemming from gender quotas resulting in a more equal gender representation in politics (Tripp, 2015, p. 193–200). Urdang (1979) reported that, following independence in Guinea Bissau, “the woman of today is a new woman from the woman of yesterday” (p. 237). She notes shifts in sexist attitudes and that, by the end of the armed struggle, women experienced greater equality with their male colleagues (Urdang, 1979, p. 237). West (2000) emphasizes that “female guerillas . . . in the struggle for Mozambican liberation . . . felt empowered rather than victimized by the war” (p. 180).

Another woman I interviewed for this project, whom I will refer to here as Peya, was a student activist during the struggle. When I asked her at one point if she thinks that the period of the liberation struggle changed gender relations in Namibia, her response was emphatic:

It did change . . . we cannot deny that . . . [With] the introduction of new laws and new institutions . . . that was very empowering to many women as such. And I think also for men, the new social security—the labor laws, looking at conditions of workers, and the relationship between workers and bosses. I think within the legal framework we really passed a number of progressive laws . . . I think that alone [made] people feel more empowered. Institutions like the women and child abuse center . . . became . . . popularized. Women assert themselves because there are institutions. Of course, there are other reasons why women don’t use those services—but I think that is one of the positives, one of many things that the new democratically elected government offers Namibians. And it created hope . . . there was a lot of hope in the country. (“Peya,” interview with the author, January 21, 2020)

Peya also shared her perspective regarding how Namibian history continues to affect women in the country:

We have been raised in a very abrasive society—because of the military prisons also. This affects relationships, and how we are raised. And in fact, just about every bone in our society—we haven’t spent enough resources on getting people to unlearn that. And it is also because people do not know other ways to interact than other to be violent . . . [even] discipline is done in a violent manner . . . Everything is so violent and abrasive. Even the way we treat women and talk to children . . . children begin to internalize that, as if that is the norm . . . The poverty levels in the country make it even worse, [and] the high unemployment rate. (“Peya,” interview with the author, January 21, 2020)

Peya's use of the word "abrasive" above presents a gendered analysis of interpersonal relationships in the country. She suggests that violent periods of Namibian history, including military prison, have fostered a somewhat aggressive vein in the social fabric. Peya's words also evoke accelerants to the challenging social issue of GBV and femicide that is currently plaguing Namibia. She sees society as creating a "violent and abrasive" environment where children from a young age are molded to use violence as a solution for any problem or issue.

Turning back to the realm of politics, Esther Muinjugange, introduced earlier in the dissertation, was Namibia's first female presidential candidate. In our interview, she cited several ways that gender norms are being re-shaped. For example, at an Ovaherero funeral, she asked to speak, despite traditional Ovaherero norms that would not normally give women this opportunity:

. . . at funerals is only men who are given platforms to pay homage or tribute to the departed one. So at this specific funeral . . . I decided, 'I want to say something also.' . . . in our culture, the women are inside the house. That's how they pay tribute. (Esther Muinjugange, interview with the author, January 24, 2020)

Muinjugange then went to the individual managing the funeral program and asked to be on the agenda.

When it came her time to speak, Muinjugange did not hesitate:

I stood up and I said, "I know exactly what our norms are. What the tradition says, the culture, that women are not supposed to say something here, but I really want you to listen to what I have to say. I know that you expect me to be inside there, but I cannot be there because that is also a skill that I don't know. So allow me to say something here." And I was very humble. And I think that also softened, especially the men.

I said what I wanted to say. Then after I said, everyone was like, "Thank you very much for what you said." The ladies were still saying that, "Well, you spoke very well, but it's not our culture," and so on. And that's how I started. Then I started to get involved in meetings, going to meetings, and not only being a spectator, but also started to participate. I'm happy about that because today, you go to funerals and Herero women are now coming up, and they will say what they want to say. I have been that type of person who always wanted to break through. (Esther Muinjugange, interview with the author, January 24, 2020)

Again, this example shows the ways that gender norms shift over time. Muinjugange took a risk and asked to be on the funeral program even though she knew it was "not the way things were normally done" in her community. One must notice the way she deftly handled the situation as an "insider" member of the Ovaherero community and someone who is well-known and well-respected. Rather than "bulldoze" over

the more traditional norms and expectations of an Ovaherero funeral, she managed not to alienate those present by paying homage to the norms of the situation and asking for their blessing for her to contribute in the way she was best equipped and trained to do (by speaking in the public sphere versus expressing mourning in private amongst other women). In this way, she successfully straddles the divide between respecting norms and paving the way for more rights and possibilities for women in her community. We can see the “ripple effect” in the ways that now “you go to funerals and Herero women are now coming up and they will say what they want to say.” This would likely not have happened—or would have happened much later in time—had Muinjugange not taken that risk and paved the way for rupturing one of the more traditional Ovaherero gendered norms dictating behavior at funerals.

Muinjugange has made inroads with a greater involvement and level of influence, both with women in Namibian politics as well as in shaping Ovaherero cultural norms to be more inclusive of women. Similarly, experiencing and internalizing new and different perspectives on gender was often a function of life in exile. This was revealed in an interview with Afra Schimming-Chase, who referred to the cognitive dissonance she often feels as a result of her multicultural upbringing:

[I am] half Caribbean and half Namibian [and] grew up all over the world. As Namibians, my grandmother was half Damara, half German. My grandfather was half Herero, half German . . . I don't know what tradition to follow . . . When my mom passed . . . there was this holy fire in the front—which is the Hereros. There was something else in the back, which was the Damara. I remember going to the Herero funeral, going to greet my uncle—and him greeting me back and very gently pushing me. I am like, ‘What are you doing?’ And he is like, ‘No, you are not allowed to stand here because this is for the men only!’ . . . So I think there is something to be said around what we were exposed to. We were not exposed to [Namibian] cultural and traditional norms. If you ask my sister or myself, we will both tell you that we don't feel at home [in Namibia] . . . It's a function of what have you been exposed . . . My grandfather raised his daughters to believe that they can go as far as their brothers. The flip switches when you know that you are as good as [any man]. (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019)

At work in Schimming-Chase's background and upbringing is a combination of the global perspective she gained due to her life in exile, as well the influence of her progressive grandparents and parents that did not adhere to traditional cultural norms and gendered expectations. Schimming-Chase and her sister experienced a great deal of incongruity between life in Namibia and their life in exile.

There have been extensive studies on the effects of migration on an individual's worldview as well as on family and national dynamics (Andall, 2002; Conrad, 2006; Johnsdotter, 2007). This scholarship reinforces Schimming-Chase's reflections of the tension she felt between her own worldview and that of some of the elder male members of her family. Her experience is not an isolated one; as migrants are exposed to diverse and multifaceted perspectives, their own worldview tends to expand.

In sum, the exile experience meant that many parents were abroad, lending support to the struggle from outside Namibia's borders. Additionally, many young children left Namibia to join SWAPO in exile, embarking on their own journeys to support the cause. Thus, whether it was the adults or the children, life in exile broke apart many families during the Namibian struggle. There were also many extenuating circumstances that increased the strain on families that were divided during this time. As discussed with the Schimming-Chase family above, shifts in attitude and worldview for those who left Namibia for life abroad often came into conflict with the paradigms of friends and family who had remained behind. Suspicion and lack of trust even among close friends and families created tension or even destroyed friendships and familial relationships.

Namibian History, Current Family Formations, and the Lingering Trauma of the Struggle

Julia Pauli in her 2019 book *The Decline of Marriage in Namibia: Kinship and Social Class in a Rural Community* presents an insightful analysis relevant to the discussion of marriage and familial structures. Pauli discusses marriage and family formation both from a historical and a contemporary standpoint. Especially applicable is her connection between past epochs in Namibian history and today's societal groupings and formation. She writes, for example, "The effects of apartheid and the class dynamics that started in the 1970s still permeate Fransfontein's⁵⁰ everyday life. The continuous negotiations and conflicts about ethnicity, religion, and politics can only be understood when taking the long-term effects of colonialism and apartheid into account" (Pauli, 2019, p. 118). Pauli's study focuses

⁵⁰ Fransfontein is a rural Namibian village located in the Kunene Region of Namibia, about four hours northwest of Windhoek, Namibia's capitol. Pauli's fieldwork and book project are centered around the Fransfontein community.

on the small village of Fransfontein, but her conclusions can be expanded to a much broader scope. Beyond the micro-level of Fransfontein, the entire macro-level of Namibian society continues to be affected by the past. Seeking to broaden Pauli's thesis, I reach back even further into history, before the 1970s. I assert that the various historical periods such as the Ovaherero and Nama genocide, policies such as contract labor put in place under the apartheid system, the inhumane violence and racial segregation of apartheid itself, and the geographical separation of the struggle all have abiding importance and relevance to the many layers and substrata of Namibian individual, familial, and community life.

The overarching focus of Pauli's work, however, is the changing nature of the Namibian institution of marriage (2019). Pauli discusses in great detail the definition of marriage and the dynamics of polyandry, polygamy and monogamy. She explains that while some marriages may appear monogamous from the outside, in reality, they are not monogamous institutions. Rather, individuals are engaged in multiple concurrent partnerships. Interestingly, she explores a type of "marital polygamy" in which Namibian men conduct polygamy outside of their familial homes. Whereas in traditional polygamy, a man lived with many wives in one compound or group of houses, in the modern Namibian form of polygamy, in some ethnic groups, wives have resigned themselves to their husband's "co-wives" who reside separately under another roof. Pauli describes this wide-spread pattern as having been accelerated during the contract labor system, when men were kept away from their families for the majority of the year or even for many years at a time. Contract laborers endured dangerous working conditions, poor compensation, and minimal time off. In part due to the limited work leaves granted and the significant distances required to travel between northern and southern Namibia, many men forced into the contract labor system often formed "new families" closer to the site of their work in southern Namibia while their families stayed at home in the North. Extenuating factors such as these led many men under the contract labor system to pursue an extra-marital affair.

Many of the women I interviewed affirmed the themes I found in Pauli's book. Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu confirmed the formation of "second families" when the length of the separation became protracted and partners faced uncertainty as to when they would see their spouse again:

So, that's really that aspect of family. Then you have also husbands. Husbands who left, and left their wives and children behind. After 20 years, what are you going to do? Because maybe when you are in exile you met somebody else . . . So, then you have two parallel families. (Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, interview with the author, May 29, 2021)

The work of Pauli (2019) and Amulungu's account above illustrate the shifting norms of family in Namibia and the ways that cultural shifts and pressures have changed the way marriage is approached. Amulungu's vignette above furthermore serves to illustrate the ways that families during the struggle were ruptured—at times with men forming second families.

Another source of rupture was the persistent stress and lingering trauma of being in a warzone. Even years after Namibian independence, Schimming-Chase described this as having a strong “struggle mentality.” Reflecting back, she shared with me that as a young child, she often had a sense of unease and lived with constant fear that her mother would not return from anti-apartheid meetings or events. Schimming-Chase expressed the trauma that she experienced as a child and the responsibility that she felt as the oldest child to take care of her younger brother and sister:

. . . until today, I have this very strong struggle mentality in the sense of . . . I have to take care of myself and my brother, because I don't know if mom is coming home . . . [And] I'm that way until today . . . the way I behave is, I've got to make sure everything is okay, I've got to put everything in order. It's very [much a] struggle mentality. (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019)

Apparent in Schimming-Chase's words is her lingering fear and sense of obligation that she has to take care of her brother and sister. Even more than 30 years later, the responsibility to keep her younger siblings safe still weighs on her. Schimming-Chase remembers feeling very uneasy during the struggle, especially in terms of not knowing if her mother would be safe:

So things that I saw and experienced, the things like for example my mom had to go to meetings, not knowing when she's coming back. Being anxious—seeing things like newspapers, seeing my mom at rallies, seeing my little brother with my mom at rallies, her being shot with rubber bullets—hiding people under my bed. (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019)

Schimming-Chase's experience mirrors that of many of her fellow Namibians. To a large degree, the trauma endured by Namibians during the struggle has not been addressed, healed, and processed. The continued embodiment of trauma was a theme throughout my conversations with Schimming-Chase.

Schimming-Chase's individual experiences almost universally applied at the macro-level across the interviews that I conducted for this study. Individually and collectively, Namibia is still processing the past trauma of colonialism, the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people, the forced contract labor system that divided families, and the violence of the oppressive, racist apartheid regime. Like Schimming-Chase, many people likely experience some degree of PTSD and continued "fight or flight" response to the insecurity and trauma of the past.

There are many different kinds of trauma experienced during war. Once the battles subside, the trauma of war reverberates far and wide into a post-conflict society. In Schimming-Chase's case, she shares experiencing a kind of survivor's guilt. Her reflections are echoed in the literature; numerous sources document the extreme trauma of survivor's guilt (Hartman, 2014). Schimming-Chase's experience, and the persistent "struggle mentality" that she describes as a part of her life even 30 years after independence, is another dimension of war and its related trauma.

Educational opportunities abroad also were a factor in family separations. Because SWAPO was recognized by the UN as the official representative of the Namibian liberation struggle, significant material, financial, and political support and the provision of educational scholarships were provided by allied countries. Educational scholarships for anti-apartheid strugglers from Europe, Scandinavia, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Poland, and the U.S. all made the opportunity for education available for some members of SWAPO. While a positive opportunity for those given full scholarships to gain educational training and credentials in order to become qualified to be a leader in the (anticipated) free Namibia of the future, education was a factor that kept families apart for extended periods of time.

The Enduring Impact of History on Families

The Namibian case presents a study on the importance of acknowledging and understanding how violent historical events have an enduring impact on families. While this study does not attempt to establish causality, breakdowns in family cohesion often occurred during the period of the struggle. Such

disruptions continue to have reverberations today. In part due to historical factors, family separations have become more the norm than the exception.

As has been discussed in this chapter, one notable factor in the spectrum of incidents affecting families was the contract labor system. During the apartheid era, the oppressive contract labor system demanded prolonged geographic separations amongst family members and divided Namibian families, the effects of which are still palpable today. Children often did not know their fathers, who were away on contract for years at a time, and were thus raised only by their mothers, older siblings, or other caretakers. Likely many marriages and partnerships did not survive this prolonged separation. The contract labor system was, in fact, intentionally designed by the apartheid government to disrupt and destroy families. As Gwen Lister summed it up, the contract labor system divided families, resulting in “a lot of problems . . . and [they are] purely a result of having split up those families in the early days” (Gwen Lister, interview with the author, March 11, 2020). Another way that the war molded post-war family relationships surfaced when couples were reunited after many years, or had to deal with the fallout of infidelity or other issues during prolonged separation. Pauli (2019) asserted that the forced family separations of contract labor accelerated widespread patterns of marital affairs.

In terms of the war itself, some effects were overtly physical. For example, family members passed away or were severely injured, thus permanently altering the nature of their families. Other influences of the war are related to trauma and PTSD, whether an individual experienced the harrowing event personally, or whether the memories have been passed down intergenerationally via Hirsch’s (2012) concept of post-memory. Women in particular, due to their gendered roles and often central place in their families and communities, tend to absorb societal suffering and thus are especially likely to pass along trauma and post-memories to subsequent generations (Hirsch, 2012). Namibia’s protracted war for independence kept parents apart from their children for years on end. This meant that children who grew up in the care of others without direct support and access to their parents were likely affected in various ways. Couples were kept apart for extended periods as one or both pursued education abroad or otherwise

furthered the goals of the struggle while in exile. Today, more than thirty years after independence, Namibians are still grappling with how the past has shaped family formations and intimate partnerships.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Namibian women were central to the liberation struggle, and their contributions have had enduring effects on Namibian society. Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah discussed the legacy of women's labor during the war:

We had women who were representing SWAPO at international organizations like the Pan-African Women's Organization. So when we got independence, it was difficult for one to say, 'Now women, go back to the kitchen,' when we have all been part of the struggle. So definitely . . . the struggle transcended the issue of gender equality . . . Yes—the respect for the role women play, it has lasted. In our first cabinet, we had women. Now we still have women . . . our prime minister is a woman, and her deputy is a woman. And if you look into the private sector, something that did not exist before independence, there are so many women who are serving on different boards. (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interview with author, May 11, 2020)

In her words, it is evident that the struggle created ruptures in gender norms, which did not revert to more traditional gender norms that were institutionalized before the struggle. Numerous women in the struggle took advantage of opportunities to study overseas or pursue careers outside the home. The powerful role played by women during the struggle has endured, and gender norms have been permanently altered. This phenomenon is not unique to the Namibian context. Many scholars have studied the evolving gender norms in the United States following World War II when many women were needed in factories and other roles previously filled by men because many young men were away at war (Gluck, 1987; Peck 2012; Rutherford, 2017). Globally, the shifting gender norms of women following war and conflict is a common theme (de Abreu, 2016; Horn et al., 2014; O’Gorman, 2011).

In this dissertation, I have delineated Namibian women’s place in the liberation struggle, ways that gender identities were used as a strategy of war, ways that gender norms shifted, and the enduring impacts on Namibian society. In the previous chapters, I have presented various patterns that emerged during the struggle that continue to affect Namibian women today. My work provides a more complete understanding of post-conflict societies as related to race and gender by grappling with and contributing vital knowledge regarding how war affects women’s lives, bodies, and futures. Lessons drawn from times of war have direct relevance for periods of peace. Gleaning wisdom from the past and working to counter omissions and erasures create a more complete, nuanced historical account.

This conclusion makes a number of key interventions by way of combining previous chapters. In conducting this research, I have depicted how Namibian women navigated war and recall their times as combatants. I have also outlined the ramifications of what happens when expectations of prescriptive forms of femininity chafe against realities of women's actual experiences within liberatory movements and broader realms of society. These conclusions are germane to the public memory of the anti-apartheid movement in Namibia. They also reflect a profound human urge to organize complicated pasts in line with shared ideals—national unity and identity, peace and harmony, and accessible truths and realities. As I have described, this project relies on women's oral history accounts of struggle and movement-building to challenge their erasure and to build a more peaceful, equal, and accountable country.

Namibian Women: Foundational to the Struggle

As I have outlined, despite women's frequent omission from historical accounts, women played vital roles in Namibia's fight for independence (Akawa, 2014; Cleaver & Wallace, 1990; Namhila, 2009). To this aim, I have identified three main sub-categories of roles that women played during the Namibian liberation struggle: care, combat, and leadership. After an overview of relevant Namibian history in Chapter One, Chapter Two depicts the closely interconnected roles of combat and care. These dynamics are set against a backdrop of the apartheid administration's violent system of white supremacy, that subjected Namibian women to a perilous situation of double jeopardy (King, 1988) where they were targeted not only for their ethnicity but also for their gender. Guided by Enloe's (1990) framework of militarization, I explain how it was not only the overt combat roles but also the care roles—such as teachers, social workers and nurses—that were militarized in the liberatory context.

As used here, the concept of care work is engaged as an umbrella term to encapsulate both formal and informal labor associated with care. During the struggle, women's care roles included serving as teachers, nurses, parents, social workers, and more. Friends and family members provided informal counseling as people dealt with the hardships of war and life as a refugee. Care work was also seen in women's labor in northern Namibia, where they fed, clothed, and housed freedom fighters. Care work encapsulates the creative solutions women developed, such as using the cultural norms governing the

“ondjugo.” The ondjugo is a woman’s private room as found in the homesteads of Oshivambo people. Women in the north were known to hide supplies or even freedom fighters in their ondjugo. Because many of the staff soldiers were Black men recruited by SADF from the local communities or northern Namibia, broadly speaking, these soldiers would have been hesitant to break cultural norms (Martha Ndakalako-Bannikov, personal communication with the author, April 4, 2021). Entering the ondjugo would have been taboo and would have made the soldiers feel uncomfortable (Martha Ndakalako-Bannikov, personal communication with the author, April 4, 2021). These care-oriented contributions also distill the importance of everyday life and the ways that women’s mundane, routine labor become extraordinary within the context of war.

Other factors further complicated women’s wartime experiences. The political geography of Namibia is fundamental to an analysis of the struggle because the open conflict and war was focused in northern Namibia. Thus, women residing in the north regularly became involved in the war without making any conscious or deliberate choice; rather, the political geography of the situation dictated that they were automatically cast as actors in the struggle. Another component of the war was the persistent threat of GBV. As included here and in extensive other scholarship (Akawa, 2014; Britton and Shook, 2014; Namhila, 2009), GBV was often part of the landscape that Namibian women combatants had to navigate.

Women during the struggle also participated in direct combat. As Chapter Two details, women adopted a diverse range of combat roles. PLAN fighters were front-line soldiers and combat tacticians as well as intelligence, communications, and operations officers. In these various functions, women deployed their gender identities to further objectives in the struggle, often acting as decoys or couriers who more easily evaded detection than their male colleagues. For example, women were known to smuggle supplies in their headscarves, or wrapped around their midsection, pretending to be pregnant. Another woman I spoke with shared accounts of nurses wrapping boxes of medicine on their backs, acting as though they were carrying babies or small children.

Chapter Three is dedicated to Namibian women's leadership roles in the struggle. The chapter grapples with questions of: what was it like to be a woman within SWAPO? What were some of the complexities that women in SWAPO were forced to navigate? As representative of women in SWAPO leadership, I focus on Rosa Namises and SWAPO Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. These and other women's experiences illustrate the numerous complexities and contradictions that women in leadership positions during the struggle grappled with. One such challenge was the tension between the returnee and the remainee⁵¹ communities, and the related tension between SWC and the NWV. I round out Chapter Three by discussing a number of other Namibian women leaders. These pioneers have laid the groundwork for other women to be leaders in business, politics, education, medicine, and many other sectors.

Chapter Four draws attention to other complicating factors in terms of historical ruptures and subsequent effects on families and social structures. The chapter discusses SWAPO's dominance over Namibia's commemorative landscape. This dynamic has led to friction as SWAPO's call for unity trumps efforts at reconciliation and addressing past injustices. The text discusses individuals who served the struggle while in exile, such as Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu. Amulungu grew up apart from her nuclear family and had to work hard to reacquaint herself with her siblings after the struggle. Amulungu's experience is emblematic of a broader element of familial divisions that continue to influence Namibian society. Mothers also noted the particular pain and hardship of being separated from their children during the war. The particular cases varied, whether it was a situation of children being born in exile, trauma borne of the refugee experience, or the loss due to injury or death of a family member or friend. Other times, the effects of the struggle manifest as stress, trauma, or strong emotions that have not yet been dealt with. Schimming-Chase describes this as having a "struggle mentality," characterized by an ongoing

⁵¹ As defined in Chapter Three, returnees served the struggle while in exile, and remainees contributed to the struggle while staying in Namibia throughout the war. See also Fikeni, 1992.

state of stress regarding the safety of her family, and attributes this to lingering trauma from the struggle (Afra Schimming-Chase, interview with the author, December 4, 2019).

Namibian women's historical visibility and recognition is vital for three main reasons. One, documenting women's contributions highlights the ways that women are making themselves more legible, thereby positively affecting women's social, political, and economic representation. This matters in ways that are less tangible and more difficult to measure, such as women's own confidence and sense of self, in personal and societal spheres of influence, and in the role models young people choose to emulate. It also matters in concrete terms; as of 2021, the Namibian Ministry of Veterans Affairs has not granted veterans' benefits to those who served the struggle while remaining in-country. It is possible that projects documenting women's roles within Namibia during the war will garner attention and be a tool for Namibian women to advocate for increased veterans' benefits.

Two, in a patriarchal context with rampant GBV and femicide, recognizing women's contributions in the struggle will raise these issues' visibility. To assert the importance of women's legibility, I am particularly challenged by the theoretical work of scholar Judith Butler (2004, 2010). Butler discusses the various layers of human experience, perception, and pain. Butler (2004) acknowledges physical pain, but argues that the denial of personhood or citizenship, rendering a person "unreal and impossible," is even worse (p. 35). In many ways, people's experiences during Namibian history have been denied. The Ovaherero and Nama people have not been granted a formal apology for the genocide perpetrated against them. SWAPO has also not acknowledged the spy drama. Women have frequently been silenced when they reported accounts of GBV during the struggle.

Women's omission or erasure from many historical accounts communicates a lack of societal value placed on their lives. Butler describes a vortex of dehumanization, that is adjacent to the milieu of violence I argue was created during the struggle. In Butler's analysis of violence, she defines level one as being deemed inhuman. At the second level, this dehumanization escalates to physical violence, and a

cultural acceptance of violence can occur (Butler, 2010, p. 25)⁵². Such a system of multi-tiered violence may also be at play in Namibia, a place where despite an extensive public policy framework aimed at curbing GBV and femicide, both have persisted.

In some ways, the continued prevalence of GBV in Namibian society is a continued war against women. Women claiming their visibility is one way to temper this war. This calls for a reassessment and reallocation of societal power. Therefore, the key issue deals with power structures and how those in power validate or invalidate specific populations. In Butler's words, a political life is called for, one that is lived "in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future" (2004, p. 39).

Three, women experienced the war differently than men, and thus it is inadequate to obscure and absorb their experiences into that of men. My project presents Namibian women freedom fighters in their own words, thus placing women's wartime experiences at the forefront. In a broader context, scholarship highlighting historical narratives that center women's active participation in the regional struggle reveals lessons relevant to broader theories of war and conflict, evolving societal gender norms, and changing understandings of masculinity and femininity. As Ringelheim (1998) notes, "These aspects of women's daily lives—vulnerability to rape, humiliation, sexual exchange, not to speak of pregnancy, abortion, and fear for one's children—cannot simply be universalized as true for all survivors" (p. 745). In Chapter Two, an identical sentiment was voiced by Salome Kambala of her own experience. Kambala recounted being treated equally, except when it came to the biological component of pregnancy. When she became pregnant, she was forced to retreat to a rear camp.

⁵² An example of this is the situation in the U.S. in terms of gun violence and school shootings. Butler (2010) states that certain lives are "not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level. This level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization which is already at work in the culture" (p. 25).

A Milieu of Violence

This project takes a long-term view of Namibian history and is inspired by scholars of the *longue durée*, a lens of historical studies that prioritizes the long-term view (Lee, 2018). In this project, I have incorporated the long-term events and narratives that took place in Namibia since the early 1900s, and I have analyzed them in terms of gender norms. I set out to approach Namibian history from a long-term perspective because this wide-angle lens affords a broader outlook within which to view and understand the lasting ruptures that took place in Namibian society, specifically with regard to gender norms. This study views Namibian history from German colonialism in the early twentieth century throughout the period of the struggle from the 1960s until Namibian independence in 1990. In doing so, the amalgamation of mutually-enforcing systems of power and control created during the struggle and the subsequent milieu of violence becomes apparent.

In particular, Chapter Four articulates the violent climate created in part by Namibia's protracted history of turbulent ruptures. The chapter focuses on Namibia's liberation struggle and the subsequent ways that family and social structures were ruptured. Namibian history has been punctuated by certain epochs of violence. From German colonialism, including the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people, to the violence of the apartheid and contract labor systems, these historical ruptures are significant and continue to exert control over Namibian society up to the present.

Visibility

Visibility matters for a number of reasons. It is clear that Namibian women are in the process of making themselves visible, thereby staking a claim on their representation. During the struggle, the presence of women as combatants, agents of care, and leaders was clearly evident. These strides towards increased visibility and representation have enduring reverberations into post-independence. In this dissertation, I have attempted to accompany a number of women as they share their life history narratives and thereby increase their own visibility. Rosa Namises, featured in Chapter Four, spoke especially well of this phenomenon. Namises said that while in the past, she had given interviews as an anonymous

source, she now wishes to be named and finds that using her name is an important part of asserting herself and her identity.

Visibility also matters as a tool of furthering human rights standards. For those who approach social issues via a human rights lens,⁵³ the first step to making societal change is understanding the issue; thus, as Turshen (2016) urges, the importance of documenting the wartime experiences of women is to give voice to their experiences and to weave their unique accounts of war into the broader understanding of war and conflict. As Namibian women render themselves more visible, it gives voice to their experiences, including their accounts of GBV that are often suppressed and silenced. Additionally, it highlights the vital contributions women made to the struggle, especially, as I argue here, in terms of combat, care and leadership. Finally, as I assert in Chapter Four, it also provides a deeper understanding regarding the ways that the struggle affected Namibian families, partnerships, and broader societies.

Bearing Witness: Women and Gender-Based Violence

The dissertation corroborates other accounts (Akawa, 2014; Britton and Shook, 2014; Williams, 2016) that GBV was pervasive during the struggle. Life in a military camp often meant women cadres suffered the ongoing threat of violence not only due to military attacks, but also in terms of GBV inflicted by their own cadres. This project documents women’s oral history narratives, including their testimonials of GBV, in concert with Akawa’s (2014) study. Akawa (2014) describes sexual violence during Namibian liberation as “the normalizing or invisibilizing of abuse” (p. 138). Akawa (2014) also documents the pervasive patriarchal norms as well as the normalizing force that men in the struggle wielded in order to justify the sexual assault and abuse of their women comrades. Adding these accounts to broader understandings of gender and conflict contribute to a more complete understanding of women’s experiences of war. It may also fortify systems and accountability such that GBV within the ranks of

⁵³ See Ignatieff (2001); in a discussion of human rights as politics Ignatieff asserts that “when human beings have defensible rights—when their agency as individuals is protected and enhanced—they are less likely to be abused and oppressed” (Ignatieff, 2001, p. 4).

military and revolutionary movements is lessened over time. As Turshen (2016) asserts, "The analysis of war economies is important for women and for the struggle to end sexual violence because women need to know their enemies" (p. 26).

South African scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola (2015) helps to interpret the context of sexual violence in southern Africa, a phenomenon she attributes largely to power and control: "If all men already possess patriarchal power, and can therefore choose to rape, then powerful men [gain] unfettered access to many anonymous women sexual partners" (Gqola, 2015, p. 35) and feel entitled to women's bodies. These patriarchal norms were pervasive during the struggle, and the power dynamics created a space where many women were subjected to violence and abuse—both at the hands of SADF and within their own battalions. Gqola calls for the radical transformation of the patriarchal norms that enable GBV to continue, often with impunity for perpetrators. She classifies this quest as a gender war against sexual violence, and she applies these pressures to the trajectory of southern Africa and the manifestation of GBV in contemporary societies there. As Gqola puts it, "The logic of war is so pervasive after the violent nightmare of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and structural adjustment, it is often hard to conceptualize forms of contestation uncontained by the dominion of war" (Gqola, 2017, Chapter 11, para. 12). Gqola calls for a systemic overhaul to both policy and societal norms around gender. Only with a clear-eyed assessment of the legacy of violent epochs of colonialism, genocide, and apartheid can this work begin.

"In reality, it wasn't the case...": Tensions Between the Rhetoric and the Reality of Gender Equality

As outlined in Chapter Three, SWAPO claimed to value gender equality and the role of women in the struggle. This was professed in SWAPO publications (1990), and the narrators in this project recounted SWAPO stating their commitment to Namibian women's rights. There is, however, a marked disconnect between SWAPO rhetoric and the applied reality of women on the ground. There were broad, generalized statements of a commitment to gender equality, yet there was little accountability or enforcement of such policies and declarations. Beyond public relations or image cultivation of Namibia as a progressive state, there lies a disparity between professed policies of gender equality and the troubling reality of gender inequality and deeply patriarchal norms. This emerged clearly in my conversation with

Norah Appolus about her mother, Putuse Appolus. Putuse Appolus is a well-known struggle hero; she is acknowledged as the “mother of the struggle” by many. Appolus reveals striking discord between the supposed gender equality that she and many others hoped or claimed was a firm fixture during the struggle and the reality that SWAPO and its cadres often fell short of this objective:

You see, in our struggle, our women were always equal. They went to the front; they took up arms; they were trained as the men did. And although obviously there was a preponderance towards more male leadership, that didn't exclude some of the women being in leadership positions. So we had quite a few in leadership positions, but that said, coming from Africa, being Africans, obviously girls were never equal. We would have wanted them to be equal; on paper, you know, we were equal. But in reality, it wasn't the case. No, it was skewed. (Norah Appolus, interview with author, May 22, 2020)

Appolus's contradictory statements speak to a desire for the progressive realization of gender equality as she acknowledges that these ideas often did not play out in reality. This tension between professed gender equality, often taking the form of gender-progressive policies or rhetoric, and the realities of the lived experiences of women on the ground is a central theme throughout this project. Many times, SWAPO leadership claimed to value gender equality. While positive strides have been made, as some of the women in this project attest to, there remains limited evidence that Namibia's progressive constitution or legal framework has made a practical difference on the ground for many Namibian women.

Although many times sidelined from historical accounts, women were very much present in the struggle and played vital roles in Namibia's fight for independence (Akawa 2014; Cleaver & Wallace, 1990; Namhila, 2009). Understanding Namibian women's essential functions and how they significantly impacted and shaped Namibian history carries significance for several reasons. Scholarship highlighting historical narratives that center women's active participation in the regional struggle reveals lessons that are relevant to broader theories of war and conflict, evolving societal gender norms, and changing understandings of masculinity and femininity.

Above, I have provided an overview of the main points of the dissertation. In sum, the dissertation provides three primary scholarly interventions. First, viewing Namibian history from a long-term perspective reveals the interconnected nature of power and control during the struggle that has, in turn, created a milieu of violence in Namibian society. Second, women were vital to the Namibian

liberation struggle, and Namibian women are making themselves increasingly visible. As I have documented here, women were present during the struggle as combatants, care workers, and leaders. Highlighting women's oral history narratives provides a counterpoint to patriarchal norms that undergird a context that at times manifests in GBV and even femicide. In a post-apartheid society, I contend that GBV is partially rooted in the longstanding contradictions of specific episodes of Namibian history, namely genocide and apartheid and their subsequent societal ruptures. Also, because women experience war differently than men, folding them into the experiences of men, or attempting to present a (misguided) gender-neutral account, obscures their experiences (Ringelheim, 1993).

Third, by further contextualizing women's experiences of war, including their accounts of GBV, this project contributes to systems of accountability that have the potential to lessen GBV within military and activist organizations over time. More specifically, and in line with a human rights framework, knowledge informs policy, and re-contextualizing the Namibian struggle history with women's perspectives and experiences has potential to elevate their status in society so that they will be considered when policy decisions are being made. To reiterate Turshen (2016), before changes can take place, policymakers must fully understand the issues from a variety of perspectives. In this project, that means incorporating the perspectives of women who drove the struggle forward, both those who remained in Namibia and those who were in exile. Narratives inclusive of women's experiences, both historically and currently, inform better policy decisions and incorporate women more fully into public policy. Namibia has strong legislation in place that is meant to protect women⁵⁴; greater enforcement and accountability is necessary to bring these policies to life and to make a practical difference in the lives of Namibian women. In sum, to enact positive changes, the full range of experiences of women must be more fully understood. In closing, I quote Neville Alexander, a South African scholar and activist, who wrote, "There are many different ways in which individuals' heightened historical consciousness manifests itself

⁵⁴ This includes the Namibian constitution, the Combatting Rape Act 8 of 2000, the Combatting of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003, and the National Gender Policy 2010-2020.

. . .The strategic-political and ultimately moral-historical question is how to move towards understanding without ever forgetting, but to remember without constantly rekindling the divisive passions of the past?” (Alexander, 2003, p. 111, 116). It is in this spirit that this project seeks to understand Namibian women’s experiences during the struggle in order to move forward, invoking a human rights framework that “make[s] progress to the degree that we act upon the moral intuition” (Ignatieff, 2001, p. 3).

Appendix A: Methods

Prior Work in Namibia

I served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Namibia from 2012 until 2014, and I was based in the Otjozondjupa region in a small village near Otjiwarongo. I worked as an English and computer skills teacher and also partnered with the local community on youth and community development programs and global health initiatives. This period deeply informed my interest in Namibia and southern Africa. My experience in Namibia was of benefit when I arrived in 2019 to begin my fieldwork. I found that with my existing networks, combined with additional “cold calling” of several women I identified through a literature review, it was possible to identify and speak with a number of women who were involved in the struggle in a myriad of ways.

My efforts to identify women willing to participate in my research were also augmented by Namibia’s sparse but strongly interconnected population. Namibia’s population is dispersed throughout a vast geographical region slightly larger than the U.S. state of Texas, but having one-tenth of the population of Texas, with the latest population estimates at 2.5 million residents in Namibia versus 29 million in Texas (CIA, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau 2019). Namibia’s small population means that most Namibians are connected, if loosely, with many fellow Namibians. Thus, the snowball method proved to be very effective, as often one narrator would introduce me to additional individuals to include in the project.

Namibia’s geography is challenging by virtue of its vast scope and size, with a journey from the far north to the far south of the country taking about fourteen hours. The climate is generally very hot and arid, but being a desert climate, it cools drastically at night, especially during the Namibian winter months (CIA, 2020). The vast geography set in contrast with Namibia’s sparse population also matters in terms of the sociology of the country. Most of Namibia is situated in remote, rural settings, with more than 60% of the country living in arid, desert regions. Additionally, Namibia is one of the most economically unequal countries in the world, having been designated as having one of the highest Gini coefficients in the world, ranking 127th globally with a score of 63 (UNDP, 2013). This regrettable statistic is emblematic of the

inequality of a Namibian society that continues to experience the enduring impact of apartheid and affords citizens vastly inequitable opportunities and access to resources (UNDP, 2013).

I collected data via a series of semi-structured oral history interviews with interviewees selected via “snowball sampling” (Hesse-Biber 2013, p. 316). I began with individuals I knew, and they in turn made recommendations regarding others knowledgeable on the topic. Again, the small size of Namibia’s population was beneficial, and I watched as my list of contacts increased exponentially. Everyone I spoke with had at least one other person they recommended I speak with—some had 10 or more. I eagerly followed up on these leads, and I watched as my original goal of 30 interviews was quickly surpassed. To date I have completed over 60 interviews.

Interview Location

Research participants generally chose the location of our conversations. Most of the time, I met with research participants in their homes. I found that often people felt most comfortable meeting in their own homes. Other times, I met with people in restaurants or cafes. I gave people the option of “me coming to them,” meeting in my office at the University of Namibia, or in a meeting room offered by the American Cultural Center in downtown Windhoek.

Methods

My two primary research methodologies were oral-history interviews and archival research. After I had identified people to interview as outlined above, and obtained the participants’ oral consent, I asked the narrators questions in a semi-structured interview format. I inquired about their roles, gender norms, and whether there was a gendered hierarchy during the struggle. My interview protocol is included below. I encouraged the women I worked with to share their memories or experiences from the later stages of the struggle (the 1960s until Namibian independence in 1990). I asked them what stood out most in their mind from that phase of their lives. For the women, I was interested in their perception of equality versus inequality with their male comrades during the struggle. I asked about their perception of how gender norms have shifted over time after the struggle and the changes they observed after independence in 1990.

I always concluded interviews by leaving it open for participants to add anything they wished, to discuss something that I did not specifically ask them, or to ask me about myself and my work.

During and directly following interviews, I took extensive fieldwork and research memos to document the oral history narratives. After the interviews, I followed up on any leads or suggestions the women had given me. I researched any interesting vignettes or sources that the women cited. Sometimes they would mention a book, a film, or another person whom they recommended I speak with. The interviews I conducted also helped to inform future interview questions. I identified emergent themes as my fieldwork progressed.

The project was approved by the KU Institutional Review Board. While conducting the interviews, I recorded the audio transcript of the interview and also made handwritten notes. Following completion of the interview, I transcribed the audio recordings. Original recordings and de-identified transcripts were stored on a secure KU server (RFS-C1), that is configured for confidential data. If an individual did not wish to be recorded, I took notes instead. For the audio recordings, I used both an iPhone and a Sony digital recorder (for back-up). Next, I uploaded the audio files to the secure KU server as soon as possible, in most cases within 12 hours. The audio files were then deleted from the digital recorder. Throughout the process, the interviews remained deidentified and assigned only a code, with the key to the code kept in a separate, secure location.

In terms of qualitative analysis, I coded the transcripts for themes and overall patterns of language using the qualitative data software analysis tool NVivo. The interview transcripts were coded in two stages, using first an open coding method and then an axial coding method. This means I coded first for manifest content—the “visible, surface content” (Babbie, 2015, p. 328) of the interview transcripts. During the second round of coding, I implemented an axial coding method seeking the latent, underlying content. I looked to the work of Doan and Portillo (2017), Doan (2008), and Thornberg & Charmaz (2006) to guide my qualitative data analysis process.

I conducted approximately 50 in-person interviews with research participants in Namibia between September 2019 and March 2020. The interviews were conducted in five different regions of Namibia:

Khomas, Erongo, Karas, Hardap, and Otjozondjupa. My research agenda took a significant turn in March 2020, when Fulbright evacuated all grantees back to the U.S. because of the COVID pandemic. Fortunately, I had completed six out of the planned nine months of my fieldwork and had collected enough interviews and archival research to move forward with my project as planned. From March to August of 2020, I conducted an additional 15 interviews via Skype, phone, or WhatsApp⁵⁵.

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

Namibia is linguistically complex, with more than twenty languages and dialects spoken widely. In 1990, when Namibia gained independence, English was chosen “as an official language to unite the Namibian people under one language” (Ngololo & Nekongo-Nielsen, 2017). While I have basic Afrikaans skills and am proficient in German, I was able to depend almost entirely on English for my fieldwork. All of my interviews were conducted in English. At one point, I hired a local guide to facilitate local connections and to assist with translation, but the work we did turned out not to require translation services. The ability to rely on the English language for communication with participants greatly eased the complexity of the project, at least from a linguistic perspective.

While I feel fortunate that I did not experience significant barriers, there were some small obstacles that I worked to understand and overcome. For example, some Namibians found my “American English” to be difficult to understand. I made a point of “code-switching” and speaking a version of English that is more enunciated, slower, clearer, and avoids slang. I also picked up the habit of ending many questions with “neh?”—something that has been incorporated into Namibian English from Afrikaans and has become a widely used vocalization in Namibian English. When I was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer, I felt that people understood me better when I included this verbalization of “neh?”, as it was a signal to them that I was indeed asking a question and desired a response.

⁵⁵ WhatsApp is a free, secure text messaging and call application available for free world-wide. It is “the most popular platform across Africa” (Latif Dahir, 2018).

Another challenge was the sometimes negative, lingering reverberations of precedents set by previous students or researchers in Namibia. Before embarking on my fieldwork in Namibia, a fellow scholar had warned me about the negative backlash they had observed when a scholar recently published a manuscript and cited many research participants by name. The individuals cited by name had possibly suffered backlash from people and parties with political power due to their speaking out. Due to the sensitive politics of the contested nature of memory in Namibia, I was sharply aware of the danger of such possible negative retribution toward my participants. Namibia, in contrast with many other nations, does not have a track record of overt silencing, but the powers that be may chastise or punish those who speak against them in terms of career opportunities or through diminished political or social capital. In a country with high unemployment, and where most salaried positions are in the civil service, being on the wrong side of public officials and politicians can create economic and social challenges. For that reason, I had originally planned to anonymize all of my research participants. To my surprise, the vast majority of participants actually preferred to be cited by name. This included some who were public figures, those who were already in the eyes of the media such as journalists, pundits, newspaper editors, or leaders in the NGO world, as well as those who simply preferred to have their names associated with their words. One woman I worked with, Rosa Namises, shared with me that it had become very important to her to be “out” with her name. She stated that it had become very important for her identity, her confidence, and her sense of self to claim her words rather than to live in anonymity.

I first became aware of the detrimental legacy some researchers have left in Namibia when I was initially seeking partners for affiliation letters with NGOs in Namibia. When I approached one prominent NGO, seeking affiliation, we were informed that while some past researchers had been granted affiliation with the organization, they had not followed up after their research conclusion to share research results. As so many grassroots organizations struggle with funding and the precious resource of time, some people and organizations therefore blanketly refused to meet with students or researchers, something which is definitely understandable, given such negative experiences. Another person I sought an interview with responded with the following: “Unfortunately I’m no longer in for interviews. I took that

decision some years back when numerous students contacted me, [I] made time available and sat for interviews BUT never got proper feedback from their research done on NAM or even worse was misquoted when finally received some feedback. So, please respect my decision.” These lingering effects—the fact that many organizations and individuals did not want to speak with researchers due to past negative experiences—is also a reminder of the problematic nature of higher education: too often we place our work in expensive online databases that only global “elites” at institutions of higher education can access. It was an important reminder to make my research widely accessible in open-access databases, trade publications, op-ed pieces, and other more mainstream outlets. In Namibia, the widely read and respected feminist organization and publication *Sister Namibia* is one outlet that I plan to publish in to share the results of this project. I took these accounts of negative past experience as a lesson, and I will share my work and outcomes and strive to respect participants’ time.

Generally speaking, Namibia has a rather strict stance towards granting permission to outsiders wishing to obtain a research visa to conduct research in the country. It took me approximately three months of intensive back-and-forth communication and bureaucratic navigation before my research visa was issued. Police and medical clearance are also required. The process is not clear or transparent. Without the support of local Namibian Fulbright support staff and colleagues at the University of Namibia, I doubt I would have been able to obtain the research visa. However, it was very important to me to adhere to the policies as prescribed because they are in line with the goals of the Fulbright mission, as stated in the Fulbright manual:

The Embassy is working closely with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the issuance of work and residency permits for Mission-related personnel...As part of this process, we have promised that no one associated with the Embassy, including Fulbrighters, will enter to work in Namibia without the proper visa and permits, even if this leads to a significant delay in their ability to start work. Every time one of our Fulbrighters is discovered to have entered improperly, it damages the credibility of the entire Embassy and undermines our negotiations. (2019–2020 Namibian Country Guidelines for U.S. Fulbright Scholars and Students)

The final sentence about damaging the credibility of the U.S. Embassy and the Fulbright program was a significant motivator to me to follow the policies precisely, in an effort not to cause problems for the U.S.

presence in Namibia. As a feminist scholar, it felt especially important to be sensitive to these power dynamics and the hurtful, violent, oppressive history of Namibia. I also wanted to be especially careful not to deploy any unjust racial or class privilege. I deemed it critical to follow the policies put in place by Namibian ministries and U.S. parties dictating the proper channels and procedures to obtain a research visa. Many researchers do “fly under the radar,” but I felt that it was important to respect the regulations. My conduct as a researcher, for example, could affect future researchers in Namibia.

Another sidebar regarding the research visa process came via a conversation with a consular representative from Botswana who was on staff at our Fulbright orientation to give advice. She told me that the Namibian Ministry of Home Affairs is especially reticent to grant permission to researchers conducting projects involving wildlife. Likely this is due to past abuses of such privileges, as the shrinking population of the Namibian pangolin illustrates.

In addition to the process of applying for a research visa through the Namibian Ministry of Home Affairs, which the University of Namibia graciously facilitated as my host institution, foreigners wishing to conduct research in Namibia are also required to obtain a permit from the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST). The process of obtaining the NCRST permit too was a long and expensive process, the permit itself costing approximately \$500 USD.

Positionality

My positionality as a feminist scholar requires my work to be reflexive and to take an intersectional approach. I align my work with scholars such as Chandra Mohanty (2003, 2018) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2008) who advocate for reflexivity. Inspired by Mohanty and Spivak, this project aims to be sensitive to the power dynamics of research relationships. I furthermore strive to be sensitive to the legacy of colonialism, especially in the southern African region, and my identity as a white, cisgender American. I am sensitive to the fact that I will always be somewhat of an outsider in Namibia and, therefore, consistently aim to work collaboratively and to partner with local scholars and activists.

Participant Remuneration

Feminist scholars are trained to always consider how one can give back to their research participants. My ethical review protocol as approved from the University of Kansas does not permit me to remunerate my research participants. However, I was allowed to buy lunch or a coffee or other beverage for research participants, as I did from time to time. I also reimbursed some research participants who lived far away from the Windhoek city center where we often met or for taxi fare for their return travel home. I also gave small tokens such as pens, magnets, or bookmarks from my home university, simply to honor their time, to tell them something about my life and work, and to engage them with a conversation starter.

Archival Research

In addition to my primary, oral history research methodology, I also engaged in archival research collection during my fieldwork. This component of my research included both formal and informal sources. Amongst the formal sources, I conducted extensive research at the University of Namibia (UNAM) Library and Archives, the National Archives of Namibia, the Namibia Peace Center, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), and the Namibian Scientific Society. I was also fortunate to be afforded access to the personal papers of the late Nora Schimming-Chase by her children.

My procedure in terms of archival research was to first make contact with the in-house archivists and librarians, who in all cases proved to be incredibly helpful and knowledgeable. At UNAM and the National Archives of Namibia, there were detailed and comprehensive finding aids available for most collections. Once identifying the relevant collections and documents within those collections, I placed a request with staff. As I reviewed the documents, I used a IPEVO brand model V4K ultra high-definition USB camera to take scans of germane documents. Most of the documents I identified were reports, letters or other personal correspondence, photos, books, articles, and some audio-visual video artifacts, as in the case of the NBC. While UNAM does not charge for access and photos, the National Archives of Namibia limits researchers to 20 photos per day and charges a nominal fee for these scans or photos of their materials. NBC requires researchers to lodge a request stating the desired use of the materials and then

provides a quotation as to the costs. I requested copies of several videos for approximately \$500 USD.

The relatively high cost can be attributed to the required process of converting these older video cassette tapes from the 1960s up until the 1990s to electronic format.

Sample Interview Questions

While I did not always ask all of the following questions, below are examples of some of the questions that I frequently asked to guide the oral history interviews in this project.

Personal level:

1. When did you first become aware of the Namibian independence movement?
2. What motivated or attracted you to get involved?
3. What was your role in the movement?
4. Did anyone or anything in specific encourage you to get involved in the Namibian independence movement?
5. What memories or experiences from your time involved in the struggle stand out the most in your mind?
6. What were the main differences that you noticed after Namibian gained independence in 1990?
7. From your perspective, what is your general feeling about your involvement in the liberation movement? (e.g. glad you were involved, ambivalent, etc.)
8. Looking back, is there anything that you are either very glad that you did, or things that you wish you had done differently?

Interpersonal level:

1. What were you taught about your country when you were a child?
2. How did men and women relate to each other during the independence movement?
3. What kinds of messages did your parents and other adults teach you about first the German colonial government, and later the South African apartheid regime?
4. In terms of gender relations, did you feel treated equally or unequally from the men with whom you worked? Why? Can you share any examples with me?
5. Do you feel that people in general (involved in the movement) treated each other respectfully? Why or why not?
6. Did you spend time in a military camp? If so, were men and women treated equally in the camps?
7. Did men and women listen to each other on an equal basis? Was there a “gendered hierarchy” within the camps?
8. If you had an idea or spoke up, did men (or others in general) listen to you?
9. What was the reaction of your family when they learned of your involvement in the liberation movement?
10. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to add? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix B: Maps**Map of Central and Southern Africa**

Location of Concentration Camps in Namibia, 1904-1908



Map of concentration camps in Namibia, 1904-1908. All five marked locations (Karibib, Lüderitz, Okahandja, Swakopmund, and Windhoek) were the site of concentration camps. Windhoek, the capital of Namibia is marked by a star.

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