

**Martha Akawa**

**The Gender Politics**

Introduction by Bience Gawanas

**of the Namibian**

**Liberation Struggle**

Basel Namibia Studies Series 13



Basler Afrika Bibliographien 2014

## The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle

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MARTHA AKAWA  
Preface by Bience Gawanas

# The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle

Basel Namibia Studies Series 13

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## Basel Namibia Studies Series

In 1997, *P. Schlettwein Publishing* (PSP) launched the *Basel Namibia Studies Series*. Its primary aim was to lend support to a new generation of research, scholars and readers emerging with the independence of Namibia in 1990.

Initially, the book series published crucially important doctoral theses on Namibian history. It soon expanded to include more recent political, anthropological, media and cultural history studies by Namibian scholars.

*P. Schlettwein Publishing*, as an independent publishing house, maintained the series in collaboration with the *Basler Afrika Bibliographien* (BAB), Namibia Resource Centre and Southern Africa Library in Switzerland. All share a commitment to encourage research on Africa in general and southern Africa in particular. Through the incorporation of PSP into the *Carl Schlettwein Stiftung*, the series, by then a consolidated platform for Namibian Studies and beyond, was integrated into the publishing activities of the BAB.

Academic publishing, whether from or about Namibia, remains limited. The *Basel Namibia Studies Series* continues to provide a forum for exciting scholarly work in the human and social sciences.

The editors welcome contributions. For further information, or submission of manuscripts, please contact the *Basler Afrika Bibliographien* at [www.baslerafrika.ch](http://www.baslerafrika.ch).

## Preface

In reflecting on our past, we should be concerned about the way in which we have interpreted women's participation in and contribution to society and their social realities. Men and women experience life differently not because of their biology but rather due to historical social factors, which determine the differences and obscure women's history and experiences. History has been written and interpreted by men and what has been recorded was about what men have done and experienced. But we know that women's participation has been crucial for the maintenance of our societies and for the success of the liberation struggles. In her book *Tears of Courage: Five Mothers, Five Stories, One Victory*, Ellen Namhila recounted the lives of five women and the book opened my eyes to the silence surrounding women in the liberation struggle despite their personal sacrifices and contributions to the struggle.<sup>1</sup>

We argued and rightfully so that, although women suffered triple oppression of race, class and gender, we are fighting the struggle to be human beings first and foremost and that after we achieved liberation, we will address the issues of gender equality. We argued too that African women are not passive beneficiaries of harmful customs but they fought against them in their own way. We also maintained that feminism must take into account all women's experiences, including Black women, women in the liberation struggles and those in the developing world, to ensure that feminism remains relevant and speaks to the experiences of all women. Today one wonders whether by not having addressed the gender issue and placing it firmly on the liberation agenda, women might have inadvertently been complacent in upholding the patriarchal system, which oppresses them.

In preparing this Preface, I re-read parts of the three volumes of the African Liberation Reader which I acquired during the struggle.<sup>2</sup> I referred to them whenever I was confronted with some issues or in preparing public statements. But now as I re-read them I am struck by the absence of writings on women or by women. There is clear recognition of class and race but a lack of attention to gender issues. This was simply because gender inequality was not a priority to be addressed then and that gender equality will be achieved when countries gain their independence.

Following Namibia's independence in 1990, there was a great expectation of gender equality and that women and men would enjoy respect for their human rights. Freedom

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<sup>1</sup> Namhila, E. *Tears of Courage: Five Mothers, Five Stories, One Victory*. Windhoek: AACRLS 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Bragança, A. de, Wallerstein, I. (eds). *African Liberation Reader. Documents of the national liberation movements* (3 vols). London: Zed Press 1982.

meant freedom from centuries of human rights denial which left Black people, including women, marginalized and on the fringes of society.

However, it is evident today that there remains a gap between gender equality in law as enshrined in our Constitution and equality in practices. This is because discrimination against women and their subordination is not merely the result of colonialism but, most importantly, because of the patriarchal nature of societies. For example, an understanding of patriarchal society is fundamental in dealing with issues of violence against women and the control over their bodies and their being treated as property through practices such as lobola.

The lack of writing by women and about their experiences of the struggle is to be regretted but there is an explanation for that as pointed out in the Introduction of the book on *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner:

“[T]he contradiction between women’s centrality and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition. When in that process of struggle, at certain historic moments, the contradictions in their relationship to society and to the historical process are brought into the consciousness of women, they are then correctly perceived and named as deprivations that women as a group share”.<sup>3</sup>

Martha Akawa’s book is an attempt at rewriting history and we will have issues with this book but we must read it, critique it and build a discourse on women in the liberation struggle. We should remain concerned about the fact that we did not undertake in-depth research and thereby gain an understanding and appreciation of gender relations within the liberation movement, how these are affected by various factors external and internal to the movement and of the manner in which we articulated our concerns and negotiated a place in the overall context of struggle. Rewriting history from a women’s perspective would therefore require an investigation into the specific social histories of gender relations that recognize that men are gendered social agents and that no institution can be gender blind or gender neutral. Men exert their masculinity in ways that are disadvantageous to women, no matter where and in what institutions they find themselves.

We should also admit that during the struggle a gender aware politics that questioned gender roles was not given a priority as alluded to earlier, even though we talked about it and wrote about it. The question we ask today is whether, when we wrote and talked about the role of women in the liberation struggle and attributed our oppression to the colonizers rather than our own male comrades, we believed that men and women were equal in the liberation movement. We cited the fact that we had women leaders and women commanders,

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<sup>3</sup> Lerner, G. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford University Press 1987, p.5.

but we neglected to mention that even these women suffered gender discrimination. In her memoir *Making a Difference*, Dr Libertina Amathila wrote about her role in the liberation struggle and in independent Namibia and no doubt she made a remarkable contribution to humanity.<sup>4</sup> Yet she also wrote about her struggle as a woman despite the fact that she is one of the most prominent Namibian women and leaders.

It is my contention that unless we rewrite history from a woman's perspective and by ourselves, we will not have a complete recollection of our past and be in a position to negotiate a space on the independence agenda. Martha Akawa has made us aware of this responsibility and asks of us what legacy we as women who fought in the liberation struggles will leave to future generations of women?

Advocate Bience Gawanas  
Windhoek  
20 June 2013

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<sup>4</sup> Amathila, L. *Making a Difference*. Windhoek, UNAM Press, 2012.

*SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia and the exile biography of Lydia Shaketange*



- |    |  |                           |
|----|--|---------------------------|
| 1  | Ohakadu  | 1974                      |
| 2  | Oshikango  | 1974                      |
| 3  | Ondjiva  | 1974                      |
| 4  | Sa da Bandeira (Lubango)                           | 1974                      |
| 5  | Nova Lisboa (Huambo)                               |                           |
| 6  | Chief Daniel's Village                             | 1974                      |
| 7  | Yuka   | 1974                      |
| 8  | Kalabo Hospital                                    | 1974                      |
| 9  | Old Farm   | 1974                      |
| 10 | Nyango   | 1974, 1976 (transit camp) |
| 11 | Lusaka (Airport en route to Sierra Leone)          | 1976                      |
| 12 | Sierra Leone                                       | 1977-1982 (not on map)    |
| 13 | Kwanza Sul (Luanda Airport en route to Finland/UK) | 1982/85/88 (transit camp) |
| 14 | Finland  | 1983-1985 (not on map)    |
| 15 | UK   | 1986-1988 (not on map)    |
| 16 | Ondangwa   | 1989                      |
| 17 | Ohakadu  | 1990                      |

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I am grateful to have met Anna Vögeli, who was not just a great housemate but remains a best friend. My thanks to Marcel Göhring who is great cook as well. You all made Basel a home away from home. In this case I wholeheartedly concur with the saying *Kuume koye iha monika ta valwa*.

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like to thank Delila Kalangula who transcribed some of the interviews. I am grateful for the institutional support offered by the University of Namibia. The Swapo Party Archives and Resource Centre (SPARC) allowed me to access its archives, which I appreciate and my gratitude particularly goes to Veiko Silas. I would like to take a moment to thank my informants who took time to respond to my questions and share their experiences with me. In summary, I am equally grateful to everyone who contributed in various ways to the completion of my studies. The fact that I have not mentioned your names does not in any way mean that you are less appreciated. *Waa pandula no yaka!*

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## Introduction

‘One Namibia, One Nation!’ This slogan, one of the many chants of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO of Namibia)<sup>1</sup> during the liberation struggle, called on the whole nation to come together and fight the common enemy in order to liberate the country from the yoke of apartheid. The men, the youth, the elders and the women were to form a solid team to contribute to the struggle in many ways. Calling on the nation to unite as one was a crucial point as the fractures in society were seen as being caused by the racial divisions of apartheid and the ethnic divisions of Homeland politics. Nationalism was presented as a solution – i.e. ‘Namibians’ had to unite. Although class and gender divisions were perhaps not seen as the central issue in the struggle, the rhetoric and propaganda produced by the liberation struggle did seem to give the pursuit of greater gender equality and the opening of new opportunities for women a more central role. Women joined, participated and contributed in different ways to the attainment of the liberation struggle. This book is about those women.<sup>2</sup>

After a long and bitter war, on 21 March 1990, Namibia gained its independence and a new state was born under the leadership of SWAPO and affirming the slogan ‘A people united will always emerge victorious!’<sup>3</sup> SWAPO is one of the oldest liberation movements in Namibia and in 1973 it was recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the ‘authentic’ representative of the people of Namibia.<sup>4</sup> SWAPO pronounced itself the

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<sup>1</sup> SWAPO was founded in 1960 as the South West Africa People’s Organization. With Namibia’s independence the organization re-named itself Swapo of Namibia. Today, the party is officially known as SWAPO Party of Namibia. Throughout this book I shall refer to the organization as SWAPO, or, for the period after 1990, the SWAPO party. It should be pointed out that the most common name currently in use for the party is simply Swapo.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean all Namibians fought for the liberation struggle under the umbrella of SWAPO. Various organizations emerged inside the country from the 1980s because of social and political disillusionment. Politically oriented, community-based, workers’ movements and church based organizations were in existence, such as SWAPO-D (a party of SWAPO dissidents that branched out in 1980), BRICKS, SAANSTAAN, Namibia Nationhood Programme Coordinating Committee (NNPCC), Namibian Community Cooperatives’ Alliance (NCCA), Namibia Women’s Voice (NWV). For more details see, Becker, H. *Namibian Women’s Movement 1980-1992: From colonial resistance to reconstruction*. Frankfurt: IKO, 1995. pp. 171–255. Shireen Hassim has comprehensively argued that women’s movements and mobilization arise due to various reasons, under different circumstances and take different forms, as the demands are not homogenous and do not always have the same demands. Hassim, S. *Women’s organizations and democracy in South Africa. Contesting authority*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. pp. 4–8.

<sup>3</sup> SWAPO election manifesto, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo’s struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000. p. 42.

representative of the people of Namibia and, with international support, drew up an agenda and programme to liberate the country and prepare the people for a restructured society after independence. It is against this background that this book focuses predominantly on the activities performed under the auspices of SWAPO. As SWAPO is the ruling party in independent Namibia, it gives one the leverage to weigh up whether its pronouncements during the struggle are fulfilled.

The sweeping and idealistic slogans of the struggle obscure the gendered, multifaceted and complex reality of the Namibian liberation struggle that shaped the progression and outcome of the liberation struggle and moulded gender dynamics during and after the war of liberation. Many narratives, including the 'official version' of the liberation struggle are nationalist in nature and portray a 'clean', although bitter, struggle (in terms of the challenges from the enemy, welfare issues inside Namibia and in exile, etc.) which ended in the 'we-liberated-this-country' eulogy.

The rhetorical pronouncements during the liberation struggle by the leadership of SWAPO (male and female) signalled that there was a great deal of commitment to promote and struggle for gender equality and women's emancipation. This book investigates the gendered politics surrounding the liberation struggle on issues such as gender equality and women's emancipation. The issue of gendered politics seems to have been neglected in the historiography to date as it has the potential of staining the sanitized and heroic version of the liberation struggle.

In this book the emphasis is placed on women's positions during the liberation struggle and briefly afterwards. The study attempts to highlight the roles played and contributions made by women during the liberation struggle, both those who remained in the country and those who fled into exile. Women contributed differently: they cooked, sheltered and nursed soldiers and activists; they mobilized, lobbied (nationally and internationally), raised funds, cared for the sick and the children and became soldiers themselves.

This book looks at the dual representation of women in the public arena. Women, on the one hand, were represented as active and equal participants in the liberation struggle. Images (literally and symbolically) on posters and (pro-) SWAPO publications portrayed women breaking new ground and entering traditional male roles in the name of the liberation struggle. On the other hand, women were represented as victims, as a vulnerable group in need of support and protection. Women and children were explicitly and repeatedly referred to in such cases.

As the situation in Namibia became unbearable, a substantial number of people fled abroad and were hosted by different countries. The places and camps they were offered became their temporary homes. The state of dislocation created a new environment. The situation dramatically altered 'normal' life, the social conventions associated with gender and

generational differences as new roles and identities were formed. This book will investigate the allegations of sexual abuse and issues surrounding sexuality in SWAPO camps and raise questions around the issues of gender equality and the emancipation of women. In addition, the (lack of) representation of women in the political and administrative structures of the camps and in the party generally raises doubts as to whether there was a genuine mission to liberate women. Was there merely a pronouncement and portrayal of gender equality as part of the propaganda package? I concur with Lauren Dobell who argues that SWAPO used the rhetoric of its military supporters (particularly the Soviet Union and communist states of Eastern Europe) without translating this into a deeply rooted policy commitment once it achieved power.<sup>5</sup> It seems that with gender, as with socialism, the content of public statements and publications reflects a strong sense of addressing an audience, rather than a deeply rooted ideological commitment.

Access to education was one of the areas that the apartheid state denied to most Namibians. This book looks at efforts by SWAPO to educate its cadres. In its programme SWAPO identified education as an equalizer that might allow women in particular to become part of the decision-making structures. The international community greatly helped to educate Namibians who were under the care of SWAPO. There was no observed disparity concerning access to education between men and women. However, a few aspects suggest gender discrimination in terms of the curriculum provided and the distribution of scholarships. Confrontational questions might also be asked because women's apparently equal access to education did not translate into equal access to power and the decision-making structures.

The aftermath of the war saw Namibia putting effort into restructuring the nation by reforming the law and implementing various programmes to promote gender equality in independent Namibia. However, the process is slow and in some cases, for example the perceived increase in domestic violence and 'passion killings', things seemed to be regressing instead of progressing. Before blaming frustrations and disappointment solely on the post-independence gender disparities and gendered-power relations, an analysis of the past and the dynamics and experiences of the liberation struggle might help us to better understand the post-war and current situation of women in Namibia. This book does not in any way claim to offer an all-encompassing analysis of the sexual politics of the Namibian liberation struggle. However, it is an attempt to highlight the discrepancies between the roles played by women and the contributions made by them during the war and the rewards and acknowledgement offered to them in independent Namibia.

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<sup>5</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000.

## Researching gender politics

In 1989 I was not old enough to vote in the first ever free and fair election held in Namibia. Until now I have vivid memories of how everyone was excited at the prospect of independence. When Namibians returned from exile in 1989, every day after school we congregated under a tree to listen to speeches and accounts of the liberation struggle narrated by two former exiles, Saul and Ruusa. We were taught liberation struggle songs, we *toyi-toyied*,<sup>6</sup> chanting slogans and dancing. Images of SWAPO soldiers crossing jungles, children crying helplessly after the Kassinga attack, women carrying guns and fighting the enemy were powerfully and lucidly narrated to us. We all imagined and created our own mental pictures of how 'the Struggle' might have looked.

However, it was only in 2006 whilst working with the *Posters in Action* project with the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, that I was confronted with posters of the liberation struggle. The images of women actively participating in the liberation struggle were striking. At the time I was old enough to wonder where these women were in an independent Namibia as their prominence in the posters and images did not correlate with their public visibility and representation. I then started to reflect on many issues and realized that even some of the songs we used to sing during the liberation struggle were strongly gendered. I therefore decided to pursue the subject and analysis of gender during the liberation struggle and in independent Namibia.

This is a broad and big topic. However, I decided to narrow it down and ask a few questions which might lead to an understanding of the public disappearance of the women in the posters and in the stories of 'Comrades' Saul and Ruusa. The questions I try to address in this book include: what kind of contributions did women make to the attainment of the national liberation? If they contributed as greatly as the posters proclaimed, why are their rewards and acknowledgement by an independent Namibia not equal to their contributions? If they did not contribute to the struggle, why was their representation in images of the struggle so dramatic? What factors might have led to the under representation of women during and after the struggle? I hope that by analyzing the gender politics of the liberation struggle in some depth, some of these questions will be answered.

## Structure of the book

The Introduction of the book highlights the rationale behind my choice of topic. It continues by looking at the methodology used in obtaining information and exploring the chal-

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<sup>6</sup> A dance with high steps performed by protesters accompanied by singing and chanting of slogans.

lenges that academics face, especially in the field of oral sources. It is in this section that the themes and debates surrounding the subject of women with regard to war, the military, their status in pre- and post-colonial times, sexuality, feminism and the status of women in the aftermath of the war are explored.

*Chapter One* looks at the roles played by women and their contribution towards the liberation of the country. This chapter focuses on what women did inside as well as outside the country and the various platforms they used to mobilize and lobby for support. It will show how women entered into traditionally perceived male domains and started to perform what was perceived to be male roles.

*Chapter Two* examines how women were represented in the public arena. Some women appeared in many SWAPO publications giving the impression that they were the female 'faces' of SWAPO. The chapter demonstrates how women were dually represented. On the one hand, they were represented as making a breakthrough into the male arena, as active actors in the liberation struggle, and with SWAPO shown as being fully committed to promoting gender equality and women's emancipation. On the other hand, women were presented as victims. The chapter includes examples of the publicity that was given to particular atrocities committed by the enemy and which exposed how vulnerable women were. This chapter looks at how the nation was feminized to symbolically represent women, indirectly showing how the nation and women needed men to protect and fight for them.

*Chapter Three* looks at the political structure and physical infrastructure of the camps in general. It describes the experiences of the occupants, the difficulties and challenges they faced, ranging from imminent enemy attack to a lack of basic necessities. Apart from the challenges faced, people tried to make the best out of the situation and came to regard the camps as their 'home' – to an extent that some people in independent Namibia reminisce fondly about camp life.

*Chapter Four* deals explicitly with issues of sex, sexual abuse and issues around sexuality in the SWAPO camps. This chapter explores how sexual abuse and rape were understood by SWAPO and goes on to provide insights into the different situations which made sexual abuse possible. The question of discipline and punishment is dealt with, exposing how the lack of women's representation in the party and camps' administrative structures hampered and influenced the handling of cases of abuse. This chapter ends by raising doubts regarding the extent to which SWAPO's male leadership was committed to the equality of women and argues that despite the official rhetoric of the party, women's sexuality was controlled and women were under represented in the leadership structure.

*Chapter Five* sets out to look briefly at education and training possibilities in apartheid Namibia and then extensively analyzes the alternative programmes which SWAPO implemented in order to offer educational opportunities to Namibians in exile. The chapter shows

how SWAPO tried to construct educational infrastructures in its camps and with the help of international community educated and sent its cadres to foreign countries in order to further their education. Various programmes were implemented to serve people with different needs and in different educational categories. The available evidence suggests that there was no disparity between men and women when it came to access to education, although course and study choices were often gender oriented. Access to education did not result in women accessing positions of power in the party structures, which leads to doubts as to whether access to education was enough to bring about gender equality.

*Chapter Six* offers glimpses into the situation of women in independent Namibia and tries to compare how many of the gender related promises and pronouncements about equality were kept after independence. The chapter focuses on tangible programmes that were put in place to bring about gender equality in the political, economic and social sphere. Despite these efforts it appears that the pace is slow and, in some cases, the situation seems to be regressing for various reasons.

*The Epilogue* reveals that there is a discrepancy between the contributions of women to the liberation struggle and the gains they have made in liberated Namibia. I ask the question whether the establishment of the SWAPO Women's Council did indeed emancipate women or whether it was just a tool to mobilize and lobby, and whether the gender equality pronouncements were genuinely meant or were merely part of the 'propaganda package'?

## **Methodology and notes on sources**

This section outlines the methods and processes used to collect information for this book and looks at the various sources employed. The challenges and strengths encountered in the process of collecting information and putting the study together might be one of the reasons why I have adopted certain perspectives and why I have reached those conclusions, which I present here.

### **Oral sources**

I am mindful of the debate surrounding oral sources as a historical method of retrieving information,<sup>7</sup> particularly as this was one of the main methods used to get information for this book. Of a total of 47 interviews 36 in-depth interviews were conducted between February 2008 and April 2009 in Namibia whilst three of these were conducted online. Eleven interviews were conducted in 2007 for the purpose of the *Posters in Action* project and provided useful information. Apart from these interviews, I have used information derived from personal communication and casual conversations. I conducted all interviews in

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<sup>7</sup> The debate around oral sources will be dealt with later in this chapter.

English or Oshiwambo.<sup>8</sup> Interviewees were given a choice to select the language they were most comfortable using; as a result, most of the interviewees ended switching between English and Oshiwambo.

All except one interviewee refused to be recorded, presumably due to the sensitivity of the topic. In this particular case notes were taken. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to three hours. During the interviews that were conducted solely for this book the author indicated to the interviewees that reference to the interview in the book would be anonymous. Only the date and year of the interview would be referenced; however, a list of names of interviewees will be provided at the end of this book. Due to the sensitivity of the topics, especially on the issues around sexuality, and due to social pressure and the political climate, which was tense at the time of conducting these interviews, the author believed that anonymity would encourage openness. For the sake of uniformity all interviews, including those conducted in 2007, will be referenced as anonymous.

The choice of interviewees is crucial. In 2007 when doing a literature search on SWAPO publications in the archives and library of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, I noted down the names of women who featured prominently in these publications. These were identified as some of the potential people to interview, since they were part of the leadership structure of the SWAPO Women's Council. This technique partly worked. When I returned to Namibia in 2008, tracing some of these women became a challenge as some had changed their surnames and some are no longer public figures. I then asked a colleague and a family friend (both formerly in exile) to help me to identify suitable people for interviews. When I started collecting data, I always asked the interviewees to direct me to others whom they thought I should talk to. I was very much aware of the possibility that this signposting might lead towards a particular and possibly skewed point of view. However, after a number of interviews and the varied responses that I got, I ruled out the possibility of bias. Eventually, I interviewed different people who held a range of positions in society such as ministers, deputy ministers, permanent secretaries, civil servants, and people employed in the private sector or parastatals, nurses, soldiers and also unemployed members of the community. Most of these people are former exiles and lived in SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia.

The interview environments were cordial. There was never a time during which I felt unwelcome and the interviewees showed a lot of interest in the topic and were willing to talk openly. I did not pay or offer my interviewees any gifts. Some interviewees even felt honored as no one had ever previously spoken to them about their experiences of the liberation struggle since their return to Namibia. Most of the interviewees were astonished by the fact that, according to them 'a young Namibian' was interested in the history of the

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<sup>8</sup> Not all interviewees were Oshiwambo-speaking and in that case, the only option was English.



country – they expected all historians to be old and grey haired. They were willing to share their experiences with me, the more so as when they had previously given interviews these had only been to non-Namibians. Most indicated that if I ever wanted to have another interview, a follow up or one on any other subject, I would be welcome to do so. There were a few times when I requested an interview, but people declined, citing time constraints. Of all the people, women and men, who agreed to be interviewed, only two people withdrew at the last minute, also citing time constraints. Before conducting the interviews, all interviewees were given a copy of my guiding questions, the description of the research objectives and a letter showing my affiliations to the University of Basel and the University of Namibia.

Other issues were the generational gap, my gender (female) and the sensitivity of some sections of the interview. In the culture of a predominantly Oshiwambo-speaking community in northern Namibia in which I grew up, the subject of sex and sexuality is surrounded by secrecy and taboos. It is unusual to ask questions around this topic and even more threatening when these types of questions are asked by a female and, for that matter, by a female who is younger than the interviewee. All of my interviewees were older than I was. One aspect noted whilst collecting the data, especially from some people who had been in exile was their interest in knowing whether I had been in exile; they asked in which camp I grew up in or who my mother was. Some assumed that my interest in the topic must have arisen from having lived in the camps. Indeed, perhaps the fact that I had not been not in exile, which made me an 'outsider', might have also had an effect on the responses I received.

As a researcher, I am aware that this investigation might evoke hostility or trigger reactions that might not necessarily be positive. Some of the issues dealt with in the book might be unwelcome to some people. The book might even be viewed as undermining or disrespectful of the aura surrounding the liberation struggle; however, these are mere speculations. It is also possible that twenty-three years after the end of the liberation struggle (and given the strong influence that the perceived history of the war has on current policy), people will be happy to read a thorough and analytical historical account of the experience of women in exile.

### **Primary sources**

A large number of SWAPO's publications are scattered all over the world. Initially I accessed the SWAPO collection at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in Switzerland. The collection has materials from and about SWAPO dating from as early as 1966. This includes many SWAPO periodicals such as *The Combatant*, *Information and Comment*, *Information Bulletin*, *Namibian Youth*, *Namibian Woman*, *Namibia News*, in addition to SWAPO's policy documents and speeches delivered at various platforms. These publications are valuable in studying the history of SWAPO. However, one has to be aware of the context in which they

were written that is the context of the liberation struggle, a violent and hard fought conflict. The content and standpoint of these publications were part of the national liberation movement discourse. They had specific audiences and they utilized a specific vocabulary to appropriately present themselves and to facilitate international funding and sympathy.

BAB also houses a collection of posters and foreign-based SWAPO supporters' news coverage, such as those from the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) and the Namibia Support Committee which produced several widely distributed newsletters, for example *Action on Namibia*. Although these foreign-based newsletters did not have access to first-hand information, it is very clear that they were trying to expose the effects which Apartheid had on the people and to uncover the atrocities committed by the South African army. SWAPO and pro-SWAPO publications were not produced or distributed in Namibia and possessing them was banned and dangerous.

I used the Katjavivi and Tjitendero collections housed at the University of Namibia's Archives (UNAM). Although both collections were very useful, they are poorly catalogued and going through the material is difficult. A colleague who spent time at the United Nations Archives in New York in August 2008, managed to obtain copies of a selection of relevant documents from that archive. Most of these materials deal with education and training in exile.

The SWAPO Party Archives and Resource Centre (SPARC) in Windhoek was officially inaugurated in November 2007 and declared open to the public. However, accessing this archive is cumbersome. One is required to write a letter motivating why one should be allowed to use the centre; this then has to be approved by the Board of the archives. Finally, if one is granted permission, access to the information is strictly controlled. A researcher must, literally, sit with an archivist who holds the computer mouse and decides which files can be opened and can be viewed by the researcher and what is still regarded as classified information – in these cases, the archivist must close the page immediately. As if this were not enough, the only materials available to researchers are those already digitized. Digitization of materials is done at random, which makes it impossible to systematically follow-up and cross-reference. However, once the archive is properly opened, currently it is more symbolic, this would be the best place to start reconstructing the history of the liberation struggle.

## **Secondary Sources**

Literature about the liberation struggle of Namibia emerged before and after independence, focusing either on the history of the struggle for independence or on specific themes. Some are nationalist in nature, others are more critical of the liberation struggle. There have been books focusing particularly on Namibian women, analyzing their participation in the liberation struggle or simply presenting the brutal face of political oppression of the war by

focusing on what women were forced to go through during the war. Autobiographical and biographical writing has made an attempt to show the personal experiences of those who fought while in exile as well as of those who remained inside the country. The Namibian historiography fits within a wider genre of histories of 'liberation movements' for other countries in southern Africa, such as those of Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

## Themes and debates

### Oral sources

The methodology used to examine oral sources for the purpose of writing history has provoked discussion and sparked energetic debate for decades. The skepticism and dissatisfaction expressed by different schools of thoughts and various critics of oral sources are based on many factors: Oral sources do not fit comfortably into a model of analysis that assumes fixed (written) texts which remain unchanged (although their meanings might shift) because originals and copies are stored and physically archived. In contrast, oral sources are temporal and temporary, short-lived 'performances' as Elizabeth Tonkin argues and their narratives have to be situated in a particular time and space and, if recorded, reviewed as having been directed by a particular individual narrator at a certain historical moment to a specific audience. This has exposed historical meanings to be fragile and to depend on physical sites and social contingencies. The oral testimonies produced, transmitted and received within a given context have meanings only in that context.<sup>9</sup>

Critics also challenged the question of the chronological reconstruction of the past, citing the individualist proclivities of the narrators and the pressures (political, social, and economic) affecting the narrators at the time of the narration. Debates have examined the notions of actors and historical actions. Some critics have felt that actors and historical actions were only the medium through which fundamental values were expressed and that their narratives about the past could not be relied on to reconstruct the history, as they were simply expressing eternal values of particular cultural regions and therefore their narratives would be meaningless as indicators of particular histories.<sup>10</sup>

The supporters of the use of oral sources as a legitimate historical method defend it by producing work based on the method and redefining both the actors and the scope of

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<sup>9</sup> Newbury, D. Contradictions at the heart of the canon: Jan Vansina and the debate over oral historiography in Africa, 1960-1985. *History in Africa*, vol. 24, 2007. pp. 216–219; Tonkin, E. *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history*. University of Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 223; cf. Tonkin, E. *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history*. University of Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1992; Stoll, D. *Rigoberta Menchú and the story of all poor Guatemalans*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999.

historical inquiry. Some even produce 'guiding principles and techniques' to be taken into consideration when dealing with oral sources.

Jan Vansina, a renowned scholar of oral sources, emphasized the importance of a critical awareness of the character of memory, context and recitation; underlining the fact that oral sources move beyond formal recitation and that a narrative might change over time.<sup>11</sup> He further acknowledged the effects the present might have on the past and warned that researchers have to bear in mind (as Tonkin has also concluded) that human beings are social beings and, hence, the construction of history is a social process influenced by a social present.<sup>12</sup>

David Henige, who on some points criticizes the work of Vansina, concurs that "respectable history could actually be gleaned from mouths rather than pages and those who did it were respectable historians."<sup>13</sup> In his work *Oral tradition as a means of reconstructing the past*, he offered a 'user's guide' on interviewing and collecting techniques.<sup>14</sup> Henige engages with the intricacies of conducting interviews with the help of interpreters who play a crucial role of 'make or break' in the process and outcome of the narrative. The issue of transmitting the message between the interviewer and the interviewee and the effect the presence of the interpreter might have are highlighted.<sup>15</sup> He further deals with the impact that might result from paying the interviewee in whatever form (money or in kind) and the constraints of time and money that a researcher might be faced with. He looks at the complexities involved in group and individual interviews; whether the presence of some people in the group might make other participants uncomfortable or that some might take the lead and speak for others; the presence of tape recorders and the ways of asking the right questions in the best way possible are also listed as being crucial factors to consider.<sup>16</sup> Henige cautions the researcher to look at oral sources in theatrical terms, "human beings are always performing."<sup>17</sup> Whether in one-on-one situations or group interviews, narrators share and shape the narratives.

A good example that exposes the peril of oral history is David Stoll's work *Rigoberta Menchú and the story of all poor Guatemalans*. When Stoll conducted his research about Menchú for his 1999 book, he was confronted with many mismatches between what he found in the government documents, reports, land claims, the interviews with local neigh-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 226.

<sup>12</sup> Tonkin, E. *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history*. University of Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1992. p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Henige, D. Oral tradition as a means of reconstructing the past. In: Phillips, J. E. (Ed). *Writing African History*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005. p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> There are many types of these monographs.

<sup>15</sup> Henige, Oral tradition, 2005, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p. 179.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p. 180.

bors, former friends and enemies and the biography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, compiled by the anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in 1983. Stoll discovered that in the story narrated to Burgos-Debray, Menchú changed some elements of her life, revised some prewar experiences, appropriated other peoples' experiences and included them in her story and modified some parts of her story to fit the image of how terribly civilians suffered during the war. Stoll admits that Menchú's story is not entirely a hoax and yet his book is a warning that academics working with oral history as a source of information should be cautious of the many pitfalls that surround the discipline and to observe a crucial code of behaviour in order to limit the drawbacks.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that oral history as a discipline is constrained by limitations, it must be encouraging to the historians that, if they are able to collect data under ideal circumstances, oral sources can produce reliable outcomes and can be a potential guide to reconstructing the past.

### **Women and the war of liberation**

There are a substantial number of publications highlighting the role of women during war and its effect on them, either their active participation in the war as combatants, spies, providers of food, information etc. or as they unintentionally were drawn into the conflict and became victims of rape or forced into prostitution. However, women were further subordinated as the war remained a male preserve as men made decisions and the power struggle was mainly between men. Studies focusing on the discourse of women and the war of liberation are numerous. Various authors have investigated different themes, posed questions, examined different periods of the war and implemented numerous theories to excavate and understand women's experiences of war. Jeanne Vickers in her book, *Women and War*, highlights the crucial issues encompassing the impact of war on women, providing an overview of the experiences of women in wars, the problem of rape, uprootedness, vulnerability and the issue of structural violence.<sup>19</sup> Caroline Allison's testimony-based book, *It's like holding the keys to your own jail*, is filled with the testimonies of Namibian women who, at the time of publication, were experiencing the war at its peak and who explained how they were experiencing the war at first hand.<sup>20</sup> Marion Wallace and T. Cleaver in their extensive research in Namibia towards the end of the war revealed the difficult situations in which women lived and wondered how the women survived the brutal war.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stoll, D. *Rigoberta Menchú and the story of all poor Guatemalans*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Vickers J. *Women and war*. London: Zed Books, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Allison, C. *It's like holding keys to your own jail*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

<sup>21</sup> Wallace, M & Cleaver, T. *Namibia. Women in war*. London: Zed Books, 1990.

During war women often become the targets of gendered violence, which mainly takes the form of sexual abuse and rape. Different issues of 'gendered punishment' including rape, sexual torture and sexual slavery are analyzed to inform a discussion on how and why women become victims of sexual violence, from the enemy and from their own comrades. Sheila Meintjes and Beth Goldblatt have revealed gruesome testimonies of gendered torture directed towards South African women activists. Their work also disclosed that violence towards women was not just perpetrated by men but that women too inflicted torture towards fellow women,<sup>22</sup> sharply contradicting the binary of women as pacifiers and peacekeepers versus men as being violent. In almost all wars, regardless of the length and the degree of the conflict or whether it had been a civil war or international conflict involving other nations, women have been victims of gendered violence. Amina Mama attributed the genealogy of violence to the violent social and cultural milieu of warfare witnessed (mainly) by men and the social and economic difficulties that force women to tolerate the abuse. She extends her explanation to the discourse of African nationalism and the prevalent notion of colonialism's legacy of 'humiliated men' and the need to recover the damaged manhood of men.<sup>23</sup> She argues that this explains how and why women become victims of gendered violence, most especially in refugee settlements.

However, apart from women being branded as 'vulnerable, without protection and victims of the war many a time' women, during the armed conflicts, have challenged the old beliefs and 'binary stereotype of active males/passive females.' In some cases, women actively and consciously took part in the armed conflict. The edited volume *Victims, Actors or Perpetrators* shows how women were either directly involved in actual combat as soldiers or indirectly supported the activities of the war. They offered material and ideological support to the cause of the war. Because of the 'passive female' belief about women's roles in war, women are mostly stereotypically regarded as non-violent and peacemakers. However, women have taken part as suicide bombers, conducted reconnaissance missions and fought as soldiers.<sup>24</sup> However, contrary to that, in the nationalist ideologies, women were dually represented as 'new woman' breaking through the colonial and patriarchal oppression as well as 'mothers of the nation, the beauty that graced the homes and the gentleness that soothes men's tempers.'<sup>25</sup> Yuval-Davis in *Gender and Nation* examines the

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<sup>22</sup> Meintjes, S & Goldblatt, B. 'A gender perspective on violence during the struggle against apartheid'. In: Bornman et al (Eds). *Violence in South Africa. A variety of perspectives*. Pretoria: HSRC, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Mama, A. 'Sheroes and villains. Conceptualizing colonial and contemporary violence against women in Africa'. In: Alexander, M. J. & Mohanty, C. T. (Eds). *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies and democratic futures. Thinking gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Moser, C and Clark F. *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Mama, A. *Sheroes and Villains*, 1997, p. 55.

discourse of gender and nationhood and the ways in which gender relations affect and are affected by national projects and processes, such as nationalism and nationalist undertakings.<sup>26</sup>

In the situation of war women do not just become victims, perpetrators or actors. Codou Bop unearthed how, sometimes, the wars turn out to be a blessing in disguise. In the absence of men, women become aware of what they can do for the survival of their families and communities and, instead of remaining dependent, women become providers.<sup>27</sup> Apart from the agency of day-to-day strategies that women devise to survive war, women also actively participate and insert themselves in the public political domain and claim their space. Shireen Hassim has shown that during the liberation struggle women in the ANC started debates about their roles in politics and demanded structural transformations in order to acknowledge and grant them equal rights in the political struggle.<sup>28</sup>

### Women and the military

The military is socially constructed as a male arena and women 'serve with' or get 'attached to' but never became part of the military or armed forces. Hence there is a strong relationship between gender and militarism, which mostly inclines towards masculinity. Indeed, most of the literature that focuses on the military and the war in Namibia concentrates on men as the main role players. This is particularly visible in the stream of books produced on the subject in the last decade.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to this view, Cock in her book, *Women and the Military*, identifies sexism and feminism as two grounds on which women get excluded from the war. On sexism, women get excluded because of their 'physical' inferiority and unsuitability to fight. On feminism, women are regarded as natural born nurturers, unable to kill, pacifiers and peacemakers. This leaves war as an activity for men, the hunters and killers, and the military as a male-dominated and controlled institution.<sup>30</sup> Although there

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<sup>26</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. *Gender and Nation*. London: SAGE Publications, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Bop, C. 'Women in conflicts, their gains and losses'. In: Meintjes et al. *The aftermath. Women in post-conflict transformation*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Hassim, S. *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin Press, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Recently a number of books and memoirs written by men who were involved in the war of liberation/border war have emerged. The former South African Defence Force has produced more than former PLAN soldiers. cf. Korff, G. *19 with a bullet: A South African Paratrooper in Angola*. Durban: Just Done Productions Publishing, 2009; Thompson, J. H. *An unpopular war: From Afkak to Bosbefok. Voices of South African Servicemen*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006; Steenkamp, W. *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola, 1975-1980*. Durban: Just Done Productions Publishing, 2006; Stiff, P. *The Covert War: Koevoet operations in Namibia, 1979-1989*. Johannesburg: Galago Publishing, 2005; Nathanael, K. *A journey to exile: The story of a Namibian freedom fighter*. Aberystwyth: Sosiumi Press, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Cock, J. *Women and the military: Implications for demilitarisation in the 1990s in South Africa. Gender and Society*. Vol. 8. No.2. (June 1994) pp. 152-169.

is evidence that women were soldiers and took part in combat in the liberation wars in southern Africa, in most cases they played secondary and auxiliary roles.<sup>31</sup> For instance under apartheid, white women contributed much towards the SADF (South African Defence Force) yet their roles were either closely related to that of the traditional mother, or they were feminized in their military roles. The domesticated role of white women in the military in southern Africa has a long history. The Afrikaner nationalist ideology of 'volksmoeder' (mother of the nation) has existed since the turn of the century.<sup>32</sup> Cock illustrated how white women contributed materially and ideologically to the militarization of South Africa. They socialized young men into a strong, aggressive masculinity by reproducing ideological gender roles that linked masculinity to militarism. They provided material support through the Southern Cross Fund, collected money that was used for humanitarian purposes and recreational facilities. Members of the Southern Cross visited hospitalized soldiers. Women served behind the lines and kept the 'fire at home burning.' In the absence of husbands who were soldiers in the war zones, their wives had the responsibility to support them, maintain the house and uplift the status of the soldiers.<sup>33</sup>

In the South African Defence Force, women who got directly involved in the military were not involved in physical combat. There was a strict sexual division of labour. Women were mainly involved in telecommunications, cartography and administration. Instruction in the use of cosmetics was an important part of the curriculum; this was emphasized in order to present a positive image of women in uniform. This preserved the ideology of gender roles by maintaining the traditional image of femininity despite serving in the army.<sup>34</sup> The main idea was to make sure that war and the military remained a male institution.

Few women in the SADF or the forces of the liberation movement, such as MK (the armed wing of the ANC), achieved positions of authority.<sup>35</sup> A common perception is that heroism in the military is associated with actual involvement in combat and pulling of the trigger as liberation was often presented as coming from 'the barrel of the gun.'<sup>36</sup> It does

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<sup>31</sup> Lyons, T. *Guns and Guerrilla girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle*. Asmara: Africa World Press, 2004; Nhongo-Simbanegavi, J. *For better or worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle*. Harare: Weaver Press, 2000; West, H.G. Girls with guns: Narrating the experience of War of Frelimo's female detachment. *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 4. (October 2000) pp. 180-194; Shikola, T. 'We left our shoes behind'. In: Turshen et al (Eds) *What women do during the war*. London: Zed Books, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Becker, H. *Namibian Women's Movement 1980 to 1992: From Anti-colonial resistance to reconstruction*. Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Cock, J. *Women and the military*, 1994. Cock, J. & Nathan, L. (Eds) *War and Society: The militarisation of South Africa*. Cape Town: David Phillip, 1989.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Heroes Acre in Namibia and Zimbabwe is filled with male heroes. Far more males than females are decorated with the heroes' medals that are presented annually on Heroes' day in Namibia.



not come as a surprise, therefore, that the majority of the military historiography focuses on men who were involved in combat and reduces women to statistics and footnotes.

Although the military remains a man's field, Harry West's study on the female guerillas in Mozambique shows that female guerillas contributed significantly during the civil war that ended in 1992. Due to their ideological commitment to the cause of the war, the female guerillas felt empowered rather than victimized.<sup>37</sup> Mady Segal's argument is that public discourse shapes the military institution; she presents a systematic theory/model that explains the degree and nature of participation of women in the armed forces. The theory has three variables, i.e. the military, the social structure and culture. Firstly, the level of the military threat influences the level of participation, e.g. the higher the threat the more likely women will get involved. Secondly, with reference to the social structure, when the supply of men does not meet the demand for military roles, women get drawn in. Lastly, if the conflict affects a society that supports gender equality, even if the threat to national security is low, it will include women in the army.<sup>38</sup>

### **The roles and status of African women in pre- and colonial societies**

The role and status of African women in pre-colonial and colonial Africa is important to this study because it highlights how pre-colonial and colonial legacies shaped the experiences of women during and after the liberation struggle. The question of the role and status of women in African pre-colonial societies became the subject of debate as to whether men subordinated women or whether this oppression only came about with the arrival of missionaries and colonialism.

Sudarkasa is of the opinion that the status of women in indigenous African societies was misunderstood and, hence, misinterpreted. Westerners who studied pre-colonial societies brought their own understanding of the status of women, which was influenced and based on the western idea and position of women in their own societies. She argued that a favourable position for women in a particular society might not be favourable in another. She continued that there is no best indicator or key variable that will yield an overall assessment of the status of women relative to men.<sup>39</sup> Sudarkasa argues that women throughout history held high positions; they were queen mothers, queen sisters, chiefs, warriors and holders of offices.<sup>40</sup> Women in West Africa, for instance, operated powerful trade and craft guilds. They

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<sup>37</sup> West, H.G. Girls with guns: Narrating the experience of war of Frelimo's female detachment. *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 4. (September 2000), pp. 180–194.

<sup>38</sup> Segal, M.W. Women's military's role cross-nationally. Past, present and future. *Gender and society*, vol. 9, no. 6 (1995). pp. 757–775.

<sup>39</sup> Sudarkasa, N. The status of women in indigenous African societies. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 12. No. 1 (Spring 1986) pp. 91–103.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*: p. 91.

spoke on matters of taxation and the maintenance of public facilities and they testified on their own behalf in any court or at hearings.<sup>41</sup>

Quinta has singled out what she distinguished as 'The outstanding women of Africa.' These women occupied prominent spaces in the histories of their respective countries/communities and provided inspiration to their own as well as to later generations of women. The examples given include Queen Cleopatra of Egypt (c. 69–30 BC), who has been contested as having been white (Greek) and Queen Nzinga of Ndongo in Angola (c. 1581–1663) who became a legend of her time when she resisted the Portuguese slavers and colonizers. Yaa Asantewa of the Asante (c.1840/60 – 1921) another famous female leader was determined to fight the British and summon the men under her to wage war against the Europeans. She was quoted as having said that if the men of Asante were going to behave like cowards and not fight they should exchange their loincloths for her underwear. Akyaawa Yikwan of the Asante was described as "a woman of masculine spirit, a woman of valor."<sup>42</sup> Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana (c. 1863–1898) of Zimbabwe was a spirit medium who, in 1896, was the only woman among the leadership of a military campaign, the Chimurenga, to drive out the British. Accordingly, the war of liberation in Zimbabwe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century became known as 'the Second Chimurenga.' Nehanda was executed in 1898, accused of the murder of a native commissioner. She died defying and denouncing the British and apparently her dying words were, "My bones will rise again"<sup>43</sup> evidently predicting the second Chimurenga. Nehanda became a legend of her time and a personality that was praised by the people of Zimbabwe. During the first ZANU (PF) Women's League, conference in 1984, Nehanda was fondly remembered as a renowned heroine who gallantly resisted colonial rule.<sup>44</sup> She is referred to as 'Mbuya Nehanda', the grandmother of present day Zimbabwe. Many women during the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe used Nehanda as their combat name. The maternity section of Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare is named after her and she is symbolically buried at Heroes Acre in Zimbabwe.

Similarly, Sweetman has compiled the biographies of what he called 'Women leaders in African History'. These women had political and spiritual powers. He identified the likes of Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, Amina of Hausaland, Yaa Asantewa of Asante, Nzinga of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid: p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> Quinta, C. 'Outstanding African women in Quinta' (Ed) *Women in Southern Africa*. New York: Allison & Busby 1987; Obeng, P. 'Gendered nationalism' in Lindsay et al (Eds). In: *Men and masculinities in modern Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> www.blackhistorypages.net; Quinta, C. Outstanding African women in Quinta, C. (Ed). In: *Women in Southern Africa*. New York: Allison & Busby Ltd, 1987; Vera, Y. *Nehanda*. Harare: Baobab books, 1993.

<sup>44</sup> ZANU (PF), *Speeches and documents of first ZANU (PF) women's league conference*. (ZANU(PF) women's league, Harare: Department of Information and Publicity, 1984. p. 23.

Matumba, Nehanda of Zimbabwe among others.<sup>45</sup> Although the book has been criticized as of 'limited value' and 'giving credit where it is not due' or that it has 'a patronizing attitude',<sup>46</sup> there is no doubt that Sweetman has tried to fill the gap in the historiography of 'her story' and highlighted the roles and status of women in pre-colonial Africa. Before the wars of liberation, women in different parts of Africa resisted colonialism and waged wars, thus emphasizing that it was not unheard of for women to wage and participate in wars and that their participation in wars of liberation is not sentimentalized.

However, it should not be thought that all African women 'controlled their own worlds'<sup>47</sup> until the missionaries and colonialism disrupted the all-equal equation between African men and women. Kinsman has uncovered the fact that Tswana women in the pre-colonial era were regarded as minors; men had to represent them in courts and legal transactions and they were physically excluded from participation in public political debates. She argues that 'women were taught to mind their work and leave the words to the men' and they were expected to be obedient to their husbands and elders; otherwise they were subjected to violent reprimands and social chastisement if they did not behave accordingly.<sup>48</sup> The subordination could not only be blamed on men; girls were brought up and socialized to rationalize the material and ideological factors that yoked them to the position of subordination and inhibited them from transforming their worlds.<sup>49</sup>

The situation of women did, however, worsen with the coming of missionaries and colonialism. These forces, together with local male elites, were very ready to collaborate and subordinate women further when the situation benefited them. They negotiated and conspired in the creation and implementation of customary laws. Schmidt revealed that in Zimbabwe between 1890 and 1939, the missionaries, the colonial state and the African patriarchs negotiated and contested the status and roles of women.<sup>50</sup> Initially the missionaries and colonial state encouraged a degree of female emancipation, especially regarding child-pledging

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<sup>45</sup> Sweetman, D. *Women leaders in African History*. London: Heinemann, 1984.

<sup>46</sup> Schimidt, E. Untitled review. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 1986); Robertson, C. Untitled review, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1986).

<sup>47</sup> Sudarkasa, N. The status of women in indigenous African societies. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 1986) pp. 91–103.

<sup>48</sup> Kinsman, M. 'Beasts of Burden': The Subordination of Southern Tsana women, ca. 1800–1840. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1. Special issue on women in Southern Africa (Oct. 1983), pp. 39–54.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Schmidt, E. Negotiated spaces and contested terrain: Men, women and the law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1939. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Dec. 1990) pp. 622–648; cf. Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J. *Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa*. *American Ethnologists*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), pp. 1–22; Simelane, H. S. The state, chiefs and the control of female migration in colonial Swaziland, c.1930s–1950s. *Journal of African History*, vol. 45, 2004, pp. 103–124.

and in reaction to forced marriages and polygamy, and they also set limitations to bride payments. This, however, emasculated the indigenous authority structures, which at the time were vital to the European mining and agricultural capital.<sup>51</sup> For the first three decades of colonial rule, African women and girls took advantage of colonial legislation and challenged their fathers, husbands and guardians on issues of forced marriage, polygamy etc. As the men gradually lost their grip in controlling women, female emancipation posed a threat to African Authority. The colonial state realized that in order to maintain peace and stability in the colony, they had to keep African men happy. The colonial state noted that 'dangerous ground would be trodden, unless we have the support of 'the natives' (men) as 'without that support, the whole indirect rule system would be in danger.'<sup>52</sup> To pacify the African patriarchs and in order to maintain law and order in the colonial system, the state had to invalidate the legislation they had passed and which African men were unhappy about.

The colonial state consulted local 'legal experts', unquestionably these were chiefs, headmen and male elders to create customary laws, which kept the natives 'happy' and, at the same time, promoted the agendas of the official state. The missionaries, whose roles were ambivalent and ambiguous, supported some of the colonial laws. African men were required to marry one wife only and had to pay an annual tax for every wife after the first wife. That was a great benefit to the state in terms of tax revenue and to the missionaries who complained about the bigamous practices of their backsliding converts. However, the same missionaries welcomed African women who fled from forced marriages and housed them at mission stations with the purpose of converting them into nuns and Christians.<sup>53</sup>

Amidst all this, women were not just passive spectators, watching as their lives and lifestyles were twisted and altered. In pre- and early colonial days, African women used 'traditional techniques' to mount resistance, such as transgressions of gender. Women wore men's trousers and engaged in warlike behaviour and transgressed gender norms by exposing their private parts in public to respond to issues that threatened their social, cultural, religious, economic or political views. Some of the methods have been revived or modified.<sup>54</sup> Various studies show how women resisted and rebelled; they undermined patriarchal authority and ignored the laws of the colonial authority. Women refused forced marriages, left rural areas, and settled in urban areas such as mining towns, despite the restrictions of the colonial state and protests from the patriarchal authorities. The subordination of African

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<sup>51</sup> Schmidt, *Negotiated spaces and contested terrain*, 1990: p. 623.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 627.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*. For more on the ambiguity of missionaries, cf. Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), pp. 1–22.

<sup>54</sup> Tripp et al (Eds) *African women's movements. Transforming political landscapes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. cf. Van Allen, J. Sitting on a man: Colonialism and the lost political institutions of Ibo women. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. no. 2. Pp. 165–181.

women did not, however, magically disappear with the liberation of their countries from colonialism as the struggle for the total liberation of women continues.

### **Female bodies: Sites of violence**

During wartime women and their sexuality are treated symbolically. Whilst during conflict violence is directed towards everybody, brutality to the body is consciously gendered. This is to be understood as a simple argument that gendered violence is directed at both men and women, but it is consciously directed at specific parts of the body depending on the gender. The abuse of peoples' bodies was an abuse of power, as it often took place as a perverse display of power.

Cynthia Cockburn argues that women and men are tortured and abused differently because of the different meanings – culturally and religiously – ascribed to the male and female body.<sup>55</sup> Women are mainly violated in a specific way, namely sexually. Their sexuality is brought to the fore, and they are figuratively reminded that they are women. The bodies of women become political signs and territories. With a woman's body given a symbolic role – that of the nation – the violation and brutalization of women is turned into a national shame and cultural disgrace.<sup>56</sup>

There are various reasons used to justify why women become targeted victims of sexual abuse during conflicts. Joanna de Berry reveals that gendered violence during war is committed because of the social relationships, structures and strategies in operation. Rape humiliates enemy women and breaks their spirit; a message is sent to men that they are too weak to protect their women and their national pride and cultural honour is affected. The male defeat leaves a big dent in their pride as this portrays them as useless. Another explanation is that gang rapes enhance soldierly solidarity through male bonding whilst another is that sexual abuse is viewed as a form of booty; violence against women parallels victory.<sup>57</sup>

In the event of war, other factors leave women more exposed to the risk of sexual abuse. De Berry has identified a number of factors that make women vulnerable during conflicts. Women find themselves without the protection of their relatives. The absence of men increases their sense of insecurity and puts women in a vulnerable position; they can get abducted from their homes, be systematically raped or they can be violated in the 'safety'

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<sup>55</sup> Cockburn, C. The continuum of violence: A gender perspective on war and peace. In: Giles, W. & Hyndman, J. (Eds). *Sites of violence: Gender and conflict zones*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004, p.36.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> de Berry J. The sexual vulnerability of adolescent girls during civil war in Teso, Uganda. In: Boyden, J. & de Berry, J.(Ed). *Children and youth on the frontline. Ethnography, armed conflict and displacement*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004.

of their homes. Men might be out fighting, have been killed during the war or have been detained. Whilst women might have either fled their homes or decided to stay, the risk of being abused sexually is not minimized. Women who flee their homes and find themselves in refugee camps and settlements, ironically 'looking for protection', might find themselves victims of the many men present in the camp.<sup>58</sup>

Lynos and Nhongo-Simbanegavi identify other factors that made women victims of sexual exploitation, especially in the situation of refugee settlements. For example, the scarcity of basic resources in the refugee camps/settlements (such as food and toiletries) lure women into entering into relationships with men. Women were often informed that in order to survive the hardships of the camps, they needed to 'behave well' towards the officers.<sup>59</sup> A female ex-combatant in Zimbabwe confirmed this: "When no one has eaten for three days, a commander might have food and offers it to you. After having eaten, it is a privilege and hence you are obliged to have sex with him."<sup>60</sup> Apart from rape, women were subjected to other forms of sexual harassment. They were made to undress in front of male guards in order to be searched. Body searches included vaginal examinations, breasts were pulled, water sprayed in the uterus and fallopian tubes, and they received electric shocks on their nipples. Women were made to go to the toilet while the guards were watching them and derogatory remarks were made.<sup>61</sup> However, as indicated earlier, men and children also suffer gendered violence though it is not within the scope of this study to address this field.

### **A comparative glance at the question of sexual abuse and sexuality in the situation of war**

The issue of sexual abuse has been documented wherever there has been war.<sup>62</sup> In Mozambique, during the civil war (1976 to 1992) women recounted horrifying tales of their experiences at the hands of the soldiers. Young and old women talked of the gruesome experience of being raped in front of their husbands and children as they were beaten if

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For better or worse*, 2000, pp. 62-63.

<sup>60</sup> Lyons, T. *Guns and guerrilla girls: Women in Zimbabwean liberation struggle*. Asmara: Africa World Press, 2004. p. 256.

<sup>61</sup> Federation of Transvaal women. *A woman's place is in the struggle*. Africa Fund, 1988; cf. Meintjes, S. & Goldblatt, B. A gender perspective on violence during the struggle against apartheid. In: Wentzel et al (Eds). *Violence in South Africa. A variety of perspectives*. Pretoria: HSRC, 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Lorentzen, L. A. & Turpin, J. (Eds). *The women and war reader*. New York & London: New York University Press, 1998; Niarchos, C. N. Women, war and rape: Challenges facing the international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 17, 1995. pp 649-690; Brownmiller, S. *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993; Stiglmayer, A. (Ed). *Mass rape: The war against women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

they refused sexual advances. They were 'violated without any pity.'<sup>63</sup> The civil war in Sudan changed the livelihood and day-to-day experiences of women in that country. Women were taken as war booty and were turned into 'slaves'. Women were raped to show the enemy that they were defeated and could not even take care of their women. Overall, women became victims simply because they were women.<sup>64</sup> In Uganda, women narrated stories of how the Lord's Resistance Army captured them from their villages and took them to become sex slaves in their bases.<sup>65</sup>

In the article 'Favours to give and consenting victims', Twagiramanya and Turshen investigated how, during the civil war in Rwanda 1990–1993, all men from both sides of the war treated women badly. They brushed off the general oversimplified belief that the war featured the 'evil Hutu versus the good Tutsi'. Hutu men violated and raped Hutu and Tutsi women and Tutsi men violated and raped Tutsi and Hutu women. The issue of ethnic cleansing was very common during this war whilst women were raped, gang raped, decapitated and subjected to other violent crimes. Women were forced to cohabit with men that were not their partners and kept as 'wives'. Women were forced to 'give favours' in the form of sex if they wanted anything, for example, if they wanted to visit their relatives in jail or when they wanted to claim their property back. In other instances, young girls and women offered themselves to the soldiers to congratulate them for their victory. It was established that this congratulatory token was not always consensual. Women were compelled to offer themselves or else they would be accused of collaborating with the enemy. The punishment for not 'offering' could mean jail. In the end, these 'consenting victims' had no choice but to offer themselves.<sup>66</sup>

In Chad, during the civil war of 1979–1982, women were the victims of rape and harassment according to numerous accounts. The range of the age of victims varied. The older women were traumatized more intensely since, traditionally, it would be unheard of for a young man to have sexual intercourse with an older woman.<sup>67</sup>

What was happening during the Zimbabwean war of liberation was similar to what was happening in the Namibian war of liberation: both liberation movements were based in foreign countries and people lived in camps (initially both movements shared a common base in Tanzania). The Zimbabweans were housed in Mozambique and the Namibians were

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<sup>63</sup> De Abreu, A. 'Mozambican women experiencing violence'. In: Turshen, M & Twagiramariya, C.(Eds). *What women do in wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Abdel, H. A. 'Attack with a friendly attack'. In: Turshen, M & Twagiramariya, C.(Eds). *What women do in wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 1998.

<sup>65</sup> de Berry, *The sexual vulnerability of adolescent girls*, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Twagiramanya, C. and Turshen, M. 'Favours' to give and consenting victims: The sexual politics of survival in Rwanda. In: Turshen, M & Twagiramariya, C.(Eds). *What women do in wartime*, 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Women's commission of the Human league of Chad. Women denounce their treatment in Chad. In: Turshen, M & Twagiramariya, C.(Eds). *What women do in wartime*, 1998.

taken in mainly by Zambia and Angola. Nhongo-Simbanegavi argues that in the guerrilla camps of ZANLA, women were exposed to sexual harassment. Senior officers would use force, including beatings to get young girls to sleep with them. Senior females in the barracks at times collaborated with the male counterparts in handing over young girls.<sup>68</sup> This means that those who had power could sometimes abuse it, despite the high profile rhetoric of the liberation movement about the importance of gender equality and women's rights. The new recruits were at risk of being exploited due to the apparent lack of awareness or effective enforcement of the party's official policy on sexual relationships. New recruits were preferred because they were always in good physical condition and their skin was fair due to skin lightening creams, compared to those who had been in the camps for some time and who were perceived to have skin diseases and, possibly, sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>69</sup>

Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi shows how female officers could also occasionally expose men in the ZANLA refugee camps to sexual abuse. However, the difference between female and male victims was that male victims could denounce and embarrass the female officers without fear of victimization, unlike the female victims. In cases like that women traded their power and dignity for sex.<sup>70</sup>

When the question of rape was debated in Zimbabwe after independence, especially after the film *Flame* sparked a public discussion, there were different reactions. The war veterans, mainly men, denied that there had been any rape or sexual exploitation. Some argued that the film was a misrepresentation of the war as the 'war was not about love'.<sup>71</sup> They were accused of trying to sanitize the story of the war to suit their immediate needs. However, some women spoke out. A female ex-combatant reiterated that 'she was raped and that is the truth. A society that denies that truth cannot develop or move forward. We must accept the truth and show what happened'.<sup>72</sup> Even during the recent 2008 crisis in Zimbabwe, after the allegations of election rigging, allegedly systematic rape and sexual abuse by the ZANU (PF) supporters was used as a technique to silence women who supported the opposition party, MDC.<sup>73</sup>

### **Camp experiences: Inclusions and exclusions**

After the wars of national liberation in Southern Africa, a range of literature has emerged reflecting on the experiences of the former exiles. These have been presented as autobiographies, biographies or sound bites derived from interviews in academic literature. This section

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<sup>68</sup> Nhongo-Simbanegavi, J. *For better or worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle*. Harare: Weaver Press, 2000. pp 62–63.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>70</sup> Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For better or worse*, 2000. p. 64.

<sup>71</sup> Lyons, *Guns and guerrilla girls*, 2004, pp. 258–9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 264.

<sup>73</sup> Youth jailed for raping MDC supporter. 26/10/08. Available at [www.thezimbabwetimes.com](http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com). Accessed 25/10/09.



will briefly examine the type of women's experiences that are included or excluded in these publications. The examples will be drawn from the people who belonged to various liberation movements in Southern Africa. The former exiles cannot be put in one category as they did not all have the same exile experiences. Their reflections might be influenced by various factors, including the liberation movement they belonged to; the particular camp that they lived in and their status, i.e. ordinary occupants, leaders, soldiers, alleged dissidents/spies, women, men. This proves the premise that the reconstruction of the past is a social process.

The autobiographies of Ellen Namhila and Lydia Shaketange, two former Namibian women exiles, describe their experiences in various SWAPO camps in Angola, Zambia and other countries they visited for study. Their narratives of life in the camps give an idea of a community that lived there together, men women and children. They positioned themselves in exile in terms of the roles they played as a teacher and nurse respectively. The themes they presented centre on being away from home, the anxiety of imminent attacks and the monotony of life in the camps. Their narratives express a sense of family, of comradeship and belonging. There is no mention of factions, rebellions in which they or others might have been involved, or any abuse of power by the leadership.<sup>74</sup>

Nathanael Keshii, a former fighter of PLAN (the People's Liberation Army of Namibia), the military wing of SWAPO, left Namibia for exile in 1974. A few years after he arrived in exile he became part of a faction that tried to challenge the leadership of SWAPO on various issues. As a result, he and other members of the faction were detained and imprisoned by SWAPO. Those who survived were released in 1978 and most of them chose to be relocated to the Nordic Countries. Nathanael's narrative includes men and women, starting with the days of mobilization inside Namibia, their journey into exile and their detention. He remembered how on their first night of arrival in a camp, some women were taken by the men in the leadership as 'good-time-girls', an issue that angered many of the male arrivals as they immediately lost their girlfriends to the leaders. He talked of women being sexually abused as the struggle progressed, how some women had to sell their bodies to survive the hardship of the camps and how some of the men were sent to the battle fronts and never returned because some men in the leadership had their eyes on their women.<sup>75</sup>

Letlapa Mphahlele's autobiography provides a good introduction to one man's personal experience of life in the camps of a southern African liberation movement, the Pan Africanist Congress, (PAC). Mphahlele first arrived in Botswana where he joined a camp as

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<sup>74</sup> Namhila, E. *The price of freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997; Shaketange, L. *Walking the Boeing 707*, Windhoek: AACRLS, 2008. This perspective taken by the two authors appears to be too nationalist (although this is not to imply that they did not experience the difficulties and challenges of the camp life) which overshadows the harsh life of the camps.

<sup>75</sup> Nathanael, K. P. *A journey to exile: The story of a Namibian freedom fighter*. Aberstwyth: Sosiumi Press, 2002.

a representative of the Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC). He later became a member of the PAC in various other camps in Botswana and Tanzania. His story revolves around his experiences and those of the few comrades. He painted a sanitized image of the camps, giving the impression that all people were treated equally – even leaders queued to get food and sometimes they ate from the same plates. Mphahlele’s narrative gave the impression that the PAC had no women and children in the camps. He referred to a few women whom he met, none of them from the camps. His relationship with the PAC leadership was cordial until he returned to South Africa before independence.<sup>76</sup> Even some academic work has failed to touch on the presence of women in the camps to highlight the gender dynamics. For example, Kwandiwe Kondlo traces the history of PAC from its establishment to its life in exile until the independence of South Africa without any substantial reference to the role of women.<sup>77</sup>

Mwezi Twala left South Africa in 1975 to join the African National Congress (ANC) and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC. Twala took readers on his journey into exile to the USSR where he went for military training and back to various ANC camps. The first women to appear in his narrative after he left home were the Russian women that he fondly remembered as “very attractive and friendly,” except for their “spinster” trainee who initially appeared as a ‘tough cookie’ although later they realized that “her bark was worse than her bite.”<sup>78</sup> Twala and some members of the ANC accused of organizing a mutiny, were detained, and moved from one camp to another as prisoners of the ANC. In his narrative, women appear again at the infamous Quatro camp/prison. He talked of how brutal prison life was and how isolated they were. The only time they met or heard any ANC women was at the health centre or when they heard them screaming when the guards raped them. Among the guards, were ANC women, who Twala recalls were the cruellest, especially the young ones. Apart from these minor hints, women are mainly absent from his narrative.

Paul Trehwela’s *Inside Quatro* is critical of both the ANC and SWAPO camps in exile. Although his work shows mainly how the leadership of ANC and SWAPO dealt with the disloyal mutineers and alleged spies who infiltrated the movements in exile, Trehwela focuses in general on what men went through in the two movements and only briefly discusses what alleged women spies went through at the hands of SWAPO. The two women whose testimonies Trehwela uses were accused of being agents of the enemy and they were “searched internally” because the main accusations against women was that they were sup-

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<sup>76</sup> Mphahlele, L. *Child of this soil: My life as a freedom fighter*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Kondlo, K. *In the twilight of the revolution. The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa): 1959-1994*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Twala, M and Bernard, E. Mbokodo. *Inside MK: Mwezi Twala – A soldier*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1994, pp. 18–19.

posed to be carrying poisoned blades in their private parts.<sup>79</sup> Although the male prisoners were inhumanly treated, their punishments mainly comprised of hard labour, which included cutting down trees, pushing drums of water uphill etc. Without generalizing too much, this shows that the treatment was gendered and stereotypically focused on the body (sexuality and physical strength).

For this section, it was imperative to focus on biographies as the details of individuals are brought to the fore as this reveals many details that might have been overshadowed in the more general account of a book.

### **Feminism vs. liberation/emancipation of women in African national liberation movements**

The debate on what constitutes western feminism and third world feminism or emancipation of women is not new. Feminism is branded by some Third World women as having been initiated by white, middle-class western women whose main concern was against gender discrimination; hence it was a struggle against sexism.<sup>80</sup> Some Third World women challenged the concept of a feminism that was based on cultural imperialism and its narrowness in defining gender only in terms of racism and class.<sup>81</sup>

In response to the limited definition of feminism some Third World women chose not to use the term feminism. Some Afro-Americans writers avoided the term feminism choosing in preference the term womanism or womanist.<sup>82</sup> Third World women and women in African National Liberation Movements (NLM), disregarded the term feminism because of issues such as hegemony, extreme individualism, militant opposition to patriarchy, its perceived hostility towards males, its failure to recognize the different historical experiences of black women compared to white women and its aggressiveness towards their cultural values and struggle for freedom as black women.<sup>83</sup> Other issues causing tension between the Third and First World as to what constituted feminism, was its foci and goals. During the United Nations Conferences for Women in Mexico (1975) and Copenhagen (1980), Third World women sought to broaden the agenda and consider feminism as a political movement connected as much to the struggle for liberation and autonomy of their communit-

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<sup>79</sup> Trehwela, P. *Inside Quatro. Uncovering the history of the ANC and SWAPO*. Auckland Park: Jacan Media, 2009, p. 148.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson-Odim, C. 'Third women and feminism'. In: Mohanty, C. T. et al (Eds). *Third women and the politics of gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p.315.

<sup>81</sup> Mohanty, C. 'Introduction'. In: Mohanty, C. T. et al (Eds). *Third women and the politics of gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. p.7.

<sup>82</sup> Johnson-Odim, C. 'Third women and feminism', 1991, p. 315.

<sup>83</sup> Mikell, G. African feminism: Toward a new politics of representation. *Feminist studies*, Vol. 21, no. 2, 1995. pp.405–424; Roberts, P. Feminism in Africa: Feminism and Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 27/28, 1983, pp. 175–184.

ies as to gender discrimination. However, Western feminists reacted by maintaining that 'politics should be kept out of women's issues,'<sup>84</sup> a stance opposed by anti-feminists. They saw women's advancement as highly political aimed partly for justice at the household, local, national and international levels. They believed that their oppression was linked not solely, nor even primarily, to gender alone and identified imperialism as the main enemy.<sup>85</sup> Imperialism encompassed not only the redistribution of resources but also their generation and control. Imperialism did not just deny equal opportunities between men and women but also the creation of opportunities. Therefore, gender oppression was not the only stand on which 'feminism' should be based in Africa, as it was not limited to achieving equal treatment for women in relation to men. Third World women could accept the concept of feminism if it went beyond gender-specificity to include all things that oppressed women in Africa, whether based on class, race, and sex or because of imperialism.<sup>86</sup>

A Namibian gender expert and a former exile emphasized that during the Namibian liberation struggle, they embraced the concept of the liberation and emancipation of women, which was in line with Pan-Africanism. The Pan-African ideal encompasses the knowledge and better understanding of Africa's past and present social, political, economic and cultural realities, which form the basis of social transformation. Pan-Africanism is concerned with the history of exploitation, oppression, and marginalization, as well as the struggles and resistance of the people of Africa. The spheres of inequality and conflict in society that includes class, race, ethnicity and gender have to be addressed. The concept of feminism caused confusion and was understood or misunderstood in Third World countries as a product of western capitalism. The women of the West were from foreign cultures and, it was feared, would divert African women from their cultural, religious and family responsibilities in traditional society.<sup>87</sup>

### **The aftermath: Women after the liberation struggle**

"The fruits of the struggle are not for women," concludes Gisela Geisler observing the situation of women in Southern Africa after nationalist movements had achieved victory in the liberation struggle.<sup>88</sup> The gains that women secured during the liberation struggle, or promises that were made to women during the struggle were not always maintained and at

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<sup>84</sup> Johnson-Odim, 'Third World women and feminism', 1991, p. 317.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp. 319–320.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 321.

<sup>87</sup> Interview 12/08/2008 (a); Ahikire, J. 'Locating gender studies in Pan -African ideal: A Reflection on progress and possibilities in Uganda'. In: *Gender activism and studies in Africa*, Dakar: CODES-RIA, 2004, pp. 54–65.

<sup>88</sup> Giesler, G. *Women and the remaking of politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating autonomy, incorporation and representation*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2004, p.60.

times were never kept.<sup>89</sup> It is believed that there was a tendency to return to the pre-conflict *status quo* promoted by men, which implied enforcing patriarchal social structures. After independence, for instance in Zambia, women registered their disappointment that “after independence the comradeship which existed between men and women during the struggle ended after the power transfer and women were supposed to hand over public roles and go back to traditional roles as mothers and wives.”<sup>90</sup> In independent Zimbabwe, women are described as “airport women” a reference to the image of “. . . women singing and chanting songs at the airport, wrapped in party colours welcoming dignitaries off the edge of the red carpet.” Four years after independence in Zimbabwe, the ZANU Women’s League complained about major areas of gender inequality that were still untouched and wanted to know what the government was waiting for, because the party’s policies during the liberation struggle had indicated that they would take a favourable position on women’s issues.<sup>91</sup>

However, as Heike Becker has indicated, after the war not all was lost for all women. In Namibia since independence there has been a redefinition of gendered traditional politics and women have become part of the public forums from which they were excluded during the colonial era. The government of Namibia has developed new policies that promote gender equality.<sup>92</sup> Becker’s assessment was made two years after Namibia’s independence when most of the ‘redefinition of gendered politics’ was only on paper.

Some observations have gone further and claimed that the gains made by women and the new roles acquired by women have become a threat to some men, especially at the household level. Men feel excluded when their economic responsibilities to their wives are relinquished. After the end of the war, former soldiers were demobilized and they had no alternative models of masculinity to militarized masculinity to draw upon. Soldiers with no skills and no opportunities became frustrated and angry. This was expressed by some ex-soldiers into violence against women at a family level, or even towards strangers. No attempt was made by the state to provide counselling to ex-combatants or address the possible links between their wartime experience and social violence, even though ex-combatants were viewed as a politically influential constituency. Even twenty years after the end of the war, women’s bodies remain battlefields.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Bop, C. ‘Women in conflicts, Their gains and losses’. In: Meintjes, S. et al (Eds). *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*. New York: Zed Books, 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Giesler, Women and the making, 2004, p.61.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>92</sup> Becker, H. ‘We want women to be given an equal chance: Post-independence rural politics in Northern Namibia’. In: Meintjes, S. et al (Eds). *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*. New York: Zed Books, 2001. pp.240–1.

<sup>93</sup> Meintjes, S. ‘The aftermath: Women in post-war reconstruction’. *Agenda*, No. 43, 2000, pp. 4–10.

## Chapter One

**“There can be no national liberation without the full participation of women”<sup>1</sup>:**

### **The Role and Position of Women in the Liberation Struggle**

This chapter focuses on the roles played and contributions made by women to the Namibian liberation struggle. The emphasis in the first section of the chapter will be placed on what women inside the country did and their political environment. It will look at the incidents that are marked as the being the milestones of colonial resistance and the liberation struggle and how women featured in them as their anticipated role and representation in the liberation struggle would have been shaped by their involvement, or lack of it, in earlier phases of anti-colonial resistance. The second part of the chapter will look at what women in exile did under the leadership of SWAPO and SWAPO Women’s Council (SWC), given the fact that SWC could operate in the absence of colonial suppression.<sup>2</sup>

The historiography of early colonial resistance is male dominated, with women only acknowledged as having played secondary and domestic roles.<sup>3</sup> There is no information and evidence, which shows the involvement of women in early colonial resistance to match the level of leaders like Mandume Ndemufayo, Hendrik Witbooi, Nehale Iya Mpingana and others. The icons of the early colonial resistance that are officially recognized at Heroes Acre in Windhoek are mainly men. At Heroes Acre, there are two types of burial sites. The symbolic graves (of people buried somewhere else but represented by means of a symbolic grave) and those where a body is actually buried at Heroes Acre. Out of fourteen people buried at Heroes Acre, only two are women. Getrude Kandanga–Hilukilua is buried here and Kakurukaze Mungunda has a symbolic grave (these female icons of the liberation struggle will be discussed in greater detail later in the book).

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Ida Jimmy, a leader of SWC during a rally to mobilize and raise consciousness among women’. *Action on Namibia*. Winter 1988.

<sup>2</sup> As indicated in Chapter one, SWAPO was not the only body to mobilize women. There were other organizations (political or non-political). However, this book focuses only on the roles played by SWAPO.

<sup>3</sup> On early colonial resistance, cf. Katjavivi, Peter. *A History of resistance in Namibia*. Paris: UNESCO Press, 1988.; Emmett, A. *Popular resistance and the roots of nationalism in Namibia, 1915–1966*. Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999.; SWAPO. *To be born a nation*: London: Zed Press, 1981.

This can be explained by the fact that women did not hold any public and leadership positions in colonial Namibia.<sup>4</sup> The decisions to wage wars were made by men. Before colonialism, a substantial number of women held leadership positions, especially in the Okavango and Owambo areas, but that changed especially as the colonial state deemed them too weak to control people to the benefit of the colonial project.<sup>5</sup> However, the colonial state schemed with the local elites, who were mainly men, and ousted women leaders. The idea of women ruling men did not fit the early 20<sup>th</sup> century gender perception of white males. Women were assumed feeble and, it was believed, would not put enough force into maintaining law and order in the community to the benefit of the colonial administration.<sup>6</sup> In some cases the colonialists did not even concur with the male elite and forcibly meddled in the question of 'rightful succession' to crown a successor who would be an ally to them. A prominent example of this was the colonial intervention in the succession dispute between Samuel Maharero and Nikodemus Kavikuna in the 1890s.<sup>7</sup>

There were a number of significant incidents that sometimes led to armed confrontation between the local population and the colonial administrations (German or South African), resulting eventually in the launch of the national resistance and armed struggle.<sup>8</sup> One of those incidents is the 1904–1908 war involving the local population against the Germans,<sup>9</sup> which resulted in genocide and the loss of livelihood after the locals were defeated. Although narratives of the war portray men conducting the armed fighting, women played crucial roles too. They stood behind men, shouting and mobilizing. They carried the wounded and the dead off the battlefield.<sup>10</sup> During this war the Herero leadership decided that German

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<sup>4</sup> Becker, H. *Namibian Women's movement 1980 to 1992*. Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Becker, H. Making tradition: A historical perspective on gender in Namibia. In: La Font, et al (Eds). *Unravelling taboos: Gender and sexuality in Namibia*. Windhoek: LAC, 2004 p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 27.

<sup>7</sup> Dreschler, H. *Let us die fighting. The struggle of the Herero and Nama against German imperialism (1884-1915)*. London: Zed Press, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> There were a number of incidents that have led to the picking up of arms in the late 1960s. It is not within the scope of this book to dwell on them mainly because the role played by women is not always highlighted, hence it becomes hard to place and position women in them. However, it is worth acknowledging the impact they had on the nationalist history. The resistance of King Mandume Ndemufayo, 1917; The Bondelswarts Rebellion of 1922, the deposing of King Iipumbu Tshilongo, 1932. For more detail, cf. Emmett, T. *Popular resistance and roots of nationalism in Namibia, 1915–1966*. Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999; Katjavivi, P. *A history of resistance in Namibia*. London: James Currey, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the 1904–1908 war, cf. Dreschler, H. *Let us die fighting. The struggle of the Herero and Nama against German imperialism (1884-1915)*. London: Zed Press, 1980; Gewalt, J.B. *Herero Heroes*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999; Pool, G. *Samuel Maharero*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Becker, *Namibian Women's movement 1980 to 1992*, 1993, p. 121.

women and children were to be spared; only German men were regarded as their enemy.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the infamous extermination order of General Lothar Van Trotha ordered that every Herero, with or without a gun, men, women and children, should be shot.<sup>12</sup>

What is noticeable during this war was the stance that the Germans took regarding women. In the extermination order, Herero women were not to be spared. Women and children were incarcerated in the concentration camps. There were five concentration camps in Namibia at the time and the death rate was estimated at 45.2%. Women were not spared the diseases, forced labour, physical maltreatment, sexual abuse, inadequate food, clothing and lack of medical attention.<sup>13</sup> The German administration not only imprisoned the carriers of the guns (men) but also the entire civil population who supported and sustained them.

Another crucial event in Namibian history in which women were actively involved was the resistance to forced removal from the Old Location to a location known as Katutura, outside Windhoek. Incidents of 'civil disobedience' preceded the climax of events on the 10 December 1959. On 4 December, hundreds of women marched to the municipality of Windhoek protesting the imminent removal. The following day, they boycotted the municipal services, municipal buses and the beer hall. On 10 December, some people were arrested at the Old Location, after which a crowd gathered to protest. Police reinforcements were called and fired shots into the crowd. Eleven people were killed and fifty-four injured. A woman named Kakurukaze Mungunda was shot dead after setting the superintendent's car on fire.<sup>14</sup> Since then there was no turning back for women. The day marked the beginning of women's involvement in the resistance to colonialism. It was henceforth commemorated as Women's Day.

The following year, in 1960, SWAPO was formed. A few women are known to have been present at the formation of the movement. Otilie Abrahams was part of the team that formed the SWAPO branch in Cape Town in April 1960.<sup>15</sup> However, many leading male nationalists left Namibia for Dar es Salaam fearing the mass arrests that followed the 1959 massacre and the formation of SWAPO. In early 1960 SWAPO had activists stationed countrywide to mobilize the people such as Andimba Toivo ja Toivo, Kaxumba kaNdola, Ben

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Erichsen, C.W. *The Angel of death has descended violently on them: Concentration camps and prisoners-of-war in Namibia, 1904–1908*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> For more on concentration camps in Namibia, cf. Erichsen, C.W. *The Angel of death has descended violently on them: Concentration camps and prisoners-of-war in Namibia, 1904–1908*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Katjavivi, P. 'The rise of nationalism in Namibia and its international dimensions'. (PhD Thesis, St. Antony's College, 1986) pp. 138–143.

<sup>15</sup> Colin, L. & Brown, S. *Living through the liberation struggle*. London: The Merlin Press, 2005, p. 143.



Amathila, Simon Kaukungua, Nathanel Maxwilili among others. SWAPO also had offices throughout the country.<sup>16</sup>

In northern Namibia, people were aware of the politics and oppression of the white man. News of the mobilization activities and campaigning of people like Kaxumba kaNdola and Andimba Toivo ja Toivo in the early 1960s must have reached the men and women in the villages, even those who had never visited the Police Zone. By the time the armed struggle was launched in 1966, people were aware of politics; even the children who had no idea what politics was had heard of the word and imagined that politics was something dangerous because they saw people being arrested 'for talking politics.'<sup>17</sup> Crucial to this situation was the migrant labour system, which had existed since the period of German occupation. The migrant labour system made the link between the Police Zone and the homelands possible. The homelands, especially Owamboland and Okavango provided the major supply of labour for the colonial economy. However, the migrant labourers were exclusively men; women were not allowed to leave the homelands. The system was highly exploitative. Workers had no right to negotiate their wages, or choice as to the kind of or length of employment; wages and working conditions were bad and the workers could not take their families to their places of employment. Families could be separated for 18 months or longer.<sup>18</sup> The development emerging out of the migrant labour system was the awakening and formation of a political organization, the Ovambo Peoples Organization (OPO), later renamed SWAPO.<sup>19</sup>

Workers were not happy with their labour situation and there were several strikes after 1916. There were constant arrests and police intimidation. However, the strike that made a major impact on the history of political activism and the nationalist campaign was the nationwide 1971/2 workers' strike. During this strike about 20,000 workers downed tools citing the usual grievances of low wages, poor working conditions etc. The ringleaders were arrested and the rest of the workers deported some voluntarily returning to their places of origin, mainly Owamboland.<sup>20</sup> The presence of about 20,000 politically charged men was one of the most influential factors on women becoming more involved in politics. A woman, who became part of the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) in 1972, indicated that:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid 1986, pp. 130, 137–138.

<sup>17</sup> The biography of Kaxumba KaNdola highlights clearly the role played by women in the early 1960s, especially those who were closely linked to the activists. cf. Namhila Ellen. *Kaxumba KaNdola, man and myth: The biography of a barefoot soldier*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, pp. 89–92; cf. Emmett, T. *Popular resistance and roots of nationalism in Namibia, 1915–1966*. Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, pp. 89–92.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 1986, p. 204.

“When the men got expelled from the South, they held meetings and were talking about politics, how exploitative the contract labour system was and other issues. I got interested and that is how I and other women joined.”<sup>21</sup>

The community and the public affairs of the community were mainly the domain of men. Even the architecture of the Owambo homestead has a space exclusively for male meetings. Noah and Ndahambelela, the children of an activist, remember political meetings in the 1960s that were held either in their home or under their Marula tree. They were not expected to attend these meetings, but to help their mother prepare and serve the food to the men who came to hold meetings with their father. “We picked up words like ‘politics’ or ‘Tanganyika’ when we were asked to serve them food or drinks while they were talking. We did not question them.”<sup>22</sup> The quote indicates that the attendance of women at political meetings in 1972 suggests a significant shift in the involvement of women in the public sphere with women becoming participants and not simply providers at political gatherings.

Many women who joined SWAPO were active members of the SYL in the early 1970s. One interviewee expressed the view that it was a period of increased political mobilization – *Ta shi yi okawi no kawi* [news started to spread].<sup>23</sup> In Owamboland, the strike turned into a general rebellion. It shifted from being merely a challenge to the contract labour system to addressing other issues, such as apartheid, the homeland policy and the Bantustan authorities. Even schoolchildren went on strike.<sup>24</sup> Women actively participated, and started attending and addressing rallies. They took part in physical activities and protests defying the administration. A woman remembers:

“I remember during the strike that the youth, even women.... I was part of it...that we started burning the vaccination points. The villagers were not explained to as to why the vaccination campaigns and to make the matters worse, those cattle that were vaccinated started dying and people were not sure whether they were dying from the diseases or from the vaccinations. We thought the administration was up to something dodgy, that they wanted to rob us of our livelihood. We decided to act. The government did not take that light. We got arrested.”<sup>25</sup>

Moleah concludes that the strike was turning into a revolt. Strikers cut and flattened the fence between Namibia and Angola and burned vaccination stations. Buses that were transporting the recruits (the authority attempted to break the strike by increasing the recruitment of ‘extra-territorial’ labour from Angola) to the recruiting depots were stoned and that forced the South African Railways to suspend all road services between the Police Zone and

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<sup>21</sup> Interview 26/07/08.

<sup>22</sup> Namhila, *Kaxumba KaNdola*, 2005, pp. 49–52.

<sup>23</sup> Interview 26/07/2009.

<sup>24</sup> Moleah, A.T. *Namibia: The struggle for freedom*. Wilmington: Disa Press, 1983.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 26/07/08.

Owambo. The police and some headmen who were perceived as being directly involved in labour recruitment were attacked. During the meetings, people demanded the total expulsion of white men from Owambo and the removal of borders, among other things.<sup>26</sup> The workers made it loud and clear that they were a force to be reckoned with; and for women, this was an eye opening moment as they were exposed to political activities and that was how they became active participants in politics and the liberation struggle of Namibia.

Rallies were held throughout Owamboland. They attracted crowds of men and women. A rally held on 10 January 1972 at Oluno attracted about 3,500 women and men. The rally was about the recent workers' boycott, but had a political atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> The reaction of the South African administration was to send armed police reinforcements to Owamboland. There was intimidation, arrests and even killings. A state of emergency was declared under Proclamation R17. Under this Proclamation meetings were banned, unauthorized people were not to visit the area (Owamboland) and the police could indefinitely and without charge arrest any suspected element.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a controversial form of punishment, public flogging, was introduced to deal with the political activists. Conducted by the tribal courts, the flogging was done by using a branch of the Makalani palm, with up to thirty strikes being administered to the naked buttocks or back. Men and women were flogged.<sup>29</sup>

## The people's war

The preparation for the armed struggle began in 1962 when military training started, while the leadership still clung to the hope of a peaceful solution through the United Nations. In 1965 the first group of combatants trained outside the country returned to Namibia. They stayed at Kaxumba kaNdola's house at Endola in northern Namibia for about eight months before they established a military base at Omugulugwoombashe in order to train more people.<sup>30</sup> The long awaited decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Namibia on 18 July 1966 was a great disillusionment to SWAPO. The UN General Assembly consequently decided that South Africa had no right to administer South West Africa (SWA) and that the territory was to fall under the direct responsibility of the UN. However, South Africa refused to leave SWA completely.<sup>31</sup> On 26 August 1966, the South African police

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<sup>26</sup> Moleah, *The struggle for freedom*, 1983. Pp.118–119.

<sup>27</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, pp. 208–209.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 211.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 221–222; cf. Soggot, D. *Namibia. The violent heritage*. London: Rex Collins, 1986, pp. 61–69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 182; Namhila, *Kaxumba kaNdola*, 2005, pp.59–64. Kaxumba was one of the most influential SWAPO activists in northern Namibia and was Accused Number One in the Terrorism Trial that concluded in 1968.

<sup>31</sup> Moleah, *The struggle for freedom*, 1983, pp.141–145.

attacked the army base of Omugulugwoombashe marking the beginning of the armed struggle led by SWAPO.<sup>32</sup> Although women did not partake in the actual battle, they played other important roles. For instance, as previously indicated, the combatants spent eight months in the household of Kaxumba and during this period Meme Priscilla, the wife of Kaxumba, cooked for these men. She had to conceal their presence from the police and the neighbours and she suffered a great deal at the hands of the police because her husband was 'Africa's most wanted terrorist'.<sup>33</sup>

It was however, after the consultative congress in Tanga, Tanzania in December 1969–January 1970 that SWAPO decided 'to take stock of the unfolding situation and make necessary adjustment'. During that meeting, new wings were founded such as the Elders' Council, the Women's Council, and SWAPO Youth League. The military wing was re-organized and renamed. The South West Africa Liberation Army (SWALA) became known as the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in 1973.<sup>34</sup> SWAPO devised a programme outlining what strategies were to be used to ensure that the liberation struggle and the armed struggle, in particular, was transformed into 'a truly people's war'.<sup>35</sup> The 1976 Political Programme included the undertaking that PLAN combatants had to recognize 'the revolutionary role of the masses, which is a primary condition for victory. PLAN had to assist in propagating SWAPO's political line among the people'.<sup>36</sup> Getting the masses on its side was one of SWAPO's well-calculated moves, as it emerged that the people played a major role in all the undertakings that SWAPO had in place.

## **Periodisation of the liberation struggle: The political environment**

It is imperative to contextualize the different phases of the liberation struggle in order to highlight the political atmosphere in which the activists had to operate. The different phases (periods) outlined in this chapter are chosen with respect to the military struggle and other notable milestones that defined the changing meaning of the war, especially to women. Furthermore, the red line<sup>37</sup> that divided the country into 'two different countries' led the

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<sup>32</sup> For more on the preparations and launch of the armed struggle, cf. Namhila, E. Kaxumba KaNdola, *Man and Myth: The biography of a barefoot soldier*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005; Shityuwete, H. *Never Follow the Wolf: The autobiography of a Namibian freedom fighter*. Cape Town: Mayibuye books, 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Namhila, Kaxumba kaNdola, 2005, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Moleah, *The struggle for freedom*, 1983, pp.101–02.

<sup>35</sup> SWAPO. *Political programme of the South West Africa People's Organization*. Lusaka: SWAPO Department for Publicity and Information. 1981.

<sup>36</sup> Moleah, *The Struggle for freedom*, 2005, p.81.

<sup>37</sup> The red line is the fence line that separates northern Namibia from the central and southern part of the country. cf. Miescher, G. 'Die Rote Linie. Die Geschichte und Siedlungsgrenze in Namibia'.

inhabitants to experience the war differently as not all (repressive) Acts and Proclamations were applicable to the whole country. The northern Bantustans were used by South Africa as a buffer zone where they tried to confine the war and (especially from the mid-1970s) prevent PLAN guerrillas infiltrating across the border from their Angolan bases into the 'white' commercial farming area. It was for this reason that the locals in these areas felt the effect of the war in a more pronounced way. I would like to divide the period between 1970–1989 into three different phases in order to demonstrate how the developments in each phase affected the women's political activity.

### **1970–1978:**

Numerous Acts and legislation made it impossible for mobilization to be done in the open and sometimes not to be done at all. After the passing of the Terrorism Act of 1967, which had been swiftly enacted to prosecute the guerrillas captured and detained at Omugulugwoombashe, the phase between 1970–1978 was characterized by mass mobilization, intense and active political involvement by men and women. This period was further characterized by the 1971/2 countrywide worker's strike. It led to the mobilization of women, followed by mass detentions, floggings, harassment, and a mass exodus into exile and the declaration of a state of emergency in the North (Proclamation R17 of 1972). The collapse of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola in 1974 had a major impact on Southern Africa. The new Angolan government opened its borders to the nationalists who were fleeing colonialism in Namibia. Most of those fleeing came from Owamboland where the repression was severe. A large population lived close to the Angolan border and people had linguistic, cultural and kinship links with communities in southern Angola. In a short period, Owamboland lost many of its skilled people, teachers, nurses and students. In 1974, within five months of the collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola, about 2,500 people left Namibia of whom about 20% were women.<sup>38</sup> The relatively large number of women marked a significant change in the character of the exile community. This severely crippled the growth of internal political organizations as the majority of the new militant activists went into exile.

South Africa tried to introduce an alternative political settlement for Namibia. After the rejection of the homeland governments introduced in 1973, South Africa attempted to reach another internal settlement. The outcome of the Turnhalle Conference of 1976 was that Namibia would become independent at the end of 1978 after holding a national election. The aim was to gain international acceptance for a political transition orchestrated by South Africa and to give the impression to the United Nations that the

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(1890er-1960er Jahre) (PhD Thesis, University of Basel, 2009); published, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Katjavivi, P. *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, p.231.

1978 election was free and fair. South Africa 'loosened' some of its most visible and racist laws. Unfortunately, it was only the petty laws such as the Mixed Marriages Act that were removed, whilst all the laws that inhibited free and fair elections and institutionalized the economic division of power remained in force. The Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 (extended to Namibia in 1976), the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 (applied to Namibia in 1966 and was renamed in 1976 as the Internal Security Act) were applied nationally and used to inhibit political organization. Proclamation R17 was introduced in 1972 after the general strike under the emergency regulations and prohibited open political activity in 'Owamboland'. The Proclamation was reinforced by Proclamation AG9 of 1977, Proclamation AG26 of 1978 and the Prohibition and Notification of Meetings Act of 1981.<sup>39</sup> The acts and legislation were loosely defined and in principle could be seen to prohibit any activity that "promotes the aims of SWAPO" or any act "that endangers the maintenance of law and order in the country".<sup>40</sup> SWAPO subsequently boycotted the election of December 1978.

### **1979–1989:**

The period 1979–1987 saw the intensification of the war between PLAN and the SADF. The Koevoet and COIN units were introduced by South Africa. The North became a full-scale war zone and political mobilization became impossible, whilst in central and southern Namibia, it was minimally possible.<sup>41</sup> During the 1987–1989 period, repressive laws were loosened a bit. However, the military was still present in the North. The Namibian National Students Organization (NANSO) and the trade unions, which emerged under the umbrella of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), indicated a new level of militancy within Namibia. The period culminated in the implementation of United Nations Resolution 435 from April 1989 and the organization of UN supervised elections in November 1989 that resulted in the independence of Namibia on 21 March 1990.

### **Mobilization inside the country: Rallying women, women at rallies**

This section looks at the role played by women who did not go into exile as well as the rallying and mobilizing of women under the auspices of the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) a wing attached to SWAPO.<sup>42</sup> Women who stayed inside the country played a major role in

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<sup>39</sup> Namibia: *The facts*. Idaf Publications: London 1989; König, B. *The Ravages of war*. London: Idaf Publications, 1983; Namibia today, Vol. 1 no. 2 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Namibia: *The facts*. London: Idaf Publications, 1989.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Akawa, M. & Silvester, J. Naming the dead: Civilian Casualties in the Namibian Liberation Struggle. *The Namibian*, 24/08/2007.

<sup>42</sup> The SWC was active in the South and Central Namibia in 1977 before it was paralysed by repres-

mobilizing the people to join and support SWAPO. The mobilization also aimed at telling women 'who they are, that they are human beings'.<sup>43</sup> Despite all the difficulties involved in mobilizing, women used various methods to make sure that the administration would not notice what was going on. Normally mobilization was done in small groups in people's houses. A big crowd would attract unnecessary attention. Women moved from house to house and made sure that they did not meet in the same house twice.<sup>44</sup> Women met under the guise of having sewing projects or Christian meetings or used any chance opportunity in order to meet and talk.<sup>45</sup>

However dangerous, women addressed public rallies. (As indicated earlier, women, in their capacity as representatives of the SWC, had addressed these rallies since the mid-1970s.) After getting last minute permission to hold a rally in Oshakati, northern Namibia in 1977 on condition that SWAPO did not bring dangerous weapons, Martha Ford,<sup>46</sup> Secretary of the SWAPO Women's Council had this to say:

"This meeting was allowed on condition that there should be no dangerous weapons. But SWAPO is here with the most dangerous and efficient weapons with which to wage the struggle. Our loudspeakers are our cannons, our tongues the AK47 and our ammunition is the truth."<sup>47</sup>

About 6000 SWAPO members attended that meeting. Ford had to leave the country shortly afterwards due to constant police harassment and various detentions.

Ida Jimmy<sup>48</sup> addressed a rally in Lüderitz in 1979. In her address she accused the South African Defence Force of shooting people without warning and stressed that SWAPO freedom fighters must be supported as sons and daughters of the Namibian people. She was charged under the Riotous Assemblies and Terrorism Act and sentenced to seven years imprisonment.<sup>49</sup>

As the war intensified during the late 1970s to mid 1980s it became very difficult for women to continue even with their clandestine mobilization. It was somewhat easier to mobilize in urban areas but in the rural areas, particularly in the North, which was a strong-

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sive laws in 1978. It remerged again in 1986. See Becker, *Namibian women's movement*, 1993, pp. 168–169.

<sup>43</sup> *The Daily News*. 4 April 1977.

<sup>44</sup> *The Daily News*. 4 April 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Interview 26/07/2008; Interview 19/08/2008; *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1 no. 4, July–August 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Martha Ford was the Secretary-General of SWC inside Namibia until 1979 when she fled the country to avoid arrest due to her political involvement. While in exile, SWAPO expelled her from the movement because of misconduct.

<sup>47</sup> *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1, no. 2 1977.

<sup>48</sup> Ida Jimmy was a worker in the fish factory in Lüderitz in the 1970s. She protested to the factory management about the working conditions and the low wages. She became a political activist and called upon the nation to support the freedom fighters, among other issues.

<sup>49</sup> *Information and Comment*, vol. 5, no. 6 Sept/Oct 1983.

hold for SWAPO, this was impossible. Mass detentions and harassment made it impractical. Allison compiled many anecdotes of women narrating how it became incredibly difficult to openly, or even secretly, take part in any activities related to SWAPO.<sup>50</sup> The North became a war zone and with the dusk-to-dawn curfew in place, it was impossible to do any 'SWAPO work'. The lifestyle of the North at the time would be an impediment as well. A typical day in the life of a woman would be characterized by working in the fields, fetching water and collecting firewood, looking after children, or going to work (for those who were formally employed). With an absent husband who had been away on contract it meant double household responsibilities. Witnessing other women being detained aroused concerns about caring for the children were she to go to prison. In addition, with the scattered nature of homesteads, it would be difficult to do house-to-house mobilization after a day filled with household activities. In any case, by the time she finished her household chores, it would be dusk and no one could move safely after sunset once the military curfew was in place (from 1972 onwards).

However, it should not be concluded that women in the North had no opportunity or venues where they could meet. There were social events such as funerals, weddings and the time after church services. Churches in particular became the sites of opposition.<sup>51</sup> One traditionally gendered public space particularly for women in the rural areas was *ekolo*; when women met under a marula tree to squeeze juice out of marula fruits. Up to ten women could be involved in *ekolo* sitting under one tree. Women could also meet at *ohaha*, this is when cattle were slaughtered and people went to buy meat either with money or by exchanging *omahangu* (millet) for meat. These and other venues could provide women with an opportunity to mobilize one another. However, the war created an environment of fear and mistrust so that it was difficult to know who was in which camp and sharing political information with people of whom one was unsure was risky.<sup>52</sup>

Other difficulties hampered the mobilization of women in the North. SWAPO's head office was in Windhoek, with a few offices in other urban areas. The SWC did not have offices in the North. It was impossible for women to continue actively with SWAPO activities, especially after 1977/8. Women continued, however, to secretly help SWAPO activists and combatants. Two of my interviewees, Secilia Iileka and Elizabeth (Queen) Shivute vividly recalled how they persisted with SWAPO activities despite the harassment from the South

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<sup>50</sup> Allison, C. *"It's like holding the key to your own jail": Women in Namibia*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> cf. Katjavivi, P. et al (Eds). *Church and the liberation in Namibia*. London: Pluto Press, 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Akawa, M. *Strictly members only: Circulation of SWAPO posters in Northern Namibia*, In: Miescher et al. (Eds) *Posters in Action*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009; Informal conversation with Uilika Kangulohi



African administration.<sup>53</sup> Given their restricted mobility, women would not have had any chance of getting information and materials from outside the region to use in their mobilization campaigns. It was only in the late 1980s when massive election funding became available that the SWC was able to embark on a massive mobilization campaign to prepare women for the 1989 election.

When Tove Dix visited Namibia in 1988, she reported that the SWC was simply not present in the North and in rural areas.<sup>54</sup> As for the South, where women were able to conduct some undercover mobilization, views on SWAPO's influence were divided. Dix and Allison deemed that, generally, young people supported SWAPO because they wanted freedom. However, the promises that the South African administration made, such as money and houses, influenced the older people into supporting the South African administration. However, the older people (in the South) went on to complain that, although they had voted for the DTA, they still had not received anything from them.<sup>55</sup> SWAPO promised 'Freedom, Solidarity and Justice.' I argue that the benefits SWAPO promised were intangible compared to the immediate advantages of getting a house and money promised to the people immediately after the 1978 election. In addition, Dix claims that in the South in 1988 SWAPO was generally identified with Ovambo-speaking people only and people (in the South) had negative stereotypical views of Ovambo people whom they knew as contract workers and whom, for various reasons, were perceived as violent drunkards with a bad reputation.<sup>56</sup>

To contradict Dix and Allison, however, the South/North divide was not so different in terms of generational attitudes. 1973 saw the establishment of homelands and a fraction of the older generation in Owamboland and Okavango supported this. A number of headmen from Owamboland supported the South African government. In addition, in the mid-1970s various communities which were not from the North joined SWAPO. In October 1976, 80% of the 37,000 Nama people in the South joined SWAPO; the Rehoboth Volksparty disbanded in order to join SWAPO in April 1977; the Tjamuaha/Maharero Royal House joined SWAPO (an estimate of 17,000 people from the Herero traditional body that contested the leadership of Clemens Kapuu).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview 28/08/2007; 20/08/2007; 29/08/2007. Elizabeth Shivute is the widow of the late Sam Shivute.

<sup>54</sup> Dix, T. WUS programme officer on her report on the mission to Namibia. 12 August 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Allison, *Its like holding keys*, 1986, p. 18; Dix, Report on the mission to Namibia, 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Dix, Report on the mission to Namibia, 1988.

<sup>57</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise to nationalism*. 1986, pp. 254–255.

## “Who do they think SWAPOs are?”<sup>58</sup>: Provision of assistance to SWAPO

“If the soldiers (SADF) come they can do anything. Most of us don’t really care, because the so-called SWAPOs are our children, our sons and daughters. Can we really turn them away? Where would you get another child from? You won’t get one from the South African defence forces. Who do they think SWAPOs are?”<sup>59</sup>

This quotation reveals the strength of the family metaphor in explaining the support given by women to PLAN combatants. The metaphor of the extended family system was an important resource to SWAPO and PLAN fighters made direct use of family members on the basis that they could be trusted and asked for favours (this is dealt with later in the book). Whilst the South African army had everything in place (food, shelter, money, transport, etc.) to ensure their military operations ran smoothly, PLAN combatants, who were operating inside Namibia, relied on the locals.

Namibia is a big country and for those who sought to go into exile, provide supplies to guerrillas or assist them in moving around the country, transport was essential. I have not found any evidence that women were directly involved in transporting the PLAN combatants or their weapons. However, this probably reflects the gendered disparity in economic power and gender roles of the time as only a few women at the time could drive or afford to buy a car. In the North, a few male SWAPO supporters and sympathizers who owned cars risked transporting combatants and those who were seeking to cross the border.<sup>60</sup>

Providing food and shelter was one of the major activities undertaken by women, especially in the war zone. There are numerous narratives of the roles women played and how they got involved.<sup>61</sup> Here a few examples will be presented. Traditionally, a man was automatically regarded as the head of the household and made decisions. Even the men who were away on contract labour retained the power and authority to make decisions affecting the household.<sup>62</sup> However, many women during the liberation struggle had to decide, without the consent of their absent husbands, whether to help and support SWAPO and, in particular, the combatants. In some cases women were not given a choice. One woman recounted:

“One night I was woken up by four aamati<sup>63</sup> in uniforms. One of them was my cousin from Olukonda whom we knew had crossed the border. My husband was away on contract. They

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<sup>58</sup> A question posed by a woman in the accounts put together by Allison, In: Allison, C. *“It’s like holding the key to your own jail”: Women in Namibia*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Interview 09/08/2007; 07/09/2007.

<sup>61</sup> There are a number of interviews conducted by Vilho Shigwedha dealing with this topic. The copies of these tapes are housed in the National Archives of Namibia.

<sup>62</sup> Becker, *Namibian women’s movement*, 1993, pp. 99–100.

<sup>63</sup> This is how the PLAN combatants were referred to locally; that literally means young men.

asked for food and I gave them. My cousin told me that he and his friends would be coming sometimes to get food. I had no choice so I agreed. They warned me not to tell anyone, especially the South African army. That was the last time I saw my cousin but other soldiers kept coming, every time they came they had some new ones, or that if they were four during their last visit, only two would come plus two or three new ones. It became a chain...they did not stop coming until the war ended.<sup>64</sup>

She continued that sometimes the *aamati* did not just eat and leave. Sometimes they stayed even for a week. They had to pretend to the neighbours that they were distant cousins who were just visiting. They would get involved in doing household chores; they would work in the field, go and give cattle water and so on, just to disguise their identity.<sup>65</sup> A friend narrated how an injured combatant lived in a thick bush in their fence for more than a month and his grandmother brought him food every day. They did not think that he would survive but one day when she brought food, he was gone and they never saw him again.<sup>66</sup> The situation in northern Namibia was similar to that in Zimbabwe during the liberation struggle. Women faced a situation where they had to provide food and other logistical support to the guerrillas. The *Chombwidos*, girls in the villages in Zimbabwe, had to carry food to the freedom fighters which they or their mothers had prepared.

As it was dangerous to feed and shelter the combatants, everything possible was done to conceal their presence or any evidence of their presence at one's house. People always denied to the South African army that they had helped the combatants. They would rake the soil to remove the footprints or throw *omahangu* (millet) on the ground and let the chickens eat it up, or they would let goats walk over the footprints. They would do anything to get rid of any sign that they had had combatants in their homestead. Research by Wallace and Cleaver on Namibian women in the war has anecdotes by women who bore witness – and some becoming victims – because of the assistance they offered to the guerrillas.<sup>67</sup>

The combatants and other SWAPO supporters were sometimes given monetary and material support. In order to disguise themselves when they were among the local population, the combatants wore civilian clothes given to them by the local people. Money too was provided when they needed to board buses and arrange lifts in order to get to places. Money was also given to support families whose breadwinners were detained by the police because of their involvement in the liberation struggle. When relatives visited the activists in jail or

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<sup>64</sup> Interview 24/08/2007

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Alexander, J. & McGregor, J. *Violence and memory. One hundred years in the 'dark forests' of Matabeleland*. Harare: Weaver, 2000, pp. 159–179; *Zimbabwe Women Writers. Women of resilience. The voices of women ex-combatants*. Harare: Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Wallace & Cleaver. *Namibia women in war*, 1990, pp. 5-6; Interview 24/08/2007.

attended their trials, money could be provided to make this possible. People used to hold fundraising activities to collect money for these purposes. People would hold a braaivleis (barbeque) where meat and drinks would be sold to raise funds. These events were known as *uudhano* and women played a major role in organizing these.<sup>68</sup>

Provision of information and medicine to the combatants and SWAPO activists was another role that women performed during the liberation struggle. Since the majority of the nurses were women, it was mainly they who stole medication from the hospitals.<sup>69</sup> As a result the administration did not supply the hospitals in the North with adequate medication since they claimed that it was often stolen and given to the 'terrorists'. Soggot described at length the ordeal which nurses such as Eva Muandingi, Rauna Nambinga, Naemi Nambowa, Esther Shangano and Kaino Malua from Engela hospital had to go through; they had been accused of having played a role in the assassination of Chief Shuumbwa Elifas<sup>70</sup> in 1975 and helping the 'terrorists'. They were interrogated and tortured for weeks at Ogongo, northern Namibia.<sup>71</sup> The combatants were also supplied with information about the whereabouts of the South African army in the area and with the names of locals who were informers and giving information to the army.<sup>72</sup> As it transpired later, in some cases people were wrongly accused of being 'informers' and 'got eliminated', because their neighbours were jealous or not on good terms with them.

As indicated earlier, the view that "...the so-called SWAPOs are our children, our sons and daughters. Can we really turn them away? Who do they think SWAPOs are?"<sup>73</sup> is central to the understanding of the involvement of women in northern Namibia during the liberation struggle. It was the major reason why SWAPO and the combatants received assistance from the people. However, for some people it did not happen in that way. A woman related how one night the *aamati* who normally came to their house tried to prove to her that they meant what they said if they warned people who refused to listen:

"One night the *aamati* came and as usual I gave them food. They told me that they were going to pay a certain XX family a visit (real name given). Apparently, they have warned them several times to stop going to Omaangondjo (name of a South African military base in that area) but they did not want to listen. So they left."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interview 20/08/2007; 29/08/2007.

<sup>69</sup> Interview 20/08/2007.

<sup>70</sup> Chief Shuumbwa Elifas was a king of Ondonga and became the Prime Minister of the 'self-governing' Ovamboland homeland in 1974.

<sup>71</sup> Soggot, D. Namibia. *The violent heritage*. London: Rex Collings, 1986, pp. 147–150.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> A question posed by a woman in the accounts put together by Allison, In: Allison, C. *"It's like holding the key to your own jail": Women in Namibia*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 24/08/2007.

When the *aamati* came back, they woke up their host. The whole family was to sit down and they (aamati) played a tape that they recorded during the visit to the family that was alleged to have been fraternizing with the South Africans. The tape started with the interrogation and the combatants telling the family why they were the enemy of the struggle; it continued with the sounds of beating and screaming and ended with the sound of something/one being hit, followed by complete silence. When the tape stopped playing, everyone was dead quiet and there was a short silence, one of the *aamati* warned that was what would be done to those refusing to listen to their warnings. The following morning the combatants were gone; news of the killing of the family soon spread around the village.<sup>75</sup> For her it became very clear that the *aamati* meant what they said that there should be no informing the army. The repercussions for the 'sell-outs', or people who did not support the guerrillas could be extreme. Equally, the colonial forces fatally punished people who sided with the guerrillas. Zimbabwe went through the same violence and its civilians bore the same brunt.<sup>76</sup>

Local people were very much aware of the fact that the so-called 'SWAPOs or terrorists' were their daughters and sons and that there was no way to turn them away. However, there were people who found themselves without any choice as to their involvement due to their fear of violent retribution. The political programme of SWAPO stated that all PLAN cadres had to uphold the supremacy of the organization and receive political education at all times 'for bringing about a steered revolutionary discipline among the combatants.'<sup>77</sup> However, one needs to take into account the difference between the experiences of officials placed in various capital cities around the world organizing the war and the combatants in the combat zones fighting the war. Perhaps the incident referred to above involving the XX family was a typical case. *Namibia Today*, the official organ of SWAPO, described in a 'war communiqué' detailing operations conducted during November 1980 the execution of an alleged informer as follows; "November 9, 1980: enemy agent, Abner Nguti, an enemy was eliminated after he ignored repeated appeals from PLAN combatants to stop his treacherous activities."<sup>78</sup>

The 'Namibianisation of the war' had an impact on the dynamics of the conflict in northern Namibia. Things became complicated: from 1970, South Africa recruited black manpower into its forces; some to be used secretly especially in the rural areas. 'Ethnic

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> cf. Alexander, J. & McGregor, J. *Violence and memory. One hundred years in the 'dark forests' of Matabeleland*. Harare: Weaver, 2000. Pp 159-179; Zimbabwe Women Writers. *Women of resilience. The voices of women ex-combatants*. Harare: Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000.

<sup>77</sup> SWAPO. *Political programme of the SWAPO of Namibia*. SWAPO Department for Publicity and Information, Lusaka. 1976.

<sup>78</sup> *Namibia Today*, vol. 5, no. 2/1981; similar reports have appeared in this volume and other SWAPO publications. *Information and Comments*, vol. 3, no. 1, March 1981.

Units' were introduced to fight SWAPO – for example, Battalion 101 was formed from Oshiwambo-speaking recruits. By 1977, 20% of the 'South African' troops in Namibia were actually black Namibians. One household could have two sons with one fighting for SWAPO and the other for Koevoet.<sup>79</sup> The effects of the war and the brutality of the South African army compelled most locals to help SWAPO. Their choice could be likened to the famous quotation of Mao: "The popular masses are like water and the army is like a fish. An army which fails to maintain good discipline gets into opposition with the popular masses and by its own action dries up the water."<sup>80</sup>

### **Beware of your political preferences<sup>81</sup>: Consequences**

The South African administration made one thing very clear: it was determined to squash and extirpate all political activity that had anything to do with SWAPO. The administration distributed widely, especially in northern Namibia, propaganda leaflets that strongly and openly warned SWAPO supporters of 'the consequences of their political preferences'<sup>82</sup> and warned against taking part in "terrorist activities aimed at overthrowing the lawful administration of South West Africa."<sup>83</sup>

There are vivid and gruesome stories of women who, because of their political involvement, became victims at the hands of the South African administration. Women felt the wrath of the colonial law as early as 1966, especially after the SWAPO combatants were noticed in the Owambo area. Women, especially those who joined the SYL in the early 1970s, suffered at the hands of the colonial and tribal police through arrests, being forced to do hard labour for local headmen and being subjected to public flogging.<sup>84</sup> During the 1988 countrywide NANSO-led school boycotts, women were mainly targeted and became victims of sexual abuse.<sup>85</sup> These few examples prove that throughout the liberation struggle women suffered. The administration realized the political influence women had and, as such, decided to hinder and restrict their political support for SWAPO. Hinz and Leuven-Lachinski found that many cases of harassment were not reported for fear of further retribution and those that were reported in the press or other media were just the tip of the iceberg.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, p.275.

<sup>80</sup> [www.kirjasto.sci.fi/mao.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/mao.htm).

<sup>81</sup> Propaganda leaflets distributed in the North warning people to learn about the consequences of aligning themselves to SWAPO cited in: *Action on Namibia*, Summer 1987.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *Facts Paper on Southern Africa*, no. 9. Idaf, July 1981.

<sup>84</sup> Soggot, D. Namibia. *The violent heritage*. London: Rex Collings, 1986.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Namhila, *Kaxumba kaNdola*, 2005; *Action on Namibia* September 1990; Moleah, *The struggle for freedom*, 1983.

<sup>86</sup> Hinz et al. *Koevoet versus the people of Namibia*; cf Allison. *Its like holding keys to your own jail*,

The victims frequently passed through the gates and walked down the corridors of jail. They sat in interrogation rooms where they were tortured and severely questioned about their involvement in the struggle. This was merely because of offering assistance to SWAPO or simply because of their opposition regarding the illegal occupation of South Africa in the country. A few were given long sentences, which they had to serve in South Africa,<sup>87</sup> experiencing harsh treatment. Some cases made international headlines due to the violence used. These included the cases of victims like Rauna Nambinga, Lucia Hamutenya, Anna Hihondjua, Naemi Nambowa, Ida Jimmy, and Elisabeth Queen Namundjembo.<sup>88</sup> Due to the assault and torture, Miss Namundjembo suffered a miscarriage while in detention at Ogongo in Ovamboland. These women were charged under various repressive laws, such as the Riotous Assemblies and Terrorism Act, Proclamation AG 9 and Proclamation AG 26.<sup>89</sup> By 1979 South Africa held 130 captives captured from SWAPO's 'Vietnam' base that had been attacked on the same day (4 May 1978) at Kassinga; a third of them were women. Prisoners were subjected to electric shock torture and beatings.<sup>90</sup> A police officer later described the torture of detainees in court, stating that "You thrash him [the suspect] until he cracks, until he points what has to be pointed out"<sup>91</sup> and a British mercenary with the SADF in 1980 described their operations in the North of Ovamboland, "Our main job is to take an area and clear it. We sweep through it and we kill everything in front of us, cattle, goats, people, everything. We are out to get SWAPO ... some of it is pretty heavy. Sometimes we take locals for questioning. We beat, cut and burn them. As soon as we are finished with them, we kill them."<sup>92</sup> Karen Batley reviewed the narratives of former South African soldiers who served during the 'border war.' Referring and analyzing a poem by a former soldier, she concludes, "In an environment regarded as hostile, nervous troops were likely to shoot first and ask questions later. Not only innocent civilians but wildlife and domestic animals were often killed by trigger-happy troops."<sup>93</sup>

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1986; Wallace and Cleaver. *Namibia. Women in war*, 1990; Soggot, *The violent heritage*, 1986.

<sup>87</sup> A detailed account of selected examples will be given in the next chapter.

<sup>88</sup> *The Combatant*, vol. 2 no. 4, November 1980; *Information and Comments*, no. 7, July 1981; *Windhoek Advertiser*, 8/12/1977; *Action on Namibia*, paper 1 1981; *The Combatant*, vol. 4, no. 11, June 1983; *The Daily News*, April 4 1977; *Information and Comment*, vol. 5, no. 6 Sept/Oct 1983; *Namibia Today*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1980; *Fact Paper on Southern Africa*, no. 9, Idaf, July 1981.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Namibia: The facts*. London, Idaf publications, 1989, p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> *Namibia: The facts*. London: Idaf publications, 1989. P. 72; cf. Wallace, M. & Cleaver, T. *Namibia women in Namibia*. London: Zed Books, 1990, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Batley, K. 'Documents of life': South African soldiers' narratives of the border war. In: Baines, G. & Vale, P. *Beyond the border war. New perspectives on Southern Africa's late-cold war conflicts*. UNISA: Unisa Press, 2008. p. 177.

At times the torture and harassment involved sexual abuse. In 1980 a young woman of 16 from Onayena village in the North (name given) died two days after the “fascist soldiers took an empty beer bottle and forced it several times into her vagina and anus.”<sup>94</sup> Her brother was badly beaten by the South African soldiers demanding to be told where the SWAPO guerrillas were.<sup>95</sup> In October 1980 while at the Oshakati military base, Rauna Nambinga survived an attempted rape. A white officer, claiming to be a doctor, tried to rape her.<sup>96</sup> The 1960s and 1970s did not have many reports of sexual incidents. Evidence pointed to the fact that with the creation of Koevoet<sup>97</sup>, the incidents of sexual abuse and sexual harassment increased.<sup>98</sup> A young woman made a statement that she was arrested by the South African soldiers: “While the truck was being driven, I was assaulted ... some soldiers grabbed my breast and were pulling me. It was humiliating and degrading.”<sup>99</sup> A human rights mission working for the Kairos group reported on the rape of pregnant women and the rape of a woman by up to seven soldiers. They reported that old women were not spared either.<sup>100</sup>

The psychological impact, apart from the obvious physical harassment and other forms of intimidation of the conflict on women, should also be considered. Hospitals were deprived of medical supplies and equipment because it was feared they were going to be given to the ‘terrorist’. The *Omahangu* fields were trampled on; livestock were slaughtered indiscriminately because apparently these were used to feed the ‘terrorists’. Suspected SWAPO supporters and sympathisers’ houses were frequently searched without any search warrant. Peoples’ movements were constantly watched and some lost their jobs. Women were often threatened with violence and the destruction of their property. They had to bear threats to their loved ones and they had guns pointed at them and witnessed their relatives being beaten up in front of them.<sup>101</sup> A victim testified: “I was slapped and beaten every time I denied having seen SWAPO. The chief put a pistol against my face and said if you do not talk you die, they kept kicking and beating me, then two teeth were knocked out with a rifle butt.”<sup>102</sup> Another woman was arrested and taken to a South African base. She was beaten

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<sup>94</sup> *Namibia Today*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1980.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Facts Paper on Southern Africa, no. 9. Idaf, July 1981.

<sup>97</sup> This was the notorious South West Africa Police Counter-insurgency unit, which was introduced to Namibia in the late 1970s. Its main aim was of prying insurgents from the local people. The unit was infamous among the local people for its brutal and indiscriminate use of force.

<sup>98</sup> Hinz, M. & Leuven-Lachinski, N. G. *Koevoet versus the people of Namibia: Report of a human rights mission to Namibia on behalf of the working group Kairos*. Utrecht: Working Group Kairos, 1989, pp. 13.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>101</sup> Interview 24/08/2007; 20/08/2007; 07/09/2007; 03/01/2009.

<sup>102</sup> Hinz et al, *Koevoet vs. The people of Namibia*, 1989 p. 11.



and electrically shocked. She was told that her young child had been killed. When she was released and went home, she found people weeping and mourning because the soldiers had told them that she was dead. Her little boy was alive.<sup>103</sup>

Ellen Namhila in her book *Tears of courage. Five mothers, five stories, one victory* vividly narrates the stories of five women who went through different ordeals and sacrificed greatly because of their involvement in the liberation struggle. One woman, Justina Amwaalwa, narrated how she and two other women were arrested at their village in northern Namibia and were flown and jailed in Pretoria where she gave birth to a baby boy in 1976. "Apartheid made me a widow," are the words of Aili Andreas Iitula as she narrated her story to Namhila. Drothea Nikodemus was imprisoned for feeding her brothers and the life of Lahja Ndawedha Iyambo was made a living hell by Apartheid.<sup>104</sup> These are just a few anecdotes of what some women had to go through during the liberation struggle.

It was against this background that the people who did not flee into exile were not deterred from assisting and sympathizing with SWAPO. Some became even more determined. Witnessing what the army was doing to them strengthened their loyalty to SWAPO and to the liberation of the country. They believed they had no other choice; after all they mostly held the same sentiment: "the so called SWAPOs are our children, our sons and daughters. Can we really turn them away? Who do they think SWAPOs are?"<sup>105</sup>

## **"A woman's place is in the struggle"<sup>106</sup>: The role played by women in exile**

The early exile community was made up mainly of men, only gradually did a few women join them. Putuse Appolus, a nurse by profession, was one of the first women to arrive in Dar es Salaam in 1961 after she was expelled from Namibia by the South African administration.<sup>107</sup> In 1962 at the age of 22, Libertina Amathila arrived in Dar es Salaam to join the liberation struggle. She later studied medicine in Poland and after completing medical school she returned to work at a hospital in Dar es Salaam. She was elected as a member of SWAPO's Central Committee in 1969 and was a director of the SWC from 1969–1975.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>104</sup> For more details, cf. Namhila, E. N. *Tear s of courage. Five mothers, five stories, one victory*. Windhoek: AACRLS, 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Allison, *It's like holding the key to your own jail*, 1986.

<sup>106</sup> Federation of Transvaal women. *A woman's place is in the struggle, not behind bars*. Africa Fund. 1988.

<sup>107</sup> Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered. The autobiography of Sam Nujoma*. London: Panaf Books, 2001, p. 113.

<sup>108</sup> Sellström, T. *Sweden and National liberation in Southern Africa*. Volume 1: Formation of a popular opinion 1950–1970. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p. 288.

Ottilie Abrahams arrived in Dar es Salaam in 1963 with her husband after being sought by the police in Namibia. She became Secretary for Education and part of the Executive Committee before she and her husband, Kenneth Abrahams were expelled from SWAPO in 1964 for 'disrespecting the leadership.'<sup>109</sup> However, following the big exodus in the 1970s, the ratio between men and women became more balanced. Towards the end of the liberation struggle, there were more women and children than men living in the civilian refugee camps.<sup>110</sup>

## The establishment of the SWAPO Women's Council

During the 1969/1970 consultative congress held in Tanga, Tanzania, SWAPO discussed, examined and re-organized the structure of the party in order to intensify the struggle. It was decided that wings attached to the main body of SWAPO needed to be established. These wings were to deal with particular constituencies, concerning women, the youth, and elders in addition to observing the party's constitution and structures. It was on this occasion that the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC), the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) and SWAPO's Elders' Council (SEC) were established. The congress also reaffirmed that the armed struggle was the only effective way to bring about the liberation of Namibia.<sup>111</sup> It was from this congress that SWAPO formally established its women's division.

The Tanga congress was a turning point in the history of SWAPO as it aimed to regroup and reassess the direction of the movement. It is not clear whether there was any debate before or during the congress to define and discuss the role of women in the liberation struggle, given the fact that the constitution of SWC was only adopted in 1980 at its first congress. Likewise, it is not clear whether the SWC was to be autonomous, deciding its own agenda and, if so, to what degree? Was there any discussion on what 'liberation and freedom' for women meant? To what extent was there to be liberation and freedom of women? Was it only "to reach out to those groups in Namibian society and involve them in the nationalist struggle and represent them within SWAPO" as Katjavivi suggested.<sup>112</sup> However, according to Dobell there is little indication of a 'master plan' with regard to the decisions reached at the congress.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sellström, T. (Ed). *Liberation in Southern Africa- regional and Swedish voices*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p 59; Leys, C. & Brown, S. *Histories of Namibia. Living through the liberation*. London: The Merlin Press, 2005, pp. 150–151.

<sup>110</sup> Katjavivi, *The rise to nationalism*, 1986, p. 310; Eriksen, T. L. *Norway and national liberation in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000, p. 110.

<sup>111</sup> *Namibia News*, vol. 3, no. 1; January–March 1970.

<sup>112</sup> Katjavivi, P. *The rise of nationalism*. p. 194.

<sup>113</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000, p. 39.

It was only in January 1980, 10 years later, that SWC held its first congress in Kwanza Sul. After the Tanga Congress in 1969/1970, Libertine Amathila<sup>114</sup> had acted as the Secretary-General but there had been no other leadership structure for the SWC until 1980.<sup>115</sup> The congress aimed at examining the activities and role of the SWC and re-organizing its structure to better serve the interests of Namibian women and that of the liberation struggle. More than a hundred delegates attended the congress. SWAPO had delegates from its settlements in Zambia and Angola, various offices throughout the world, SWAPO students from abroad, representatives from PLAN and UNIN. Open sessions were attended by delegates from Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, USSR, GDR, the ANC, and PAWO. Getrude Kandanga, was arrested in Namibia just before she was due to travel.<sup>116</sup> Nineteen members of the central committee were elected, with Pendukeni Kaulinge as the Secretary General, and Getrude Kandanga as her deputy elected *in absentia*.<sup>117</sup>

The constitution of the SWC was adopted at this congress. It consisted of an 11 page document, which clearly indicated at the start that it would observe the aims and objectives of the SWAPO constitution as reflected in Article III. However, it adds additional aims and objectives pertaining to what it intended to achieve for women. SWC strove to achieve equality for women, their full participation in the struggle for national and social liberation; they aimed to develop and deepen political consciousness and revolutionary militancy among the Namibian women; to bring about women's full participation in public work and to prepare them for productive jobs; to campaign for the creation of nursery schools to enable women's full participation in productive work; to instill in the Namibian child a sense of justice and revolutionary respect for women and to develop an internationalist spirit in the Namibian woman by enabling her to work in solidarity with all militant and progressive feminine movements thereby strengthening the world-wide anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist front.<sup>118</sup>

The constitution of SWC is divided into articles that stipulate its aims and objectives, eligibility for membership, the organizational structure, the executive bureau officers and their functions, different organs and their roles. A few questions are not addressed. Firstly, what position did it give women in the struggle and what role could women play in the wider SWAPO leadership structure? The congress of SWAPO was the supreme organ of the organization responsible for electing the Central Committee (CC) of SWAPO and the Secretary-General of each wing (SYL, SWC and SEC). The congress was to be composed of

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<sup>114</sup> For more on Libertine Amathila, see Chapter three.

<sup>115</sup> Becker, *Namibian women's movement*, 1993, p. 154.

<sup>116</sup> *Information and Comments*, vol. 2, no.2 February 1980.

<sup>117</sup> Becker, *Namibian Women's Movement*, 1993, p. 154.

<sup>118</sup> The constitution of SWAPO Women's Council, article II. Copy consulted in Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Basel: AA.3: SWAPO Collection.

all members of the central committee, all members of the National Executive Committee (NEC), four delegates from each wing, PLAN and each Regional Executive Committee. The following example illustrates the possibility of unequal representation of women: if SWAPO had held a congress in 1977, for instance, when there were only three women as members of the CC and four women representatives from SWC, there would be seven women out of 45 congress delegates.<sup>119</sup> The CC members elected the NEC consisting of 17 members and there was a possibility that a woman would not get a seat here, as members were not made up of representatives from the various wings. The CC and NEC basically ran SWAPO. Overall, the two bodies supervised, controlled and put into practice the decisions, resolutions and directives of the organization. All wings, the SWC included, could adopt their own constitution, plan activities, raise funds and accept donations, but only once these were approved by the CC of SWAPO.<sup>120</sup>

At the end of the 1980 congress, the SWC made resolutions and declarations that signposted how the women were going to position themselves and contribute towards the attainment of national and social liberation. The women reasserted their intention to participate in the liberation struggle and to mobilize women in order to be fully integrated in PLAN. They expressed their intention to participate in the literacy campaign, their intention to request the redoubling of material and political support to the liberation movement and their support for the struggle of progressive women around the world.<sup>121</sup>

## **Mobilization in exile**

SWC was created as a women's organization and a transmission belt for SWAPO policy, ideology and programmes with the specific mission of mobilizing women's participation in the struggle for national and social liberation.<sup>122</sup> Mobilization was regarded as the most important way of getting Namibian women involved in the struggle, and of making sure that the aims and objectives of SWAPO and the SWC, in particular, were achieved. It was imperative that women were mobilized, both locally and internationally, to support the liberation of Namibia.

The SWC was aware that not all Namibian women who were in exile had a deep political consciousness. "Some people left Namibia because they were just following their boy or girl friends who left earlier", one informant told me:

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<sup>119</sup> The CC of SWAPO consisted of forty-five members only.

<sup>120</sup> Constitution of SWAPO and SWC. Copy consulted in Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Basel: AA.3: SWAPO Collection.

<sup>121</sup> Information and Comments, vol. 2, no.2 February 1980.

<sup>122</sup> Preamble of the SWC constitution.

“some left in the spur of the moment just because their friends were leaving, some were pregnant or impregnated girls and had no guts how to face the community, some people committed crimes and were running away from the law, some were forced by the repressive situation in the country, some had different ideas of how the exile life was going to be and instead turned out something else, these people had to be educated to support the liberation struggle ...”<sup>123</sup>

Mobilization had to be done continuously, because people were constantly arriving in exile. It was sometimes insinuated that those people who lacked deep political understanding and the will to support the liberation struggle tried to leave or sabotage the movement by coming up with ‘charges of harassment’ or other accusations in order to be pardoned by the UNHCR.<sup>124</sup> For situations like these to be avoided, continuous political education had to be given to enable people to appreciate the efforts that SWAPO was making towards the liberation of the country.

The SWC strove to achieve equality for women and facilitate their full participation in the struggle for social liberation. Women came from a background of oppression. They were oppressed by traditional values and feudal customs – mental colonialism: a woman was reared and socialized to believe that men were superior to them. In addition, they were oppressed by the apartheid system.<sup>125</sup> The main aim was to teach women to know who they were. Martha Ford summed it up by stating that “The SWAPO Women’s Council has taken the task not only of mobilizing women to participate in the struggle, but to make them conscious that they have the same right and obligation as men to make decisions concerning their nation’s interest; that the woman should therefore develop herself to be a comrade in all aspects and not just a homemaker and that both male and female should understand the system of exploitation and combat it as comrades ... .”<sup>126</sup> Women were of the opinion that equal rights had to mean the same rights for women.

Women did not only have to convince themselves that they had the same rights and obligations as men; even within SWAPO, men were another obstacle that women had to overcome so that they could fully participate in the struggle as well as in the larger society after independence. Netumbo Ndaitwa had this to say: “In the course of our struggle, the male comrades’ attitudes were also an obstacle to one degree or another. Little was expected of women’s contribution ... .”<sup>127</sup> Within SWAPO, sexism was identified as one of the reactionary tendencies, which the movement and the highest level of leadership were to relentlessly combat.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Interview, 05 August 2008.

<sup>124</sup> University of Namibia Archives, C3: A-02(c) (ix). Measures of assistance to South African, Namibian and refugee women. 1987? In: M. Tjitendero’s collection.

<sup>125</sup> *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1, no. 4; July–August 1979.

<sup>126</sup> *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1, no. 2, March–April 1979; Martha Ford was on tour to Britain.

<sup>127</sup> Collins, C. “Swapo images of a future society: Women in Namibia”, *A Journal of Opinion*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Winter 1977) pp. 39–45.

<sup>128</sup> *Namibia Today*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1982).

Another aspect, which the SWC was to rally behind, was to bring about women's full participation in productive work, in education and cultural creativity. Hence women were urged to campaign for the creation of nursery schools to allow them to participate in productive work and for women to equally consider training and education as a spring board for entry to the productive work force (the content and significance of the training and education opportunities available to women in exile will be discussed in greater detail later in this book).

The inclusion of women in 'productive work', which was defined as work that earned them money, was of importance to ensure equality between men and women. This was based on the ideology that women should work to earn money to avoid unequal power relations between men and women. If it were only the men who earned a living and supported the family, this would result in unequal access to rights and privileges on the part of the men and oppression on the part of the women. If women did not participate in public or productive work, they would not develop their skills, nor be able to participate in public forums and governance processes; they would have no influence on policies and strategies that directly affected their lives. The SWC seemed committed to the campaign and they took the 'comradely advice' of Comrade Peter Mueshichange who addressed them during their regional conference in Kwanza Sul in 1982. He urged the women to note, "The passing of any resolutions which are not followed up with concrete action is always a waste of time and energy."<sup>129</sup> During that conference the participants also had an 'illuminating' lecture from a volunteer teacher from the GDR, entitled 'A socialist woman'. The presentation stressed that the main goals women should achieve were 'the right of women to work, equal pay for equal work, the right of women to fully participate in all political and social issues and full rights of women to receive education at all possible levels'.<sup>130</sup>

The SWC continually made pronouncements on women's liberation and the SWAPO leadership assured them of their unwavering support. However, a few factors indicated that there were obstacles to the liberation of women. Despite the assurances made in the editorials that 'we will stand by your side in your noble efforts',<sup>131</sup> SWAPO's leadership remained male-dominated. In 1977 Martha Ford, a SWC leader inside Namibia at the time, complained about the party being male dominated at both the National Executive level and the branch level. She stated that she would like to see a conscious effort to draw women into the decision-making organs of SWAPO.<sup>132</sup> During a SWC workshop in 1980 in exile, women complained of the insignificant representation of women in the leadership structure.<sup>133</sup> The

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> This tone of assurance was routine from the male leadership. *Namibia Today*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1982).

<sup>132</sup> *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1, no. 3 1977.

<sup>133</sup> UNAM Archives, Family planning, 1980. Katjavivi's collection.

SWC was a wing attached to the mother body, SWAPO. This meant that before the SWC could embark upon any programme or activity these had to be approved by the mother body. In 1979 Martha Ford went on a tour to Europe. She attended meetings organized by women in European solidarity movements. In an interview she indicated that she was not pleased with the fact that SWC was just a section of SWAPO; she recommended that they emulate the example of Angola and Mozambique where women's organizations operated autonomously from the liberation movements to which they were attached. Upon her return from Europe to Angola, SWAPO stripped her of her position and expelled her for what the movement regarded as 'undisciplined behaviour'.<sup>134</sup> At the 1985 UN women's conference in Nairobi during a debate on the necessity of an autonomous women's movement, there were divided opinions and some women who represented national liberation movements, for example, strongly opposed the idea of an autonomous women's movement, arguing that 'it is counter-revolutionary, dividing the working class, because any movement outside the 'class struggle and a working class party,' especially a women's movement, was doomed.'<sup>135</sup>

## Platforms and Media

Unlike the SWC inside the country, the women leaders in exile had clear possibilities to achieve their goals. They were in a better position to realize their aspirations. They had the freedom, at least physically, to move and attend conferences, meetings, seminars etc. They could hold meetings in the camps and were able to write freely and publish articles dealing with the liberation struggle.

### International conferences and networking:

The SWC attended many international conferences in which they presented the case of Namibia and of women in particular. Namibian women had the opportunity to speak in front of audiences, including the UN,<sup>136</sup> where they appealed to the international community for material and political support. The SWC was a member of the Pan- African Women's Organization (PAWO). PAWO's main aim was to "organize and promote the solidarity of member organizations in support of the liberation movements."<sup>137</sup> PAWO was founded in 1961 in Tanzania. Putuse Apollus (a member of SWAPO and the SWC's Central Committee

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<sup>134</sup> Cited in: Becker, *Namibian Women's Movement*. 1993. It is not clear whether those were the reasons for her expulsion.

<sup>135</sup> Hendessi, M., 'Fourteen Thousand Women Meet: Report from Nairobi, *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (Summer 1986), pp. 147–156.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, Putuse Apollus addresses the United Nations; *Namibia News*, July/August 1973.

<sup>137</sup> *SWAPO Information Bulletin*, September 1986. This issue indicated that PAWO was founded in 1962.

at the time of her death in exile) was a founding member of PAWO and served as a representative of SWAPO in the Secretariat of PAWO for 12 years.<sup>138</sup> SWC women toured many countries where they held meetings, seminars and exchanged ideas.<sup>139</sup>

SWAPO at the time had offices in Congo (Brazzaville), Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, Angola, Zimbabwe, in the UK, in East and West Germany, France, Romania, Sweden, Yugoslavia, India and Australia.<sup>140</sup> Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwa is one of the women who held diplomatic positions and represented SWAPO in various offices.<sup>141</sup>

### **Meetings in the settlements:**

The SWC held meetings in the various refugee settlements in Angola and Zambia. Apart from the various respondents who affirmed that women's meetings were held,<sup>142</sup> there is also archival evidence about meetings for 'women comrades'.<sup>143</sup> During the first SWC congress in 1980 it was suggested that there should be weekly meetings in the camps and settlements.<sup>144</sup> The invitations to these meetings found in the archives do not indicate the agenda. However, the women who were in exile and regularly attended these meetings revealed that the agenda ranged from the need for women to remain motivated and fight, the importance for women in the camps to maintain their dignity and not 'sleep around' or give in to their boyfriend's demands to fall pregnant; the agenda also touched on the subject of family planning.<sup>145</sup> A former male occupant in the camp indicated that, "when your girlfriend comes to you after those women's meetings, she would behave strangely towards you and would not give into demands, like having sex."<sup>146</sup>

The SWC created structures to cater for women's issues. Every settlement was regarded as a branch with a chairlady, deputy chairlady, assistant chairlady for information and political orientation as well as a treasurer. The chairlady was the leader in charge of the women's activities in the area. She chaired all branch meetings. Her duties were conducted in con-

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<sup>138</sup> *SWAPO Information Bulletin*, October 1986.

<sup>139</sup> *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1977; *Action on Namibia* Summer 1988, UNESCO, UNPD and SWAPO, Paris 1981; Study tours of Namibian women to Mozambique and Congo; SWC, Namibia women in the struggle for national liberation independence and reconstruction, meeting held in Guinea-Bissau September 1983. International conference in solidarity with the people of Namibia, Paris, September 1980, Paris.

<sup>140</sup> Vigne, R. 'SWAPO of Namibia: A movement in exile'. *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 1987), pp. 85–107.

<sup>141</sup> Interview 26/06/2008; 30/06/2008; 07/05/2008; 25/07/2008.

<sup>142</sup> Interview 06/08/2008; 18/06/2008; 05/08/2008; 23/04/2008; 12/07/2008.

<sup>143</sup> Invitations to meetings at various SWAPO settlements. SPARC 02005457, 02005454, 02005452, 02005449, 02005178.

<sup>144</sup> SWAPO of Namibia, *Information and Comments*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1980.

<sup>145</sup> Interview 06/08/2008; 18/06/2008; 05/08/2008; 23/04/2008; 12/07/2008.

<sup>146</sup> Interview 25/07/2008.



sultation with SWC branch executive committee (exco) members. The deputy chairlady was the principal assistant to the chairlady. The assistant chairlady for information and political orientation was responsible for gathering, analyzing and disseminating information on socio-economic, political conditions and the struggle for liberation to the women at the branch level. She was responsible for composing, explaining, propagating and defending the SWC's policies and programmes in the branch and she was the principal supervisor and co-ordinator of women's programmes, sport and culture. The treasurer had to keep and maintain the books and propose ways of fundraising at the branch level; she was also responsible for paying women at the branch level.<sup>147</sup> Teachers, nurses and people who did other professional jobs were paid an allowance, just enough to buy basic necessities.

### **10 December and 8 March:**

These days were publicly commemorated and formed platforms where the role and position of women in the liberation struggle was reinforced and praised. The women themselves and the SWAPO leadership organized these commemorations. 10 December was marked in the SWAPO calendar of significant events of the liberation struggle as Women's Day. On this day in 1959 in the Old Location in Windhoek, people demonstrated, opposing the forced removal from the Old Location to Katutura. The police opened fire on the demonstrators, wounding and killing many. A woman named Kakurukaze Mungunda burned a police car before she was shot dead. This was highlighted as a symbol of resistance, especially on the part of women and marked an important milestone in the role of women fighting apartheid. During the liberation struggle this day was celebrated in honour of the women, both deceased and alive, who had decided to wage war against colonialism. Annually, SWAPO publications were filled with poems, speeches and images of women who pledged to continue the struggle side by side with men.<sup>148</sup> Ironically, the anniversary of the shooting is on the same day as the anniversary of the day in 1948 when the General Assembly adopted and proclaimed The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In independent Namibia, as in many other countries, 10 December is celebrated as Human Rights Day.

International Women's Day, 8 March, celebrates the economic, political and social achievements of women globally. Since its foundation in 1911, International Women's Day is recognized globally by women throughout the world. The UN recognized it officially in 1975. SWAPO and SWC used its publications and rallies to emphasize their commitment to equal rights in the interests of promoting unity for the purpose of the total liberation of Namibia. The movement was collectively responsible for the elimination of male chauvinism.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> SPARC 02005448.

<sup>148</sup> *The Combatant, Namibia Today, SWAPO Information Bulletin, The Namibian Woman.*

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

There is archival evidence that 8 March and 10 December were both commemorated in the SWAPO camps. Meetings were held to prepare for the days and to make sure that logistical issues were in place, that food would be available, poster exhibitions were organized and that guests were invited from ANC, OMA, PAWO and other relevant organizations.<sup>150</sup>

### **“The Namibian woman”:**

This was a magazine published by the SWC. The idea of the SWC to create a magazine exclusively for women was conceived during its first congress in 1980,<sup>151</sup> and launched four years later, in December 1984. The first issue was the result of a six-month workshop sponsored by a Finnish donor agency to teach exiled Namibian women journalism skills.<sup>152</sup> According to Pendukeni Ithana, then secretary of the SWC, the magazine was established because the movement’s magazines did not prominently feature women; they ran only a few pages regarding women’s issues. The magazine focused on women in the settlement camps as its main readership and aimed to prepare them for the challenges they faced and to keep them updated on developments on the battlefield and in the political arenas.<sup>153</sup> Broadly the aims of the magazine were outlined as: “The magazine will be the official organ of SWC and will serve as a mouthpiece for the Namibian women. It will help explain the national liberation struggle SWAPO is waging and the role that women are playing in its execution. It will mobilize women at home and abroad. The magazine will present women with possibilities of expressing, advancing themselves and demonstrating their capabilities ...; the magazine will present the case for women’s emancipation using convincing facts and arguments as the struggle of national liberation is dialectically linked with the struggle of women.”<sup>154</sup> The editorial to the first magazine talks explicitly about ‘women’s emancipation’.

The magazine disappeared quickly, only to re-appear again in 1988. In 1989 it linked up with other SWAPO publications in the mass election campaign.

## **Sisterhood and Solidarity**

The status of Namibia as being the direct responsibility of the UN and the fact that SWAPO was recognized in 1973 as the ‘sole and authentic’ representative of the Namibian people

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<sup>150</sup> SPARC 02000695; 02003402.

<sup>151</sup> SWAPO of Namibia, *Information and Comments*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1980.

<sup>152</sup> Heuva, W. Voices in the liberation struggle: Discourse and Ideology in the SWAPO exile media. In: Melber, Henning. (Ed) *Re-examining liberation in Namibia: Political culture since independence*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> *The Namibian woman*, vol. 2 February 1988.

placed the country in a more favourable position in terms of receiving aid.<sup>155</sup> For various reasons SWAPO enjoyed what Dobell classified as 'the solidarity aid' and 'the cold war aid' in terms of moral, arms, material and financial resources from different governments and solidarity movements.<sup>156</sup>

Amilcar Cabral argued that Europeans could assist African liberation struggles by fighting capitalist structures in their own country.<sup>157</sup> I am going to focus here on the relationship built up between SWAPO and the London based Namibia Support Committee (NSC), which came to play a major role in assisting Namibian women under the flagship of the SWC. Initially known as 'Friends of Namibia' and later renamed the Namibia Support Committee, it came into existence in July 17 1969 at Red Lion Square in London. Peter Katjavivi, who opened a SWAPO office in London in 1968, was instrumental in the formation of this association.<sup>158</sup>

The NSC was an umbrella body comprised of campaigning sub-groups assigned to deal with specific issues. There was, for instance, the 'Campaign Against the Namibian Uranium Contract' (CANUC), the NSC Health collective, the SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign (SWSC), SWC literacy campaign and the Campaign for Namibian political prisoners. There were regional branches in England and Scotland. The NSC ran a bi-monthly magazine, *Action on Namibia*.<sup>159</sup> The magazine was instrumental in informing the world about the needs of Namibians and women, in particular, by asking for material and diplomatic support to those who were in the settlements in exile. It ran updates on the role and position of women and exposed the repression suffered by the people at the hands of the South Africans and the army particularly those inside the country. Finally, it showed the role of British involvement in Namibia both economically and politically.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, pp. 64–65. For comprehensive studies, cf. Iina S. & Pekka, P. *Finland and National liberation in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: The Nordic Afrika Institute, 1990; Tor, S. (Ed). *Liberation in Southern Africa*. Volume 1: Formation of a popular opinion, 1950–1970. Uppsala: The Nordic Afrika Institute, 1999; Tor, S. (Ed). *Liberation in Southern Africa: Regional and Swedish Voices*. Uppsala: The Nordic Afrika Institute, 1999; Tore L. *Norway and National liberation in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: The Nordic Afrika Institute, 2000; Kössler, R. & Melber, H. The West German Solidarity movement with the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. A (self) critical perspective. In: Engel Ulf and Kappel Robert (Eds). *Germany's Africa Policy Revisited: Interests, images and incrementalism*. Hamburg: Lit Verlag Münster, 2002 .

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Kössler and Melber. *The West German Solidarity movement*, 2002, p. 105.

<sup>158</sup> Vigne R. Standing by Swapo: British Campaigning for Namibia. Available at [www.anc.org.na/un/conference](http://www.anc.org.na/un/conference); accessed 04/04/2009. SWAPO had a battalion named Red Lion Square in Angola (Interview 09/09/2007).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> *Action on Namibia* magazines; Summer 1987; Paper 1, 1981; July–August 1979; March–April 1979; Summer 1988, September 1990; Autumn 1988.

The NSC sponsored and hosted Namibian women in the UK, held meetings, seminars and workshops with students, women's groups and anti-apartheid groups. Women from the NSC and SWSC attended the congress of the SWC in 1980 and frequently visited the settlements in Angola and Zambia to familiarize themselves with the situation. It raised funds and collected materials. Sanitary towels, mosquito nets, soaps, toothpaste, pens, papers, sewing machines, literacy packs (entitled 'Nangula is pregnant' and 'Nangula is visiting the Eembaxu village'), a land cruiser, survival kits, underwear, clothes, contraceptives, medicines and other necessities were collected and shipped to the SWAPO settlements in Angola and Zambia.<sup>161</sup> It is striking that the images that accompanied the appeals in the NSC magazines aimed to evoke emotion (women in desperate situations inside the country, the grave of Kassinga victims, groups of people en route to the camps escaping South African repression) whilst others were of women doing traditionally male dominated work (women carrying guns or doing mechanics jobs).<sup>162</sup>

Under the flagship of the NSC, posters depicting Namibian women and the liberation struggle in general were produced.<sup>163</sup> These posters were sold in order to generate money. Other items, such as badges, postcards and publications on Namibia were sold too and people were encouraged to subscribe to the magazine. Films were sold and at times shown and contacts of various anti-apartheid movements were given so that people could subscribe to additional publications or make donations.<sup>164</sup>



Figure 1. A Free Ida Jimmy Campaign sticker<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> For more on posters. cf. Miescher, G. & Henrichsen, D. *African posters: A catalogue of the poster collection* in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien. Switzerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2004.

<sup>164</sup> Action on Namibia magazines.

<sup>165</sup> This image appeared in *The Combatant* vol. 4, no. 11 1983. It had no caption and it is not indicated whether it appeared on a badge, t-shirt, poster or leaflet. There is a striking similarity between this image and a badge from the Free Angela Davis campaign in the early 1970s. See [www.rasodac.be/www.dearkitty.blog.com](http://www.rasodac.be/www.dearkitty.blog.com)

People were asked to boycott apartheid products, which was done both through demonstrations and through posters. Demonstrations were staged and petitions were signed for intervention. On 26 August 1983 a petition with 6000 signatures was handed in to the British Prime Minister's office at 10 Downing Street in London by the SWC. The petition called on the British government to intervene in the release of Ida Jimmy.<sup>166</sup> A more extensive analysis of this political involvement and the case of Ida Jimmy will be dealt with in the next chapter.

## **The role of women in the settlements and camps**

Women in the camps and settlements played a major role in their establishment and organization. This is not to imply that men did not work, but for the scope of this book, I am going to concentrate on the role of women.

### **Caring for the young ones:**

Women played a major role in looking after the children. After delivering, mothers stayed with their children for up to two years after which they entrusted them to caretakers. Kindergartens were set up and run by women. This was in line with one of the SWC's objectives, making sure that women were not excluded from education or productive work because of child-care responsibilities. This was emphasized again during the first congress of SWC in 1980.<sup>167</sup> A former exile re-emphasized why women were not allowed to keep their children:

“Everyone had to contribute to the liberation struggle. Imagine how many women could have been just sitting looking after the children. They had to go to school, to the front to fight or anywhere where their services were needed. The point is getting children was not going to be the obstacle for women's advancement. One can be a mother and still contribute to the liberation struggle. There was life after getting a baby”<sup>168</sup>

It was mainly women who took care of the children and ran the nurseries. Most primary school teachers were female as well.<sup>169</sup>

### **Nursing:**

Women played a role in the nursing section. They looked after the sick, injured and the vulnerable people, like the old. Many women who served time at the battlefield were nurses

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<sup>166</sup> *Information and Comment*, Sept/Oct 1983.

<sup>167</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Autumn 1988; *Information and Comments*, vol. 2, no.2 1980; *The Combatant*, December 1984.

<sup>168</sup> Interview 12/08/2008.

<sup>169</sup> Interview 06/05/2008.

and worked in the military hospitals.<sup>170</sup> Ellen Namhila in her autobiography 'The price of freedom' relates her experience of being a young nurse in the camps. Namhila recounts how she had to treat wounded soldiers and how she could not get used to that. She recalls how unprepared she was, especially when she could not professionally help those patients who had 'wounds of the mind' after the Kassinga attack.<sup>171</sup>

### **Food production:**

Apart from the food that people were given by the movement, women were involved in food production. They grew maize and vegetables and were involved in rearing chickens, ducks, goat and pigs. Eggs and vegetables were mainly fed to the young and the sick.<sup>172</sup>

### **Manufacturing and studying:**

After receiving weaving, knitting and tailoring training, women were involved in making uniforms for the schoolchildren and the combatants and produced clothing generally according to the general local demand. Women did not just do traditional feminine jobs but entered into traditional male dominated lines of work. For example, by 1981, there were about 80 women studying medicine, 33 studying mechanical work, 14 doing construction and 11 doing electrical work.<sup>173</sup>

### **Sisters in arms: Women in the military wing**

During the first congress of the SWAPO Women's Council in January 1980, it was reaffirmed that the armed struggle was the only effective way to achieve the liberation of the country. It was during the same congress that the SWC indicated 'its determination to mobilize women for fuller integration into the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN)'.<sup>174</sup> All fit, able-bodied men and women went through the same rigorous military training. The notion was that all people had to contribute to the struggle and, most importantly, that all people had to be militarily ready in case the enemy attacked.<sup>175</sup>

Although women were trained as the men were, only a few women were posted to the front where they worked mainly as nurses or in the communications department. A small number of women, however, participated in actual combat.<sup>176</sup> Segal observed that during

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<sup>170</sup> Interview 16/07/2008; 06/05/2008.

<sup>171</sup> Namhila, E. *The price of freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997, pp. 42–48.

<sup>172</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Autumn 1988.

<sup>173</sup> *The Combatant*, vol. 5, no.8, 1984; *Action on Namibia*, Autumn 1988, *Namibia Today*, vol. 5, no. 2 1981; Interview 16/07/2008; 06/05/2008.

<sup>174</sup> *Information and Comments*, vol. 2, no. 2, February 1980.

<sup>175</sup> Interview 12/08/2008; 23/04/2008; 26/07/2008.

<sup>176</sup> Interview 12/07/2008; 16/07/2008; 09/09/2008.

World War II, the line between combatant and non-combatant was directly connected to the firing of weapons. Even uniformed women who performed tasks associated with combat and tasks that were regarded as secondary or support roles, were viewed as non-combatants, simply because they did not fire weapons; men had to do it.<sup>177</sup> It appears as if the armed struggle led by SWAPO leaned towards a similar definition of 'the combatant.'

Throughout my interviews, many male ex-combatants expressed various personal opinions why women could not go on combat operations:

"It was tough; it was impossible due to their biological set up; we could not expose our women to such danger; it was going to be tough if they were to be captured, they could either reveal sensitive information or could get raped; we did not want the world to think that SWAPO had no men to fight; South Africa did not send women to fight us, so we, the men had to fight the other men, women are mothers, South Africans had guns, when fired, women would not stop menstruating ..."<sup>178</sup>

Women are mostly looked at in terms of gender differences; women are mothers and nurturers and are not supposed to kill. The role of women is regarded as life giving rather than causing death through the barrel of the gun.<sup>179</sup> The nature of the military missions was one of the factors emphasized. Soldiers had to walk long distances, carry their weapons and food rations whilst being hunted by an enemy who was ruthless and lurked everywhere.<sup>180</sup> It is probably for these reasons that women soldiers are generally sent on peacemaking operations and disaster relief activities as opposed to ground combat.<sup>181</sup>

The nature of the war meant that if the camps were attacked (civilian or military), women were bound to be involved in the battle. For example, when the civilian Kassinga camp was attacked in 1978, more women and children were victims. More women were found in the settlements and rear bases. However, a few women did narrate some life-threatening battles in which they had fought.<sup>182</sup>

Women were praised time and again in SWAPO publications about their successes in various battles. Women were also visually represented in photographs as tough looking and in postures ready for combat. According to *The Namibian Woman* "The women combatants of PLAN distinguished themselves in the battle of Okanghudi, 57 km north east of Ondangwa, on 31 October 1987, in which 100 South African troops were killed,

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<sup>177</sup> Segal, M. W. Women's military Roles cross-nationality: Past, Present and future. *Gender and Society*, vol. 9, no.6 (December 1995), pp. 757-775.

<sup>178</sup> Interviews 12/08/2008; 12/08/2008; 22, 07/2008; 15/07/2008; 25/07/2008.

<sup>179</sup> Segal, Women's military Roles cross-nationality, 1995: p. 762.

<sup>180</sup> Interviews, as in footnote 107.

<sup>181</sup> Segal, Women's military roles cross-nationality, 1995: p. 762.

<sup>182</sup> Interview 26/07/2008; 19/08/2008.



14 military vehicles destroyed and buffel and wolf combat vehicles were captured.”<sup>183</sup> Another example was that of the two women, Maria David (Katoko) and Esther Naboth<sup>184</sup> who died fighting the enemy during the Kassinga attack. The SWAPO publications say little about these women, but they are remembered: “They unselfishly fought the South African jet bombers for 12 hours and they heroically died with anti-craft guns in their hands.”<sup>185</sup> The Okanghudi battle cited in SWAPO publications as a ‘major success battle’ should be treated with suspicion. The battle was regarded as one of the biggest battles but today nothing is heard of it in contrast to the ‘major and decisive’ battles that are celebrated in Namibia through songs and other means.<sup>186</sup> For propaganda purposes it was in the interests of SWAPO or South Africa to claim high enemy casualties. However, looking at the record of people who sacrificed their lives listed in the SWAPO publication *Their blood waters our freedom*, only a small number of women, compared to men, lost their lives during combat especially in the war zone. Ironically neither David nor Naboth are among the names that appear in this list.<sup>187</sup>

The rank and file of PLAN was male dominated. However, during the interviews it transpired that a few women were prominent and did play crucial roles in PLAN. Various respondents mentioned a couple of names, Ndaiponofi Nehova and Aira Schikwambi<sup>188</sup> as being the only two women who were members of the military council, the highest body of PLAN, which reported directly to the commander-in-chief, Tekla Shikola. Two others, Margaret Amagulu and Hangapo Veico were applauded for being distinguished combatants.<sup>189</sup> It is unfortunate that these women, although honoured with medals befitting their heroism, did not continue to offer their military expertise in independent Namibia, unlike their male counterparts who now occupy key positions in the Ministry of Defence. Some women apparently struggled to get formal employment after independence.

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<sup>183</sup> *The Namibian Woman*, vol. 2, February 1988; *NAMPA Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, March 1988; *Namibia Today*, vol. 5, no.2, 1981.

<sup>184</sup> These two women are heroically recalled in various SWAPO publications as having died as heroes because they died fighting back the enemy during the Kassinga attack.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> In Namibia on 18 March 2008, a series of activities were held to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Public lectures, a military convoy march and a panel discussion on national TV were held.

<sup>187</sup> SWAPO Party. *Their blood waters our freedom: Glory to the heroes and heroines of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*. Windhoek: SWAPO party, 1996.

<sup>188</sup> Nehova and Schikwambi were professional nurses before they left the country and continued to practice nursing while in exile. According to Nehova, they were appointed to sit on the Military Councils partly because they were good soldiers but mainly because they headed the hospitals at the military headquarter.

<sup>189</sup> Interview 26/07/2008; 12/08/2008 (b); 22/07/2008; 05/08/2008; 23/04/2008; 19/08/2008; 09/07/2008; 10/09/2008; 06/05/2008.



Armed conflicts change gender roles and identities. Normal life is disrupted as people are dislocated and forced out of their homes and social life and accepted norms become eroded. When men leave their homes, women have to learn to cope without their men folk and if women leave, men might have to take over work that was traditionally done by women. When people went into exile and lived in camps their lives changed. They lost their livelihood, livestock and land, which meant they could not grow food to sustain themselves. Food was distributed to them, an act that is not in line with the accepted tradition of men being 'hunters' and providers for their families. As a result new social relationships and identities were formed.<sup>190</sup>

Traditionally, a king (*omukwaniilwa*) could distribute millet (*omahangu*) to his subjects in times of famine but subjects obligatorily contributed this *omahangu* to the king during the years of good harvest. The process is called *oompale*. However, for the SWAPO leaders to distribute food to the people in the camps did not mean that they took on the role of the *omukwaniilwa* per se, because the concept of having food distributed is not entirely the same. Traditionally, the difference is that during a famine the *omukwaniilwa* redistributed grain that his subjects had given to him during the seasons with a good harvest. In the camps, food and other goods were constantly distributed to the refugees and there was no sense of ownership because the refugees did not contribute anything towards the distributed goods.

Women became soldiers, a role that is traditionally believed to be a man's role, whilst men who lived in the camps cooked, a task that was traditionally done by women. Sideris has argued that these kinds of shifts can present serious threats to masculinity.<sup>191</sup> El-Bushra has concluded that men find it more difficult than women to adjust to new situations and roles. Patriarchal norms based on gender identity seem to be a serious issue of contention as sudden shifts in roles intensify men's sense of failure and frustration.<sup>192</sup> Men, feeling that they are stripped of their masculinity might, for example, find other ways of reaffirming their manhood and superiority.

## Summary

This chapter outlined the role played by women inside and outside the country. It highlighted the different political environments in which women had to operate and the way in

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<sup>190</sup> El-Bushra, J. Fused in combat: Gender relations and armed conflict. *Development in Practise*, vol. 13, no. 2/3 (May 2003), pp. 252–265; Meintjes, S, Pillay, A, Turshen, M. *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

<sup>191</sup> Sideris, T. Rape in war and peace. In: Meintjes, et al. *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*. London: Zed Books, 2001, p. 142, 152.

<sup>192</sup> El-Bushra. *Fused in combat*, 2003, pp. 252–265.

which these determined whether they could execute the aims and objectives of the SWC, especially that of mobilizing other women to support and join SWAPO.

It has also examined the situations leading to the shifting of gender roles and gender relations as women had to manage life at home in the absence of their male counterpart or, at other times, when they had to cope with being uprooted and dislocated from their homes and were forced to relocate to the camps and settlements.

## Chapter Two

### Idealized struggle?

### Public and Visual Representations of Women

This chapter sets out to reconstruct the visual and public representations made by SWAPO and SWAPO supporting publications. The ideology and programmes of national liberation movements advocated non-exploitative societies by promoting women's advancement, coupled with women's desire to break away from exploitative traditional structures and the quest for national liberation and independence. National liberation movements used various media to market their ideologies.

This chapter will look at those women selected consciously (or not) to put a face to women's leadership and represent them as exemplary role models. They were portrayed as the movers and shakers within the women's wing of SWAPO during the struggle. There was, however, a dual representation of women, not only as actors, but also as victims. This chapter will focus on the women who were presented as victims and on those who 'broke through' and acquired influence in a male dominated arena. Posters, songs, poems and other means were used to depict a visual and public image of SWAPO; women were included in this image.

The first SWAPO publication in exile was produced in Egypt in the 1960s. It was called *Solidarity*. This was followed by *Namibia Today*, previously called *South West Africa Today*, initially published in Tanzania and later in Zambia. *Namibia Today* was the official organ of SWAPO and funded by the party's own resources. There were other significant publications such as the *SWAPO Information Bulletin (SIB)* and *Namibia News* (whose name was changed several times to avoid suspicion by the colonial police inside Namibia). The SWAPO Youth League (SYL) published *Namibian Youth*, which was established in the 1970s. The SWAPO Women's Council had a quarterly magazine, *Namibian Woman*, which they launched in 1984. *The Combatant*, a monthly and official organ of the People's Liberation Army (PLAN) was first published in 1979.<sup>1</sup> The London-based *Action on Namibia* was the bi-monthly magazine of the Namibia Support Committee (NSC). In addition, SWAPO and various national Anti-Apartheid Movements produced publications and posters across the globe. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Heuva, W. Voices in the liberation struggle: Discourse and ideology in the SWAPO Exile media. In: Melber, H. (Ed). *Re-examining liberation in Namibia: Political culture since independence*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003.

worth noting that SWAPO was exposed to the visual environments of Soviet, Cuban and British posters all of which represented 'liberated women', a visual image which SWAPO adopted as well. SWAPO collaborated with solidarity artists such as Eduardo di Muro whilst the famous *mannetjie*, the emblem of SWAPO, was based on the graphic influence of a Cuban poster that had been displayed in SWAPO offices.<sup>2</sup> Posters and publications had a common general aim, to "propagate and agitate the ideals and objectives of the movement" and to solicit international support.<sup>3</sup> Their circulation was wide. Most periodicals were published in English, others were published in a Namibian vernacular language. *The Combatant* sometimes had a parallel newsletter, *Omukwiita* that ran the same articles in Oshiwambo. SWAPO had offices across the world and encouraged the people to subscribe to these publications. Some were distributed in the SWAPO camps and settlements and PLAN carried and clandestinely distributed some of these publications inside Namibia.<sup>4</sup>

## Heroines and legends: (Re-)presenting the women leaders and icons of the struggle

In the Introduction, the concept 'women' was used in terms of an 'imagined community'. Whilst this section looks at women in the SWAPO settlement as an imagined community bound together by common goals, it also recognizes that women were not homogenous and should not be reduced or labelled simply as a singular entity.<sup>5</sup> Different women, especially those in leadership positions, had different experiences to ordinary women who lived in the settlements. Gilliam has made the critical observation that the elite in the liberation movements formed the officially recognized leadership and the channel through which the less privileged voiced their grievances.<sup>6</sup> I would argue further that most of the time the leaders' privileged positions and experiences were applied across the board to cover and represent all women who, in reality, might have had dissimilar and tougher experiences. A Central Committee led the SWC with just 19 members and a smaller National Executive Committee. The majority of women were in different positions and had very different experiences; SWAPO's publications highlighted the stories of these women.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Miescher, G. et al. (Eds). *Posters in action: Visuality in the making of an African nation*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009, pp. 100–101, pp. 168–169.

<sup>3</sup> Heuva, *Voices in the liberation*, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Akawa, M. "Strictly members only". Circulations of SWAPO posters in northern Namibia during the liberation struggle. In: Miescher, G. et al (Eds). *Posters in action: Visuality in the making of an African nation*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Mohanty, C.H. Introduction. In: Mohanty, C.H et al (eds). *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, pp. 4–6.

<sup>6</sup> Gilliam, A Women's equality and national liberation. In: Mohanty, C.H et al (eds). *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 216.

## Kakurukaze Mungunda

Responding to a question about the role played by women during the liberation struggle during my research interviews, the majority of my respondents replied by initially narrating the story of Kakurukaze Mungunda. The role she played and the path she opened on 10 December 1959 inspired the active participation of women in the fight against apartheid. Mungunda was a member of a crowd, which had gathered outside the municipal offices in the Old Location in Windhoek to protest the forced removal from the Old Location to Katutura. It is alleged that she was shot dead after she had set the Superintendent's car on fire. In the years to come, 10 December was celebrated by SWAPO as Women's Day but, since independence, the day has been celebrated as Human Rights Day. The same story was recited at all the commemorations of Women's Day. During a 1982 rally, it was re-emphasized that "Every revolutionary struggle has its own historic deeds, of which some are more outstanding than others. In our case, the Windhoek uprising of December 1959 represents a watershed."<sup>7</sup> Addressing a rally in 1987 to commemorate the day, President Sam Nujoma said: "This day of December is an unforgettable day in the history of our struggle for the liberation of Namibia. A day of rededication, redetermination and a day of respect to our heroes and heroines killed on that day and during the bitter struggle for liberation."<sup>8</sup> Similar sentiments have been expressed in various SWAPO publications. Kakurukaze Mungunda died fighting and has today a symbolic grave at the National Heroes Acre in Windhoek. A street in Katutura, a patrol vessel and the old single quarter market in Soweto, Katutura, have all been named after her.



*Figure 2. Source: Namhila, E. "We are not going to prosecute you", 2003*

<sup>7</sup> *Namibia Today* 1/82, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> *The Combatant*, Vol. 9, no. 5, December 1987.

Kakurukaze Mungunda became a central figure and a point of reference in terms of heroism in SWAPO publications. Although there was never a photographic image to accompany the narratives related to her act of resistance on 10 December 1959, the account of what happened on that day was vividly narrated, in some cases following a chronological order leading up to 10 December. Her relatives donated an image of Kakurukaze Mungunda only after the symbolic tombstone was erected for her at Heroes Acre in 2001.<sup>9</sup> Kakurukaze Mungunda was the first Namibian woman to be recorded as having died in conflict with the South African authorities. This could be the reason why she fitted into the ‘armed conflict narrative’, unlike other women who led the mass protest march into the centre of town a few days earlier to petition against the removal of the Old Location and whose names are now forgotten.

### **Meekulu Putuse Appolus**

Meekulu Putuse was affectionately called *Meekulu* (grandma). She adopted and brought up many orphans of the liberation war whom she loved like her own. Born in 1930, Meekulu Putuse was a nurse by profession. She was one of the women who joined the liberation struggle whilst in exile in 1960. She was elected to the SWAPO Central Committee in 1969 and was a founding member of the SWC. After having gone for further nursing training, she was appointed as a health inspector in Lusaka, Zambia in 1964. She was a founding member of the Pan African Women’s Organization (PAWO), which was formed in 1962 and for twelve years she was the SWAPO representative in the Secretariat of PAWO. In 1973 she addressed the United Nations Committee on the Decolonisation of Africa in New York. She attended and addressed many workshops and conferences around the globe and was described in an official SWAPO obituary as having proven herself beyond doubt as a “capable comrade, and a committed fighter against colonialism, oppression and exploitation.”<sup>10</sup> She died on 28 October 1986 after a short illness. At her memorial service in Angola, a grief-stricken Nujoma stated that “Our hearts are shattered by the news that comrade Meekulu Putuse has passed away, ... death has robbed SWAPO of a dedicated freedom fighter, a dependable and devoted cadre ... she is irreplaceable and I therefore call upon you to emulate her selfless example.” He further declared that Meekulu Putuse deserved to be called ‘Mother Africa’: “Her name will be written in golden letters in the historical books of the motherland ... when Namibia is a free and a sovereign independent state.”<sup>11</sup> When the

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<sup>9</sup> Namhila, E. N. “We are not going to prosecute you, we want your records and stories”: Filling apartheid gaps in the public memory of the Namibian liberation struggle for independence. Presented at the World Library and Information Congress: 69<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference and council, 1–9 August 2003, Berlin. Available at [www.ifla.org.sg](http://www.ifla.org.sg), accessed 30 May 2009.

<sup>10</sup> *SWAPO Information and Bulletin*, October 1986.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

**“Meekulu” (Grandma)  
Putuse Appolus  
1930-1986**



I,  
he,  
she,  
are children of this land  
brought up by mother Africa's own hand  
now we've got people from many a land  
struggling to give us a hand  
in the battle against an enemy band  
entrenched for years in our mineral-rich land.

I



I,  
he,  
she,  
are children of this land  
brought up by mother Africa's own hand  
we've grown up in Katutura against our stand  
pushed there by the murdering enemy band  
we've grown up in Soweto against our stand  
massacred there by the blood-thirsty enemy band  
there's something the enemy fails to understand  
that we've always been children of this land  
long before Jan Van Riebeeck set sail for our land  
we were here with many a grazing cattle in our land  
this blood dripping is for our land  
what more should we do to make the world understand?

IV

I,  
he,  
she,  
are children of this land  
brought up by mother Africa's own hand  
now we're this century's revolutionary brand  
battling because we've a revolutionary stand  
baying because we want our land  
entrenched, the enemy will not remain in our land

II



I,  
he,  
she,  
are children of this land  
brought up by mother Africa's own hand  
somewhere in an overseas' land  
there's a child holding a juicy apple in one hand  
not knowing it came from our beloved land  
where father receives no profit from the fruit of our  
land  
where mother wraps the apple after weighing it in  
her own hand  
we shall fight for the return of our beloved land  
please rest, having struggled for our land  
from here we'll go on, struggling for our land  
so that your children...us all, can live in a peaceful  
land.

V

I,  
he,  
she,  
are children of this land  
brought up by mother Africa's own hand  
troubled by people from another far away land  
now the world has heard the cry for our beloved  
land  
now they've all seen signs of our united stand  
comrades have seen blood dripping from our big  
hand  
the same hand that cultivates our fertile land  
is slightly injured in the battle for our land

III



Mvuda ya Nangolo

Published by the SWAPO Women's Council  
and Printed by the SWAPO Department  
of Information and Publicity,  
Lusaka, Zambia



Figure 3. Source: Miescher, G. & Henrichsen, D. African posters. A catalogue of the poster collection in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien. Swizerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2004<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A respondent recalls that this image was taken during the last workshop, which Meekulu addressed before she passed away. Interview 06/05/2008.



SWC held its Central Committee meeting in 1987, Peter Mweshihange, SWAPO's Secretary for Defence, called the audience to observe a moment of silence in memory of Meekulu Putuse before he opened the meeting. He described Meekulu as "a great mother of the oppressed Namibians, a great humanist who strived for the emancipation of women the world over". He continued by stating: "Her memory remains an inspiration to everyone."<sup>13</sup> The largest kindergarten in Kwanza Sul, which cared for more than 800 children some of them on a 24-hour basis, was named after her.<sup>14</sup> The author personally remembers singing songs and chanting praises during dances about Meekulu Putuse. A street in Katutura is now named after her.

### **Dr Libertina Inaviposa Amathila**

Born on 10 December 1940 at Fransfontein, Libertina Amathila was the first black woman Namibian medical doctor. In 1962, at the age of 22, she left Namibia to join the liberation struggle with the main aim of studying medicine. After completing medical school in Poland, she returned to work at a hospital in Dar es Salaam. She was elected as a member of SWAPO Central Committee in 1969 and a director of the SWC from 1969–1975. In 1970 she was SWAPO Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare and from 1975 to 1989 she worked as a doctor and health director in the SWAPO camps. Dr. Amathila is represented in the SWAPO publications as the first black Namibian woman to become a doctor and as having played a pivotal role in the pioneering and establishment of the health sector in SWAPO camps. Between 1971 and 1976, together with her husband Ben Amathila, who was the SWAPO



*Figure 4. Dr. Libertina Amathila with Jariretundu Kozonguizi. Source: Namibia News, Vol. 5. No. 8, 1972*

<sup>13</sup> *The Combatant*, May 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Autumn 1988; *Namibia News*, Vol. 7, Nos 6/7, June/July 1974; *Namibia News* Vol. 8, Nos 9/12, Sept–Dec 1975.



chief representative for the Scandinavian countries, Dr. Amathila resided in Sweden and helped to establish a solid support base for SWAPO in Sweden and other Nordic countries.<sup>15</sup> She worked in the field of health at an international level. After independence, she held various ministerial positions and in 2005 became Namibia's Deputy Prime Minister. She has been awarded various medals: in 1987, she was awarded one of SWAPO's highest honours – The Ongulumbashe Medal for Bravery and Long Service. In 1991, she was rewarded with the Nansen Refugee Award. This award is given yearly to a person or group for outstanding services in supporting refugee causes. In 2002 at the commemoration of Heroes Day, she received The Order of the Eagle, one of Namibia's top awards.

### **Pendukeni Kaulinge**

Pendukeni Kaulinge was born on 11 October 1952 at Uukwandongo village. She went into exile in 1974 and was the Secretary-General for the SWC from 1980 to 1991. She was one of the first women fighters in PLAN<sup>16</sup> and was among the first group that graduated at the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) in Lusaka. Being the first and only Secretary-General for SWC in exile she was instrumental in all the official decisions made by SWAPO about the SWC and by the SWC itself. She attended many workshops and conferences both in the settlements and around the globe. Most official statements about the role and positions of Namibian women were made through her as she was the 'official' spokesperson for the women. Once tagged as the 'iron lady,' Kaulinge was prominent



**Comrade Pendukeni Kaulinge, Secretary for SWAPO Women Council**

Figure 5. Source: *Namibia Today*, Vol. 5, no. 2, 1981<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Sellström, T. *Sweden and National liberation in Southern Africa. Volume 1: Formation of a popular opinion 1950–1970*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> *Namibia Today*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1982; *The Combatant*, Vol. 3, No. 6, 1982; *Action Namibia*, Winter 1988; *Action on Namibia* Autumn 1988, *Namibia Today*, Vol. 2, 1982; *Information and Bulletin*, December 1987; *Information and Bulletin*, September 1986.

<sup>17</sup> The SWAPO publications used her maiden name.

in soliciting donations from solidarity organizations and anti-apartheid movements to help women in the SWAPO settlements. By 1982 she was one of the three women serving on the SWAPO Central Committee.<sup>18</sup>

### **Penny Hilite Hashoongo**

In independent Namibia, Hashoongo is one of the less well known women compared to the praise showered upon her during exile. During interviews I had with the former exile community, a few people made brief comments to respond to the questions of who she was and what she did that was so extraordinary to rise to fame at the age of 25.

Responses included the fact that she was hard working and that she showed a lot of potential. Hashoongo died at the age of 25 in October 1977 in Lusaka. She died suddenly after complaining of a headache and vomiting.<sup>19</sup> At the time of her death, she was Secretary for the Women's Council. She was instrumental in developing the guidelines and activities of the Women's Council. She was a SWAPO delegate to many international conferences and developed networks with many international organizations.<sup>20</sup>

Hashoongo had this to say about women: "History will forever record the radiant images of women fighters indomitable in prison, of mothers who dig shelters to protect revolutionary cadres and hide wounded soldiers, of women soldiers and defence units which shoot down enemy jet planes and peasants who produce food for the soldiers and fighters."<sup>21</sup> She



**Penny Hilite Hashoongo, Secretary of SWAPO's Women's Council, who died tragically (aged 25) in Lusaka on 31st October after a short illness. Her contribution to the struggle lives on.**

*Figure 6. Source: Namibia Today, Vol. 1, no. 3. 1977*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Interview 26/06/2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Namibia Today*, vol. 1, number 2, 1977, *The Combatant*, vol. 4, no. 5, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> *Namibia Today*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1977.

continued by saying: "Enjoying the care of SWAPO, Namibian women are maturing by leaps and bounds and their cultural, political and professional level is unceasingly heightened. Our contingent of women technical, political and managerial cadres has rapidly developed. The equal role of women in our movement has been guaranteed by SWAPO and is in the main being materialised."<sup>22</sup> A maternity unit at a hospital in the SWAPO settlements was named after her, but, as far as I am aware, no street or building has been named after her since independence.<sup>23</sup>

### **Angela Yvonne Davis**

SWC claimed not to be a feminist movement, however, in 1973 SWAPO invited Angela Davis to address a SWAPO rally in Dar es Salaam to mark Namibia Day that was commemorated on 26 August every year to celebrate the launch of the armed struggle in 1966. In independent Namibia the day is still commemorated annually as Heroes Day.<sup>24</sup> Angela Davis was born in Alabama USA on 26 January 1944. She is an American political activist whose speeches drew heavily on Marxism and feminism. Associated with the Civil Rights Movements and Black Panther Party for Self Defence, she became notorious when a weapon registered in her name was linked to the murder of a judge during an effort to free a black convict in the summer of 1970. After being on the run for two months, she was captured.

In 1972 eighteen months after her arrest, she was tried and acquitted of all charges as there was insufficient evidence to establish her responsibility for the plot. After her release she temporarily relocated to Cuba.<sup>25</sup> She must have been in Cuba before she came to address the SWAPO youth. The SWAPO publications that feature her visit to Tanzania do not have much to say about her during this visit. She was tagged as 'Sister Angela', which gives an indication that she was regarded by SWAPO as 'progressive and militant' as the constitution of the Youth and Women's Council stated that they would associate with individuals and organizations with radical credentials. There are no further indications that SWAPO had any ongoing contact with her. However, looking at how militant and outspoken she was in America about issues of women's rights, racial justice and gender, these must have been some of the reasons why SWAPO regarded her as a role model and an example to be emulated by the youth and women of SWAPO.

These are the women who occupy prominent spaces in the histories of their respective communities and were presumed to provide inspiration to the generation in which they lived and to those that followed. These women were time and again featured in SWAPO

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *The Combatant*, December 1982.

<sup>24</sup> *Kalahari News*, vol. 6, no.11&12, Nov/Dec 1973.

<sup>25</sup> [www.womenshistory.about.com](http://www.womenshistory.about.com).

publications and posters. However, whilst there was no evidence of nepotism, it is interesting to note that most women in the SWAPO leadership are related by birth or marriage to powerful men.<sup>26</sup> It is also noteworthy that in some instances, the women highlighted above were honoured by having institutions named after them that are associated with gendered roles such as nurseries (looking after children) and maternity hospitals (giving birth). This stands in stark contrast to the Tobias Hainyeko military training centre, which was named after a former male commander. Currently in Namibia, the clinic at the Suiderhof Military base is named after Peter Mweshihange and the Police College Academy is named after Patric Iiyambo Lunganda, both prominent PLAN commanders during the liberation struggle. Only men's names have been used for commemorative purposes at military and police sites.

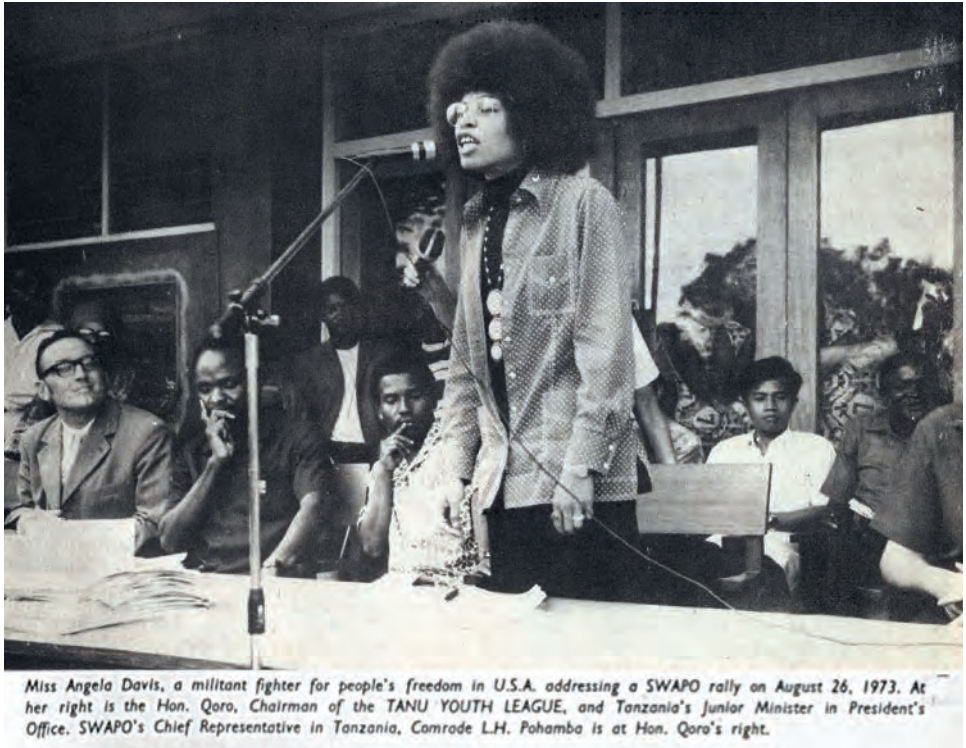


Figure 7. Source: *The Namibian Youth*, Vol. 1, no. 1, Jan–Feb. 1974

<sup>26</sup> The SWC Central Committee (CC) was elected in 1980. Some of these women were (at the time, or later) married to politically powerful men in SWAPO; some women came from elite families (in terms of education, political circles or their connection to traditional authorities). Some members of the CC of SWC included Pendukeni Kaulinge, Kovambo Nujoma, Ulitala Hiveluah, Ndaiponofi Shaduka, Frieda Nambundunga, Pashukeni Shoombe, Aira Schikwambi and Putuse Appolus. *Namibia Today*, Vol. 2, No. 3 1980.

## Inclusion and exclusion

As much as the author tried to refrain from falling into the trap of being selective, one is forced to include and exclude as, I must acknowledge, it is the nature of historian to select or ignore evidence in order to develop an argument. However, my selection of evidence is heavily based on those stories and images that repeatedly feature in the SWAPO publications. In addition, most of these names and incidents cropped up during the interviews conducted for the purpose of this research.

However, the process of inclusion and exclusion is also found in the historiography of the SWAPO publications and various pro-SWAPO monographs. There was a general trend of excluding women (and men) who played an important role in SWAPO, but fell 'out of flavour' with SWAPO, after which their contribution was ignored. One example of this tendency is Otilie Abrahams. She joined SWAPO in 1960 when the party was established. She was part of the team that established the SWAPO branch in Cape Town.<sup>27</sup> In January 1963 Otilie and her husband Kenneth Abrahams opened the SWAPO branch in Rehoboth. They recruited members and started a network that sent recruits out of the country through Botswana. After arriving in Dar es Salaam in August 1963 (SWAPO had an office there at the time), they were sent to Kenya the same year to lobby for support. They were suspended from SWAPO in 1964 for raising questions about how funds were being spent. Otilie Abrahams was the Secretary for Education and served on the SWAPO Executive Committee.<sup>28</sup>

## **“This is what we stand for”: Public declarations by SWAPO’s male and female leadership**

Gender politics are institutionalized. The roles that men and women were to play in the liberation struggle were included and constantly 'replayed' in speeches, newsletters and propaganda material, whilst public declarations and commitments reflected the rhetorically advanced and progressive programmes and principles of women in the liberation movement. However, Judy Kimble has argued that these pronouncements were double-edged. It was a fact that the question of women's problems was lifted up to the level of other issues but it was simply fashionable for liberation movements to make these pronouncements to increase their popularity by pegging 'women' as an element that would make the movements appear

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<sup>27</sup> Leys, C. & Brown, S. (Eds). *Histories of Namibia. Living through the liberation struggle*. London: The Merlin Press, 2005, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 143, 150–1; Sellstöm, T. (Ed). *Liberation in Southern Africa – Regional and Swedish voices. Interviews from Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the front line and Sweden*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, pp. 59–60.



progressive.<sup>29</sup> Twenty-five years ago, Kimble called these declarations ‘trendy’ because “when the gift wrapping is removed, this often amounts to little more than a heroic bumping up of women’s roles or a glorification of the reality of subordination.”<sup>30</sup> The women and men of the SWAPO leadership made these affirmations and it is only after independence that the time is right to assess whether these were just fashionable or honestly meant statements.

During the liberation struggle 10 December and 8 March were commemorated annually as Women’s Day and International Women’s Day respectively, as outlined in the previous chapter. It was mainly on occasions like these that pronouncements on the liberation of women were made. In addition, reports on women were generally prepared when a special visit was made, for example, when Namibian women went on tours, or when women from different organizations or countries came to visit Namibian women.

Addressing the United Nations Committee on the Decolonisation of Africa in New York in 1973 and reporting on the progress of women’s activities regarding the liberation struggle, Putuse Appolus praised the role that women played by fighting alongside men and claimed that they covered “long and arduous distances carrying heavy weapons and ammunition. The women inside the country cook and tend the wounded soldiers.”<sup>31</sup> She continued that “The Namibian women totally refused to be cadavers of the international economic tycoons who are nursing and protecting the illegal occupation of Namibia ... They are facing the future with confidence and gaiety and are endowed with tactical flexibility, like springs ready to bound forward or backward as the circumstances require.”<sup>32</sup> At the end of the article, she appealed for financial and material aid.

In 1977 the *Guardian* newspaper in London had an interview with a woman SWAPO member identified only as Ulitala. The newspaper asked her to highlight the role that women were playing during the struggle. She pointed out that women were involved in mobilising and organising activists to join SWAPO and PLAN. She added that women were being trained as guerrillas and that they were instrumental in transporting equipment to the front, and were communication experts and anti-aircraft gunners. She urged women to heighten their political consciousness so that “when the country is independent, we can contribute and teach the people who didn’t have the chance of coming here abroad as we did ...”<sup>33</sup> She drew attention to the women who were suppressed, tortured and arrested because of their involvement in the struggle for liberation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kimble, J. The struggle within the struggle. *Feminist Review*, no. 8, (Summer 1981). pp. 107–111, p.107.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.107.

<sup>31</sup> *Namibia News*, Vol. 7, Nos. 6&7, June/July 1974.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *Guardian*, September 1977.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

In 1979 Martha Ford, at that time the Secretary-General for the SWC inside Namibia, who had fled Namibia in 1978 to evade arrest, had this to say about women whilst she was on a tour to Britain. "SWAPO women are creating a new society, a society in which they will insist on their rights to participate and decide, as well on their rights to control their own bodies."<sup>35</sup> She continued: "The Namibian woman is realizing that she should be actively involved in the struggle for liberation to free her country from the yoke of colonialism and, at the same time, to free her and her male counterpart of the wrong practices which served to keep them both unliberated."<sup>36</sup> This gave the vision of a progressive new society, ready to tackle the issues of double oppression and reproductive rights. It is worth mentioning that in the same article Ford presented the dire situation of women who were flooding the SWAPO camps and were in urgent need of material aid. She requested funds to create nurseries that would be able to free women to pursue training and education, bulk consignments of sanitary towels and contraceptives.<sup>37</sup> Some of these pronouncements should be looked at in the light of what was happening globally. From the 1960s to 1980s, the Women's Liberation Movement in Europe and United States of America was undergoing the second wave of feminism. It addressed the issues of unofficial inequalities, sexuality, family, the work place and, most controversially, reproductive rights.

The views of Pendukeni Kaulinge on the role of women were cited in *Namibia Today* in 1981. She had just been elected Secretary-General of the SWC and her comments outlined what she envisaged as the role of women in the struggle. She started with the history of the exploitation of women and how they became active in politics, specifically referring to their participation in the protest on 10 December 1959. She acknowledged how the creation of SWAPO paved the way for Namibian women to fight for the independence of the country and at the same time fight for their rights and equality with their men folk. She added that "Our way to freedom is not easy ... and Namibian women are dedicated and ready to sacrifice for the cause of independence."<sup>38</sup> She highlighted some of the sacrifices made by women in Kassinga and the progress of women as they were trained in tailoring and typing. Some were studying medicine, hotel management, mechanical work, construction and electrical work.<sup>39</sup>

During her visit to the war zone in 1982, Pendukeni Kaulinge elaborated on what women were fighting for: "We are fighting for a new society, that means abolishing colonialism and backward traditions, i.e. superstitions, illiteracy, double oppression."<sup>40</sup> Racism and sex-

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<sup>35</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Jan–Feb 1979.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Namibia Today*, Vol. 5, No. 2 1981.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Namibia Today*, 2/82, 1982.

ism were coded as double oppression due to the unequal relationship between men and women (the subordination of women by men) and social inequality because of different races. She continued that the emancipation of women was of paramount importance. Namibia had more women than men, and to “exclude us from the decision-making process of the national liberation struggle, education and building up of our country as inferior, would be tantamount to narrowing the social basis of the Namibian revolution.”<sup>41</sup> After highlighting that women were active in PLAN, enjoying equal status with the male comrades in the army and proving themselves to be capable, she sent her message to the Namibian women. She asked women to combine efforts and strength, never to lose sight of the goal and never to look back, especially if they had to observe the saying “Behind a very successful man, there is always a great woman.”<sup>42</sup>

In celebrating the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the International Women’s day (8 March) in 1983, SWAPO women organized a big rally in Lubango in southern Angola. There were various speakers; among them was Inge Zaamwani who was to be the chief spokesperson of the day. She was the chairlady of a SWC primary organ at one of the refugee settlements. *The Combatant* caught up with her and asked her about the significance of the day to Namibian women.

Zaamwani gave an overview and the general background of International Women’s Day and its relevance to Namibian women. She gave her view on the policy of SWAPO regarding women, which she thought was positive as a wing for women was created to pay attention to the special needs of women. SWAPO recognized that the independence of the country would only come with the full participation of women and men. This was clear because SWAPO was educating men and women equally; men and women received the same military training and the posts in SWAPO were filled on the basis of merit, irrespective of sex.<sup>43</sup>

*Namibian Woman*, the official magazine for women administered by the SWC, ran an update on the role of women in the struggle for independence in 1985. The article began with background information on how victimized women were by both tradition and the apartheid system. It looked at the atrocities committed against women by the administration of South Africa. The article is accompanied by images of women in pitiful situations. The section that looks at women under the care of SWAPO shows images of women as soldiers as well as those who were in the leadership positions.

The article stated the position of SWAPO, that it “holds the conviction that the liberation of Namibia will be incomplete without the liberation of women.”<sup>44</sup> It continued to look at

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *The Combatant*, Vol. 4 No. 8, March 1983.

<sup>44</sup> *Namibian Woman*, July 1985.



the commitment of SWAPO to the question of women, especially with the creation of the SWC to mobilize women to actively participate in the struggle. At the time, it was reckoned that “women in SWAPO hold leading positions at different levels of its organizational structure and decision-making organs”<sup>45</sup> and continued that “we do not in any way imply that we have achieved total equality between men and women ... oppression is a result of centuries-old habits ... and old habits indeed die hard.”<sup>46</sup>

Commemorating the Namibian Women’s Day (10 December) in 1987, *The Combatant* paid tribute to the women of Namibia by running a piece on women and the liberation struggle. The article started by looking at the events of 10 December 1959 up to the establishment of SWC in 1969/70, which “today is one of the means which enables Namibian women to maintain their dignity and weed out backward practices to enhance their participation in the liberation struggle.”<sup>47</sup> It continued to look at the ‘new society’ that SWAPO was creating by eradicating illiteracy, providing upgrade courses to women and organizing scholarships for women to study around the world.<sup>48</sup>

In 1988 *The Namibian Woman* reviewed the position of women in the liberation struggle. The article started by looking at the historical background of the oppression of women by the apartheid system and their own traditions. It was acknowledged that women of Namibia could learn from the experiences of women in other countries and movements but had to modify some of the ‘lessons’ to pick elements that were applicable to Namibian women. SWAPO was saluted for acknowledging that the liberation of the country could not be reached without the participation of women, which is why women “were swelling the rank and file of SWAPO every day.”<sup>49</sup> It was, however, also pointed out “that a low level of education was hindering the full participation of women, and the fear the male comrades had about losing their rights and privileges due to backward notions they might have regarding emancipation were to be alleviated.”<sup>50</sup> The idea was that if women were educated they would be able to partake in productive jobs and have a say in the political decisions that had an influence in their lives.<sup>51</sup>

The male leadership was always full of praise and encouragement when it came to the work and involvement of women in the liberation struggle. Commemorating Women’s Day in 1984, an account of women’s involvement in the struggle, including the atrocities committed against women by the South African administration was given. Women were also

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *The Combatant*, Vol. 9, No. 5, December 1987.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; Education and training will be dealt with later in the book.

<sup>49</sup> *The Namibian Woman*, Vol. 2, February 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Interview 26/06/2008 .

applauded for the sacrifices they were making toward the liberation of the country. The words of the late Secretary of Defence, Peter Nanyemba, were remembered. He once said, "The Namibian women study, work and fight ... . They have decided wisely and voluntarily to participate fully in all social and revolutionary activities that can bring about liberty to the Namibian people. Many have lost their legs, arms or eyes during the cause of the fight for the glorious aims and dignity and liberty. Some have sacrificed in combat, heroines who shall always be remembered with pride as courageous and inspired fighters for justice."<sup>52</sup>

During the commemoration of Namibian Women's day in 1987, SWAPO's President and Commander-in-Chief of the army, Sam Nujoma, had this to say to women: "This day of December is an unforgettable day in the history of our struggle for liberation of Namibia, a day of rededication, redetermination and a day of respect to our heroes and heroines killed on that day and during the liberation struggle. This has become a day of stock-taking; re-viewing the achievements and determining what needs to be done to enhance the national liberation."<sup>53</sup> At the same commemoration, the Secretary for Defence, Peter Mweshihange, pointed out that: "Without the political awareness and active participation of women in the liberation struggle, there will be no genuine revolutionary achievements and progressive development of the country."<sup>54</sup>

Paying tribute to women during the celebration of International Women's Day in March 1988 in Luanda, Sam Nujoma, applauded the women as heroic fighters who distinguished themselves in various battles, although he did not mention any particular heroic woman fighter and only referred to the battle of Okanghudi (on this battle see the previous chapter). He urged the Namibian women to take up the challenges that the struggle would present. He continued to assure women that "We have adopted equality of sexes and we are committed to ensure that this equality is fully exercised in our movement in the interest of promoting the unity of purpose and action towards the total liberation of our motherland. It is the collective responsibility of both men and women to eliminate male chauvinism as well as to promote equality of sexes among the members of SWAPO."<sup>55</sup>

In a message to the Namibian women in the magazine *The Namibian Woman*, Nujoma, encouraged the women to step up the struggle. He continued by saying: "Today the Namibian woman has etched for herself a permanent place on the golden pages of the annals of our historic struggle."<sup>56</sup> He saluted the women who outperformed themselves in various battles and how they continued to distinguish themselves at the rear base in the fields of education,

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<sup>52</sup> *The Combatant*, December 1984.

<sup>53</sup> *The Combatant*, December 1987 (The exact message was delivered during the 1987 commemoration of Namibian Women's Day).

<sup>54</sup> *The Combatant*, December 1987.

<sup>55</sup> *The Combatant*, March 1988.

<sup>56</sup> *The Namibian woman*, Vol. 2, February 1988.

health, social welfare to the effective execution of the struggle. "It is her heroic support and commitment that keeps our combatants' fighting morale high thus enabling PLAN to score many victories."<sup>57</sup>

The representation of women in all the writing cited so far was strongly identified with the agenda for the liberation of women. Hence it had a political agenda. The women themselves made pronouncements, most of them with a strongly feminized agenda. There was a dual representation of women; women were presented as victims of tradition and apartheid; however, women were also seen as militant activists in the struggle. The speeches delivered by women mainly included appeals for material and moral support from people of good will around the globe. It is striking to note that women were made to ask for donations. A letter from the office of the Secretary for Logistics (presumably run by a man – Festus Naholo signed the letter) presented the office of the SWC with a list of items that were running out during the last stocktaking. "In view of this we are hereby presenting the list to your office for campaigning under emergency terms among women and the solidarity organization community. We look forward to your usual co-operation."<sup>58</sup> The list included textiles, materials for making dresses and trousers, chitengi [wrap arounds], napkins for babies, ladies' under pants and bras, sanitary towels, feeding bottles and various foodstuffs for babies.

## Liberated zones

The issue of liberated zones is a typical example of what I term 'idealized/imaginary representation'. Although one might argue that this section might not appropriately fit and link up with the question of women and the liberation struggle, it illustrates how some issues of the liberation struggle were idealized to present a certain image of the Namibian liberation struggle. Unlike the Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in Guinea-Bissau and The Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frelimo) in Mozambique that had liberated zones, SWAPO did not establish liberated zones<sup>59</sup> despite the fact that some members of SWAPO claimed that it had. A liberated zone or area was supposed to be an area inside the colony where the movement could exercise its forecasted vision in the area of education, health, culture etc. SWAPO did not have liberated zones because it was either

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> SPARC 02004003. The letter was dated 26/03/1987. It is not clear whether the office of SWC had the responsibility of asking for donations as part of the delegated tasks from the office of Secretary for Logistics or whether the office was just asked because 'women and children' evoke emotions and their plea would receive immediate attention.

<sup>59</sup> Katjavivi, P. 'The rise of nationalism in Namibia and its international dimensions', (PhD Thesis, St. Anthony College, 1986) p. 284.

not feasible or not necessary to its strategies. The refugee centres of SWAPO provided good locations where they could try to implement ideas for a future government and administration.<sup>60</sup>



Figure 8. Source: IDAF for Southern Africa. *This is Namibia: A pictorial introduction*. London: Idaf 1984

However, in 1985 in an interview with the SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign (SWSC), Ellen Musialela of SWC claimed: "There are liberated zones where the South African army dare not go. The North is the war zone, but can be called a semi-liberated zone because, although the South African forces have bases, there are areas they do not go into, because our fighters have the support of the people."<sup>61</sup> The Namibia Support Committee (NSC) in a list of films on sale, listed one entitled *Inside the semi-liberated zones*. The film claimed to show SWAPO's armed struggle in those areas of Namibia where SWAPO had control, conducted political education for the People's Liberation Army of Namibia and where the co-operation between combatants and civilians in cultivation and health care existed. The film was made

<sup>60</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign. Namibia: Interview with Ellen Musialela. *Race and Class*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1985, pp. 79-90.

in colour (16mm) and lasted 50 minutes.<sup>62</sup> Although it is a fact that PLAN soldiers were present inside the country and had the support of the people, all the activities were done clandestinely. The people who supported SWAPO did so in fear and PLAN's presence in the areas had to be concealed. South Africa introduced an approach called "total strategy" in 1975. The aim of this programme was to physically eliminate SWAPO and intimidate the locals that supported SWAPO. As a result, the whole country was to be dotted with military camps especially in the North where SWAPO had a large number of supporters.<sup>63</sup> However, even in Angola and Zambia where SWAPO established refugee centres, these were never "places where the South Africa army dared not go", because these camps were also regularly attacked, even though this meant the crossing of international borders by South African troops.

If SWAPO had established liberated zones,<sup>64</sup> these areas would have been the major targets of attacks by the South African forces and this would have been a major concern to the local population. Why did SWAPO claim that it had some parts of Namibia under its control? What did that mean to the wider world when women in the leadership also made such claims? In 1995, in an interview with Tor Sellström, Ben Amathila recalled that during the first half of 1970s the relationship between SWAPO and the solidarity movement remained strained: "... some people believed that we did not have the seriousness of movements like Guinea-Bissau's PAIGC, Angola's MPLA and Mozambique's FRELIMO because we did not have liberated territories and were not ideologically clear ...".<sup>65</sup> This clearly indicates the pressure that SWAPO was under to prove its seriousness as a liberation movement and that led some SWAPO leaders to claim that SWAPO had liberated zones which in reality it did not.

## The politics of gendered bodies and symbolic representations

Theories of nationalism have indicated how profoundly national liberation movements were gendered. In the armed liberation struggle terms like 'combatants' and 'soldiers' are almost always synonymous with men, while the nation is mainly feminine in its representation and reconstruction. The nation is narrated through the body and roles of women. One's motherland, as many nations are referred to, is appropriated as maternal and there is a strong desire (always masculine) to love, possess, protect and even die for her. The nation

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<sup>62</sup> *Action on Namibia*, summer 1984. I did not succeed in tracing the film.

<sup>63</sup> Moleah, A.T. *Namibia: The struggle for liberation*. Wilmington: Disa Press, 1983, pp. 258–268.

<sup>64</sup> Although it was not excessively pronounced that SWAPO had liberated zones, some public statements, films and pictorial booklets were made that clearly claimed that they did.

<sup>65</sup> Sellström, T. (Ed). *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa, vol. 1: Formulation of popular opinion (1950–1970)*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, pp. 290–291.

becomes the object of desire, the subject of songs and poems. The words chosen, tunes sung and images painted evidently provide signs that point to the gendering of a nation.<sup>66</sup> The nationalist songs and poems written during the war of liberation in Namibia show how symbols of gender were appropriated along gender stereotypes and divisions of labour. The land was equated with women whilst bravery and 'away from home' was related to men. The poem below shows how the land is equated with an expecting mother.

### **Labour Pain**

Throughout December  
'Tis labour pain  
All that I remember  
'Tis bloodshed and pain  
Pregnant with hope of freedom  
Expectant with hope and despair  
Push my country to bear down freedom  
Push instead of waiting in despair  
In pain my country's courage shines  
To drive away the dark with light  
In her flame of beauty my motherland  
So attractive, fair and bright  
On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December sacred flame  
The dawn into blood slowly turning  
Yet in pain of the shooting flame  
Her eyes in anguish still burning  
No freedom without pain  
No birth without afterbirth  
More blood and pain  
It's a pain-staking death.<sup>67</sup>

The poem clearly indicates how the nation is compared to a woman who is pregnant and not very sure what to expect, but confident that the expected baby (land) will be fine. The poet seems to justify the need to 'push' instead of waiting in despondency. As freedom will not be easy there will be pain and blood as with giving birth naturally. The adjectives used – attractive, beauty, fair and bright are mainly used with reference to women and hardly used to describe men.

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<sup>66</sup> Sundindyo, S. When the earth is female and the nation is mother: Gender, the armed forces and nationalism in Indonesia. *Feminist Review*, No. 58, International voices (spring, 1998), pp. 1–21.

<sup>67</sup> Chris, T. Labour Pain. In: Mbako, S. Z. (Ed) Tell them of Namibia: Poems from the National Liberation Struggle. London: Karia Press, 1989, p. 82.

## Gone Are The Days

We are to play the game of equals with men  
We are no more the handiwork of men  
We are mothers of the battle and struggle  
These are ever endowing and enriching us  
With the beauty and spirit of revolution  
We are not mere women, we are combatants  
We are not mere producers/ We are mothers of combatants  
We are not only educators of the young  
We assure the strength of the revolution  
Gone are the days of apathetic women  
The struggle is weaving new women  
Forever evading their subordination  
The struggle is creating new women  
Forever dashing their domination  
Gone are the days of traditional women  
The liberation of women is not an act of charity  
Nor the result of an humanitarian gesture  
Nor the consequence of compassionate men  
There is no liberation without women  
Gone are the days of an artificial liberation<sup>68</sup>

In “Gone are the days” the women themselves admit that they were no longer just the women who stayed at home and do domestic chores, but have taken on a new identity as women participating in the public arena traditionally designated for men only. Women are like the land, which gives safe haven and brings into being the nation state. Women are producers of strong brave sons and combatants ready to fight and die for the nation. “We are not mere women, we are combatants.”<sup>69</sup> The fact that they are producers of the combatants provides them with an equal status. Women accept that their own liberation from double oppression, patriarchal male and colonialism, is not going to be “an act of charity, nor the result of a humanitarian gesture; not the consequence of compassionate men” but the achievement and struggle of women themselves.

One of the songs popular during the liberation struggle was sung by everyone, men, women and youth. It is not very clear who the speaker is – It could be a combatant who has given up on his life or who has made peace with dying in the war, or it could be a mother who has realized that giving birth to a son is hopeless or, on the contrary, could be an honour as she is the producer of a brave combatant who is ready to die an honourable death fighting for the land.

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<sup>68</sup> Mbako, S. Z. *Tell them of Namibia. Poem from the liberation struggle*. London: Karia Press, 1989, p. 81.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.



*Wa dal'olumenhu ino dala  
Omulumenhu oha ka fila mofuk  
Eedja doo Kola noo Kaimbi  
Aluta Continua!*<sup>70</sup>

If you have given birth to a man  
It's as if you have not given birth at all  
A man can die in the jungle (wilds)  
He is a meal of wild birds  
Aluta Continua!

In the next example, also a popular song, the speaker is obviously a combatant, who is ever ready to die for the country.

*Tso' twalilwa nale ta pwa  
Twa hupulwa  
Shaashi moita, oha mu fiwa  
Mo oha m'lemanwa*<sup>71</sup>

We are already mourned  
Given up on  
Because in the war, people get killed  
And can become lame or crippled

The combatant is reconstructed as a person who goes out into the wilds to fight and is ready to die for the nation. The pride of the mother or father having the son at home is overshadowed by the pride of a combatant who is fighting in the war. The humanity of dying and receiving a proper burial is obliterated. It is simply reduced to a soldier ready to die anytime. Whether he is dead or alive in the jungle – it does not matter as people 'at home' have already mourned and given up on him. Women are prepared to lose their sons and husbands, and men ready to lose their lives for the love and protection of the motherland.<sup>72</sup>

In the next example, the song represents women as sly and who can employ cunning to win the enemy over.

*Oukadona v' SWAPO ovandjanga  
Nge va tumwa Botha ota u ya naye  
Nge wa nyengw' aalumenhu opo tuli.*<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The author personally recalls the songs. We used to sing them during the liberation struggle.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Cockburn, C. The continuum of violence. In: Giles et al (Ed) *Sites of violence*. London: University of California press, 2004, p. 33.

<sup>73</sup> The author personally recalls the song.



SWAPO's girls are shrewd  
if they are asked to bring/trick Botha, they will come back with him  
If they fail, we the men are available

The song does not explicitly say how the women will trick Botha (the then South African President) however, if they fail, the men will (possibly forcefully) be available to get him (Botha). Women are reconstructed as being able to use various means other than physical force to get what they want.

This type of gendering the body and of symbolic representation has also found its place in the SWAPO anthem, Alert Namibia, and the same symbolic representation of the nation as the motherland is repeated in the Namibian national anthem, Namibia, Land of the Brave.

The chorus of the SWAPO anthem is:

Namibia, our country  
Namibia, our country  
Namibia, Namibia our motherland  
Namibia, we love thee

While the chorus of the national anthem is:

Namibia our country  
Namibia motherland  
We love thee

The ideologies and reconstructions of private and public arenas as separate gendered social spaces for men and women could be deeply rooted. Women by tradition and biology are regarded as keepers of the home, whilst men by tradition and physique are there to protect women and children (hence 'women and children' are mostly put in one group and are synonymous with a vulnerable group).<sup>74</sup> The appropriation of the body or gender is not unique and applicable to Namibia only; it is found in many countries and amongst many national liberation struggles and movements. Could there be something universal in the relationship between men and women to explain this?

Ortner has highlighted the universality of female subordination, although it is not homogeneous. She argues that women are symbolically identified with nature and men are identified with culture and its products. A woman's body and its functions are involved with 'spe-

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<sup>74</sup> Cockburn, *The continuum of violence*, 2004, p. 29, 33.

cies life'. Women bleed (menstruate) and, at times, this can be uncomfortable and painful. In some cultures menstruating women are not allowed to partake in particular social activities as they are regarded to be unclean. They are stigmatized and deprived of social contact during this time. Women reproduce and can give birth naturally. During pregnancy, some women's vitamins and minerals are channelled into sustaining the foetus, hence depriving the women of some of her strength and energies. Childbirth itself is painful and dangerous. The women's body, like other female mammals, produces milk during and after pregnancy and this can explain her confinement to the family domestic context. She stays at home and breastfeeds. When a woman gives birth she is in many cases asked to breastfeed immediately in order to create a bond between her and the newborn.<sup>75</sup> Women are then expected to look after the children and socialize them into being responsible adults. In some cultures, for example in Oshiwambo, when a child or young adult is viewed as having no manners or culture, they are asked *nyoko olye?* (Who is your mother?). Nura Yuval-Davis has observed that women are given the social role of intergenerational transmission of cultural tradition, customs, songs and the mother tongue.<sup>76</sup>

If women are entrusted with the responsibility of socializing the young into responsible and cultured adults, it is because the society is confident that she is a capable being. Women take part in the most important activities of the society. They celebrate the victories and they lament in the defeat of the society.<sup>77</sup> Men are unable to bear children, so they recreate themselves artificially through symbols and technology. They create immortal and everlasting ideas, as opposed to women who create the transitory, i.e. human beings.<sup>78</sup>

## Mothers of the nation

Despite the pronouncements that SWAPO supported equality between men and women, women were still portrayed as doing female related jobs and collectively performed the chores traditionally associated as women's duties.

Looking after children and other 'domestic chores' were ironically supposed to free women from being domesticated and enable them to enter into male's world.

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<sup>75</sup> Ortner, B.S, *Making Gender: The politics and erotics of culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, pp. 27–28, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. Gender and nation. In: Wilford, R & Miller, R. (Eds). *Women, ethnicity and nationalism. The politics of transition*. London: Routledge, 1998, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ortner, *Making gender*, 1996, p. 31.

## Women as mothers and homemakers



Figure 9. Source: *The Namibian Today*, Vol. 6, 1982

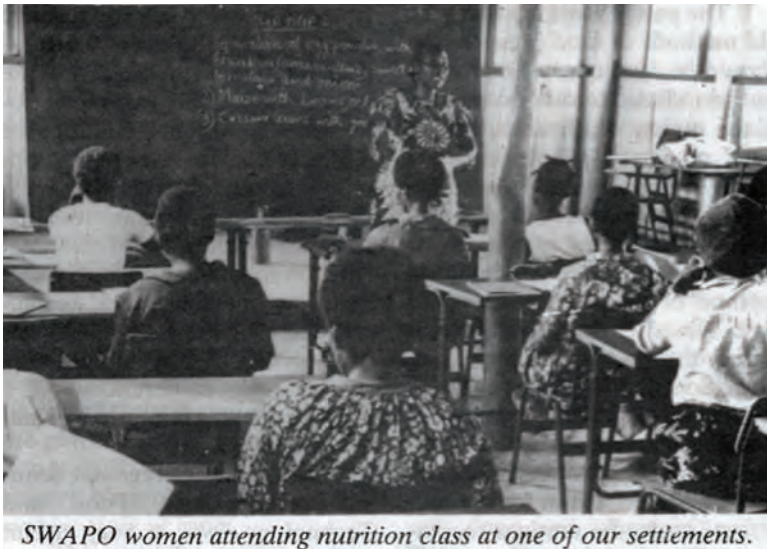


Figure 10. Source: *The Namibian Woman*, Vol. 4, September 1988

The SWAPO Women's Council embarked upon major knitting, weaving and tailoring projects to train women to help clothe people in the refugee camps.<sup>79</sup>

Knitting, weaving and tailoring by SWAPO women helped to clothe many refugees in the settlements abroad. Nyango, Zambia. 1982



Figure 11. Source: SWAPO Women's Council. *Viva! Namibian Women in the struggle*. Windhoek: SWC, 1994

The image of a mother slinging both a baby and gun was variously interpreted by different people during the interviews. Some saw it as liberating, and others saw it as an 'add-on' to the already burdened and domesticated women.



Figure 12. A woman slinging a baby and a gun. Source: Miescher, G and Henrichsen, D. *African posters. A catalogue of the poster collection in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien*. Switzerland: BAB, 2004

<sup>79</sup> More details on this will be dealt with in the education and training chapter below.

## The face of repression

In the situation of war, women, children and the elderly rank among the most vulnerable. There is a general tendency during war time to regard women as victims and automatically assume their vulnerability. Are women always the victims of the war? Can they be actors and perpetrators of violence? Are men less vulnerable when it comes to the situation of war? It is not within the scope of this work to extensively look at those questions. However, the answer would be 'no' to all these questions. It might be worth looking at the social context that exposes women's susceptibility to becoming victims in war time. In some cases, women experience vulnerability due to their physical characteristics or circumstances, especially when they are pregnant or mothers of young children. In patriarchal societies, women might become victims of sexism and this can lead to social, economic, cultural and political alienation. Actual conflict can disadvantage women. Civilians increasingly might be caught up in the fighting and women are more vulnerable, especially when they have to ensure the day-to-day survival of their families. Gendered violence, especially sexual abuse and rape is more often directed towards women than men.<sup>80</sup> Meintjes and Goldblatt in their investigation of gender violence during apartheid in South Africa have come to the conclusion that women's torture was directed at their womanhood and sexuality in order to dehumanize them as human beings; at times they were exposed to various experiences in order to ridicule their men (raped or not allowed to wash for days so that they stank).<sup>81</sup>

Recent wars have made no distinctions between combatants and civilians as targets of war. Half the casualties of World War II were civilians.<sup>82</sup> For various reasons women are more affected. During the war of liberation in Namibia, there were particular incidents that highlighted the magnitude of atrocities that were committed against women. The following are some of the incidents mentioned in SWAPO's publications and remarked on during the interviews conducted for this research.

### Floggings:

People who joined SWAPO in the early 1970s were arrested and handed over to the Ovamboland Bantustan. They were accused of being SWAPO members, wearing SWAPO colours or singing SWAPO songs. The punishment included hard labour, paying a fine or being flogged in public. Women were not spared. The flogging was done with a branch of a Makalani palm [*epokolo*]. Up to thirty strokes were administered in public to the naked buttocks or back.

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<sup>80</sup> [www.icrc.org/web](http://www.icrc.org/web); accessed 15/05/2009.

<sup>81</sup> Meintjes, S & Goldblatt, B. A gender perspective on violence during the struggle against apartheid. In: Wenizel et al (Eds). *Violence in South Africa. A variety of perspectives*. Pretoria: HSRC, 1998, pp. 231–233.

<sup>82</sup> Cockburn, *The continuum of violence*, 2004, p. 21.





*Figure 13. Epokolo. Source: Namibia News, June/ July 1974*

An activist gave a testimony when he witnessed a woman being flogged: “A tribal police man brought out a chair and forced the woman to bend down across it. Four policemen held her down while a fifth pulled her up her dress. One of the chief’s messengers was ready with the Makalani – a thorny palm branch with razor sharp edge. Hushed murmurs of dismay rippled through the crowd ... A pistol shot erupted in the silence followed by a scream as the Makalani hit the woman’s bare buttocks. More screams followed. Pink, raw flesh appeared in the patches that soon yielded dark red blood, which splattered with each successive descent of the cane ... ”<sup>83</sup> Possibly, the audience was dismayed and surprised because a woman’s body was being exposed and beaten, or simply because flogging was not a form of traditional punishment that people were used to.



*Figure 14. An image of a victim’s flogged buttocks. Source: Namibia News, June/ July 1974*

<sup>83</sup> *The Combatant*, December 1984.

A woman who became a member of the SWAPO Youth League in 1971 recalls how she was arrested and taken to the headman's house. She and other prisoners had to do hard labour. They used to cut grass for thatching the huts, draw water and pound Mahangu. The day of the flogging came. It was done under a tree in Oshikango. She remembers: "That day there was something like a cultural festival or trade fair kind of thing. There were many people, some came to sell and some came to partake in the dancing and singing at the festival. Then an announcement was made with a loud speaker that we were about to be flogged. People came, lots of them, some climbed on top of the trees to see women about to be flogged. I was accused number one, because I attended a SWAPO meeting and apparently suggested that all headmen must be killed. I denied having said that. They felt insulted because I answered back and then four men held me down while the fifth one was flogging...we were flogged together with Netumbo-Ndaitwa and others."<sup>84</sup> The floggings stirred international condemnation. The international Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International produced reports on the situation and World Church bodies helped with the legal battles in Namibia. It was proven that flogging was never a traditional way of punishing offenders.<sup>85</sup>

### **Kassinga Massacre:**

Kassinga, a SWAPO refugee camp in Angola was attacked on 4 May in 1978 by the South African army forces. Afterwards a dispute developed as to what type of camp it was and how many people perished in the attack. SWAPO claimed that about 600 people were massacred in Kassinga. The international journalists who visited Kassinga a few days after the attack corroborated this. The photographs taken showed two mass graves, one covered, allegedly, containing 122 bodies of children, and one that remained open with 582 victims awaiting burial. The photographs showed images of women in civilian clothes.<sup>86</sup> The South African authorities maintained that Kassinga was an important military headquarters of SWAPO and a military training centre where plans to infiltrate Namibia were made. They claimed that Kassinga was a military site and a battle waged between two armed forces. South Africa insisted that it was not a civilian transit camp and denied that there were civilian casualties and the existence of a 'cleanup operation' that was meant to wipe out all survivors who failed to flee the camp during the attack.<sup>87</sup> It was however, clearly one of the bloodiest attacks by the

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<sup>84</sup> Netumbo-Nandi Ndaitwa held various leadership positions in exile and currently she is the Minister of Foreign Affairs; Interview 26/07/2008.

<sup>85</sup> Katjavivi. *The rise of nationalism*, 1986, p. 223; The subject of flogging appeared in various issues including; *Namibia News*, Vol. 7, Nos 6/7, June/July 1974; *Namibia News*, Vol. 8, Nos 3/4, March-April 1975; *OAU Liberation Committee News Bulletin*, Dar es Salaam, July/Sept, 1974.

<sup>86</sup> Baines, G. 'The battle for Kassinga: Conflicting narratives and contested meanings'. Paper presented at Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 11 December 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

South African army. Every year since the attack the Kassinga massacre is commemorated and in independent Namibia, 4 May is a public holiday.

During the liberation struggle, SWAPO publications for the month of May were always filled with the commemoration of Kassinga in the form of poems, images and speeches.

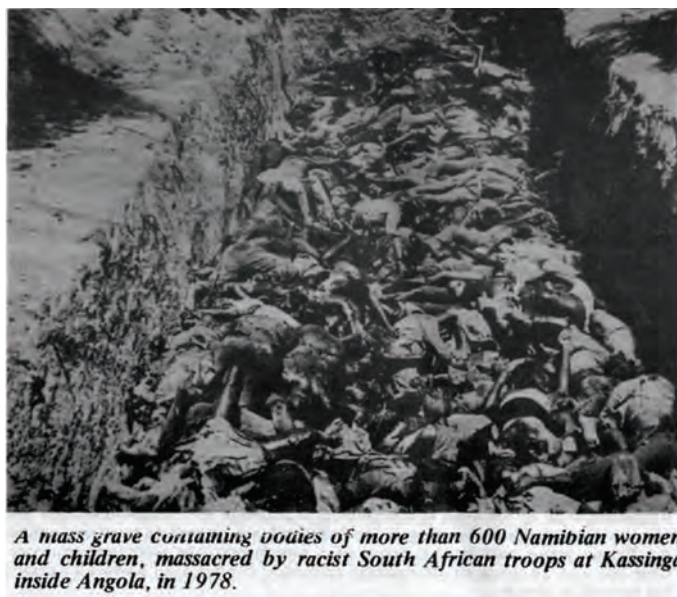


Figure 15. Source:  
*The Namibian*  
*Woman*, July 1985,  
special edition

This was one incident in which women were hailed as victims and heroines at the same time. "At Kassinga and other sites of massacres and battles ... women shared in death, defiance and victory."<sup>88</sup> Prominently mentioned was the heroism displayed by two women, Maria David (Katoko) and Esther Naboth, who died fighting the enemy during the Kassinga attack: "They unselfishly fought the South African jet bombers for twelve hours and they heroically died with anti-aircraft guns in their hands."<sup>89</sup> These women were praised in various publications as heroines of Namibia.

<sup>88</sup> *The Combatant*, Vol. 8, No. 10, May 1987; (The Kassinga event was widely covered). For further SWAPO coverage on Kassinga see: *The Namibian Woman*, vol. 2, February 1988; *NAMPA Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, March 1988; *Namibia Today*, vol. 5, no.2, 1981;; *The Namibian Woman*, July 1985; *Namibia Today*, Vol. 2, NO. 2, 1978; *Namibia Today*, Vol. 2, No. 3 1978; *Special Bulletin of SWAPO*, June 1978; Post card titled, President of SWAPO, Comrade Sam Nujoma holding an orphan, one of the survivors of Kassinga Massacre; *The 'Kassinga file'* by Gaetano Pagano. Photo documentation. Geneva: Southern African Information Programme (SAIP) of International University Exchange Fund. Basler Zeitung. Picture of a mass grave at Kassinga, May 16 1978; *Namibia Today*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1979; *Information and Comment*, May 4, 1986; *Information Bulletin*, May 1988; *The Combatant*, Vol. 9, No. 10, May 1988.

<sup>89</sup> *The Namibian Woman*, vol. 2, February 1988.



Oshikuku Massacre:

# Massacre at Oshikuku



The photograph (top left) shows the scene of the massacre near Oshikuku village in Northern Namibia. At the bottom, on the right, the burial of the victims. For further details, see overleaf.

Figure 16. Source: A press release issued by SWAPO Dept. of information and publicity, Luanda in 1982 included these images

On 10 March 1982 Koevoet members allegedly disguised as SWAPO guerrillas gunned down a family of 12 in cold blood. The victims, mainly women, were members of SWAPO and well known for supporting PLAN with food and other basics. The incident took place at Oshikuku, 30km to the west of Oshakati in northern Namibia.<sup>90</sup> When reciting the ordeals that women went through, specifically at the hands of the South African forces, the Oshikuku massacre was one of the crucial narratives.<sup>91</sup> The images of the butchered bodies of the victims at times were part of the contents of the SWAPO publications. Commemorating the massacre in 1984, images of the mutilated bodies were followed by a caption “Dead ... sorrowful! Frightening reality of terrorism.”<sup>92</sup> The images widely circulated and showed bodies of women slaughtered during the attack.

### **Rape – A strategy for repression:**

This is how rape was described by SWAPO publications. The victims of these acts of rape were of any age, young and old. Rape was not just done haphazardly, but it was believed that it was a systematic way on the part of the South African regime to destroy the morale of the people, and it was closely related to the idea of power and supremacy to symbolize subjugation and conquest.<sup>93</sup> With the establishment of the South African forces in Namibia, cases of rape increased. Many cases were left unreported and for the ones that were reported, no action was taken. Rape was one of the reasons why a countrywide school boycott was started in 1988, demanding the removal of military bases next to the schools.<sup>94</sup>

Men and women are tortured and abused differently because of their physical differences and the different cultural meanings ascribed to male and female bodies. Rape was almost entirely directed against women. Among the various reasons for this, rape carries a man-to-man message, that men around the women in question are too weak to protect their

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<sup>90</sup> *The Combatant*, June 1982.

<sup>91</sup> *The Namibian Woman*, Vol. 2, February 1988; *The Combatant*, December 1984; *The Namibian Woman* July 1985.

<sup>92</sup> *The Combatant*, Vol. 5, No. 8. March 1984.

<sup>93</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Winter 1988; other publications that covered this subject include; *Information and Comments*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1982; Pamphlet issued by SWAPO Department of Information and Publicity, Luanda, August 1982; Press report – A report of a visit of two mission stations in Owambo, February 13, 1986.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*; *The Namibian Woman*, Vol. 4, September 1988; *The Combatant*, Vol. 10, No. 5, December 1988; *Namibia Today*, Vol. 1, No. 2 1977, *The Combatant*, Vol. 2, No. 11, June 1981; *Action on Namibia*, winter 1988; A report on human rights violations concurs with what was published in the SWAPO publications. cf. Hinz, M. & Leuven-Lachiniski, N. G. *Koevoet versus the people of Namibia: Report of a human rights mission to Namibia on behalf of the working group Kairos*. The Netherlands: Working Group Kairos, 1989.

women and this is supposed to dent the masculinity of the men who cannot protect their women.<sup>95</sup>



Figure 17. Source: [www.historicalvoices.org](http://www.historicalvoices.org)

### **Rauna Nambinga:**

Rauna Nambinga was one of the activists who made headlines as a victim of the South African administration just because she was a SWAPO member. She was not the only woman who was a victim but her case received maximum publicity. She was a nurse by profession and joined SWAPO in 1973. First arrested in 1975 by the South African Security Police at the Engela Hospital in the North, she was taken to a detention centre at Ogongo. At this time mass detention of SWAPO activists took place because of the assassination of Chief Fillemon Elifas, the Prime Minister of the Owambo Bantustan. During her interrogation, Nambinga was forced to reveal that she gave money and medicine to the freedom fighters, although she denied the allegation. She was beaten with gun butts and was taken outside into the blazing sun. She was taken inside an office for further interrogation and ordered to remain standing. When she complained of being tired, her arms were tied behind her back and she was hung from the roof. She was not allowed to go to the toilet and at times, she relieved herself where she was, but was again punished severely for doing that. "They put sand in my mouth and poured very cold water on me as punishment."<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Cockburn, *The continuum of violence*, 2004, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> International Defence & Aid Fund (IDAF). *Remember Kassinga and other papers on political pris-*

A week later, she was transferred to Ondangwa prison. She was forced to admit that she knew about the assassination of Chief Elifas. She was taken to a room where the walls were lined with photographs of corpses and told that her brother Usko was in one of those pictures and was asked to identify him. When she could not identify him, she was beaten until her body was swollen. She was later taken to a room full of living snakes. She was threatened with a snake that was put close to her ear; she could not remember what happened later as she collapsed and became unconscious.

After another week, she was transferred to the Windhoek Central Prison and kept in solitary confinement. She was left without food and water for days and was only allowed to wash infrequently. In December 1975, she and another five SWAPO members appeared in the Windhoek Supreme Court. They were charged under the Terrorism Act. Their case was then transferred to Swakopmund. In May 1976 two of the accused, Aaron Muchimba and Hendrik Shikongo, were sentenced to death under the Terrorism Act, whilst she was sentenced to a seven year prison term, and Anna Nghaihondjwa to five years. They were transferred back to the Windhoek prison and in July 1976, she and Anna were transferred to Kroonstad Women's prison in the Orange Free State, South Africa. Evidence surfaced about irregularities during the trial resulting in the convictions being overturned and all four were released. The case attracted international attention and anti-apartheid and solidarity movements, churches and humanitarian organizations launched a campaign to secure their release.<sup>97</sup>

Rauna resumed her work at Engela hospital but was arrested again in July 1980. She was again accused of giving assistance to SWAPO freedom fighters. She was shocked with electricity and to avoid making noise, cotton wool was put in her mouth. She was put in a small room and a rope was tied around her neck and pulled down. Her jaw was broken in the process. She was tortured every day. In November 1980 she was transferred to Swakopmund and was forced to work in a shop. On one occasion, three police officers tried to convince her to work for them as an informer and agent. She refused and later ran away from Swakopmund and in February 1981 managed to cross the border into Angola. On 2 February 1981 she appeared as a SWAPO witness before the second session of the 'International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the Racist and Apartheid Regime in Southern Africa', held in Luanda, Angola. She informed the commission that her left ear could not hear properly and that she had pain in her chest and ribs.<sup>98</sup>

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*oners and detainees in Namibia*. London: Canon Collins, 1981.

<sup>97</sup> Soggot, D. Namibia. *The violent heritage*. London: Rex Collings, 1986.

<sup>98</sup> The same story, at times summarized, appeared in *Information and Comments*, No. 7, July 1981; *Action on Namibia*, paper 1, 1981. Her name has been mentioned in various articles in SWAPO publications; *Current events in Namibia*, No. 8, May 1976; *Namibia News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1977; *Information and Comments*, No. 7, July 1981.

### Lucia Hamutenya:

Lucia Hamutenya was the SWAPO Secretary for Legal Affairs inside Namibia before she fled the country. She was a victim of torture and gross maltreatment by the army and the police during her detentions. She was detained for the first time in 1977 under Proclamation AG 9 and in 1978 was detained again for several months under Proclamation AG 26. In 1979 she was twice detained under the Terrorism Act before fleeing the country.<sup>99</sup>

Figure 18. Source: *Namibia Today*, Vol. 4, no. 2, 1980



Lucia Hamutenya

### Ida Jimmy:

Ida Jimmy was an active leader of the SWC. While addressing a rally in Lüderitz in 1979, she accused the South African Defence Force of shooting people without warning and stressed that SWAPO freedom fighters must be supported as sons and daughters of the Namibian people. She was charged under the Riotous Assemblies and Terrorism Act and sentenced to seven years imprisonment.<sup>100</sup> Ida Jimmy was seven months pregnant at the time of her imprisonment. She gave birth in jail and, whilst she initially kept her baby, it was given to her mother after a year. The baby took ill and died and Ida was refused permission to attend the funeral. Her detention



Figure 19. Source: *Action on Namibia*, Winter 1988

<sup>99</sup> *Namibia Today*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1980; *Information and Comment*, December 1978; Press release, 5 December 1977, signed by Peter Katjavivi (a copy was sent to the United Nations); *Information and Comment*, a copy of telex message dated 4 December 1978 sent from SWAPO Windhoek to SWAPO Department of information and publicity about the detention of Lucia Hamutenya and other SWAPO leaders.

<sup>100</sup> *Information and Comment*, vol. 5, no. 6 Sept/Oct 1983; *The Combatant*, Vol. 2, No. 4, November 1980; *Information and Comment*, Aug/Sept 1980; Press announcement, July/Oct 1980, from Rand Daily Mail and Radio Angola.



stirred international attention and on 26 August 1983 a petition with 6000 signatures was handed in to 10 Downing Street in London by the SWSC. The petition called on the British government to intervene in the release of Ida Jimmy.<sup>101</sup> (See also the Free Ida Jimmy campaign as discussed in the previous chapter.) Since then, the abuse of Namibian women in prisons was given greater prominence in propaganda and the media. The stories were run in SWAPO's publications and publications sympathetic to SWAPO and its cause. The circulation of these materials was banned inside Namibia, therefore main audience was the international community.

### The visual liberation of women

Visually, women made a breakthrough in previously male dominated arenas. Images of women representing SWAPO's objectives were numerous. Photographs and posters of women in military uniforms, addressing rallies, attending international conferences and summits, being trained as mechanics and electricians gave an indication of the commitment of SWAPO to afford equal opportunities to men and women.

Right, a PLAN communication unit in action in northern Namibia during the armed struggle. 1981



Left, a PLAN medical unit treats a fellow combatant wounded in action. 1981



Figure 20. Source: SWAPO Women's Council. *Viva! Namibian women in the struggle*. Windhoek: SWC, 1994

In 1994, four years after independence, the SWC made an effort to produce a pictorial booklet, 'Viva' that illustrated the various roles played by women during the liberation struggle.

<sup>101</sup> *Information and Comment*, Sept/Oct 1983.

The booklet shows the leaders of SWC and other ordinary women, highlighting some of the issues they vowed to address during the 1980 SWC congress. These included: women who had joined PLAN; the literacy campaign to eradicate illiteracy and women doing jobs that had previously traditionally been done by men.<sup>102</sup>



Figure 21. Women soldiers in a ready to attack pose.  
Source: *The Namibian Woman*, Vol. 2, February 1988

SWAPO women mechanics were an asset because of their knowledge – and their courage. Transit Camp, Luanda, Angola. 1981



Figure 22. Source: SWAPO Women's Council. *Viva!* 1994

<sup>102</sup> SWAPO Women's Council. *Viva: Namibian women in the struggle*. Windhoek: SWAPO Women's Council, 1994.

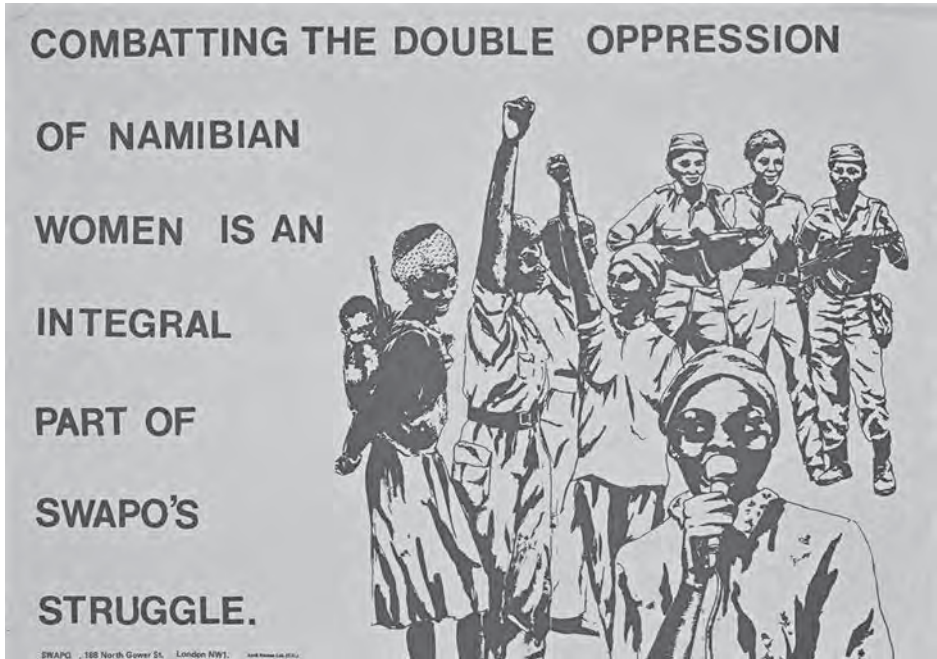


Figure 23. Images of 'actively involved in the struggle' women. Source: Miescher and Henrichsen. *African Posters, Basel 2004*

Research elsewhere has proven that women participated in violent campaigns, took part in uprisings for national liberation and committed atrocities, e.g. the genocide in Rwanda. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka had an entirely female battalion of suicide bombers. This being the case, women might gain equality through active involvement in the war but the culture, character and hierarchy of the armed forces do not become more feminine by women's presence.<sup>103</sup> Men remained in control and the war remained a man's game.

### The legacy of the war

In independent Namibia the war is reconstructed as having being won through the barrel of the gun. Heroes Acre, the official war memorial of the Republic of Namibia outside of Windhoek, is obviously gendered. The entrance of Heroes Acre is flanked by two kneeling women in dresses (not military uniform) holding bouquets of flowers. Using flowers as a welcoming gesture is a common sight in Asia (the memorial was built by a North Korean

<sup>103</sup> Cockburn, C. Gendered dynamics of armed conflict and political violence. In: Moser, C. & Clark, F. *Victims, perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence*. London: Zed Books, 2001, p. 21.



company), especially at airport arrival terminals, and both men and women practise it. In some cultures it is mainly women and children who welcome guests in a household and go and report to the man, the head of the household, that a guest is requesting his attention, following which he can decide whether or not he would see the guest. Women and children are the ones that kneel when presenting food or drink to men. Men would only kneel if in front of a king or during prayers in a church service. The monument, therefore, reproduces this image of women honouring the men who, it is implied, are the heroes.

At Heroes Acre the bronze mural behind the unknown soldier illustrates the milestones of Namibian history. It starts with slavery, the oppression by the colonial rulers (Germany and South Africa), followed by the resistance with petitions, the armed struggle and eventually the attainment of independence. Viewed from left to right, its narrative starts with a man and ends with a man holding a flag, a sign that victory has been achieved. There is an image of a woman holding a baby – a symbolic representation of the nation. At different stages of the struggle, women and men are depicted participating in the liberation for national liberation. However, the men outnumber the women.



*Figure 24. The Unknown Soldier.  
Photograph by Jeremy Silvester*

The imposing unknown male soldier, eight meters high and weighing four tons, gives Heroes Acre a masculine impression. The Unknown Soldier, the heavily male populated mural and the mostly male heroes (most of whom died fighting and some were prominent in PLAN) who are symbolically or physically buried at Heroes Acre, make the site convincingly masculine and militaristic in its structure, narrative and representation of the liberation struggle. Just as the liberation songs used to say, *okom'lung' ike gwo ndjembo, ta*

*limanguluka* ('It is only through the barrel of the gun, it (Namibia) is going to be liberated'), it seems that it is mainly the masculine liberators of the country that are represented at Heroes Acre.

Nonetheless, 18 years after independence, the role of women during the liberation struggle is being recognized. In contrast to Heroes Acre, the centre piece at the Eenhana shrine, designed by Namibian artists, is a female combatant. The armed soldiers at this memorial consist of male and female soldiers. More importantly, the civilian population, including men and women who were responsible for helping PLAN combatants with food, clothing, medicine and information are also depicted.<sup>104</sup> The depiction of the local population has cut across the gendered division of labour, as not only women are portrayed performing the domestic and maternal duties of providing food and medical care to PLAN. Men too are shown as actively participating. On this shrine, women are leading the men.



Figure 25. A sketch of the Eenhana shrine  
Source: Booklet prepared for the official inauguration of the shrine, 26 August 2007



Figure 26. A detailed image of the Eenhana shrine. Source: Booklet prepared for the official inauguration of the shrine, 26 August 2007

This can be read differently; they are either upholding the norm of 'ladies first,' traditionally practised as a gesture by 'gentlemen' but only in secure environments or, alternatively,

<sup>104</sup> Booklet prepared for the reburial ceremony of discovered mass grave suspected to be of the ex-combatants and civilians who supported SWAPO during the liberation struggle, 26 August 2007, Eenhana.

they are simply proving that women can be the first ones to face the danger (literally in the 'frontline'); men do not have to be in front to make sure the path is safe before they clear the way for women to follow.

### **Victims, perpetrators or actors?<sup>105</sup>**

The question arising out of these issues is whether the stereotypical representations of women as victims and men as perpetrators during the armed conflicts should continue? What do women gain from being treated as mothers, dependent and vulnerable or autonomous individuals?<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, how should the multiple effects of political conflicts be viewed? As a setback? Were women more vulnerable during the armed conflict or was the guerrilla war a springboard for women's emancipation?

Women were not mere victims of the conflict; conflicts often allow a fluidity in social ordering, which leads to changes in gender roles and relations. Women challenged the colonial administration and defied its laws. Men viewed women's involvement in politics as a sign of loyalty. Women broke the mould of homes as private and domestic spaces and turned them into porous public arenas where they used the 'homes' to engage in 'public' political activities. The political crisis provided a space for consciousness-raising experiences and solidarity among women. New identities were developed as women tried to cope alone with family needs, poverty and increased militarization. The involvement for women in politics created a space for them to debate and contest issues around gender and relations. Women linked the struggle for liberation to that of gender equality and this became a springboard for their increased participation in politics and the quest for emancipation.<sup>107</sup>

### **Summary**

This chapter has looked at public representation and not at other social complexes. It is important to 'read' these representations against the backdrop and discourse in which they were written, i.e. that of the national liberation movement. The 'idealized' struggle was directed towards specific audiences to fit an agenda which in some instances might not have been that of SWAPO; this might explain why women were reconstructed in the way they were.

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<sup>105</sup> This is borrowed from the title of the book by Moser and Clark (Eds). *Victims, perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Cockburn, *Gendered dynamics*, 2004, p. 16; Simona S. *Rethinking Women's Struggles in Israel-Palestine and in Northern Ireland*. In: Moser, Caroline and Clark Fiona. *Victims, perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence*. London: Zed Books, 2001, p. 97.

<sup>107</sup> Simona, *Rethinking women's struggles*, 2001.

## Chapter Three

### Women and the SWAPO refugee camps

This chapter looks at the history of the SWAPO camps and how women were positioned or positioned themselves in these camps. It looks at a normal day in a camp, the structures of the camps, different types of camps, and analyzes the challenges that women faced and the reminiscences that some have about the camps.<sup>1</sup>

The Namibian exiles' experience of camps was not a unique one. Various African liberation movements maintained camps in different host countries and as such many Africans had similar experiences. A range of core themes characterized life in the camps, with the three common themes being discipline, routine and security. In the FRELIMO camps people were subjected to strict discipline. Apart from other chores, women were tasked with the ferrying of weapons. They were instructed never to abandon the weapons, whatever the situation they found themselves in. Women who were given the responsibility for carrying weapons and who arrived at a camp without them were executed.<sup>2</sup> Despite the negative effects of the war some women found the war empowering because the war experience created a space for new roles and identities.<sup>3</sup> Some South Africans also described the life and conditions in the ANC camps as having been harsh. People were moved about according to the necessity of the movement and this generated anxiety and uncertainty.<sup>4</sup> Security and inevitable attacks from the enemy were a major problem. In Zimbabwe, too, the ZANLA and ZAPU camps were constantly attacked and all people were prone to attack. Camps such as Mkushi, Nyadzonia, Chimoi were attacked. Most attacks blurred the boundaries between the battlefield and hinterland during the war.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the SWAPO camps, I will

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the interviews conducted by the author, this chapter draws heavily on the autobiographies of two female former exiles, namely Namhila, E.N. *The price for freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997 and Shaketange, L. *Walking the Boeing 707*. Windhoek: Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS), 2008. I must acknowledge that I might not be able to piece together all the information on the SWAPO camps, however, I will try by all means to reconstruct what I learned during my interviews and other sources.

<sup>2</sup> West, H.G. Girls with guns: Narrating the experience of war of Frelimo's female detachment. *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 73, no. 4 (October 2000), pp. 180–194, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Hassim, S. Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: The ANC in exile and the question of women. *Journal of Southern Africa Studies*, Vol. 30, no. 3 (September 2004), pp. 433–455.

<sup>5</sup> Lyons, T. *Guns and Guerilla girls. Women in the Zimbabwe liberation struggle*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004, pp. 124–8.

highlight the core themes that characterized and were institutionalized by the liberation movements despite the fact that the camp dwellers were living outside the normal social framework of social constraints that existed when family elders and traditional leaders guided their lives.

## The history of the camps

It is difficult to give an accurate figure for the number of SWAPO camps before deciding and defining what should constitute a camp. Some were big others small, some camps were occupied on a permanent basis with infrastructure in place. Some were easily abandoned when discovered by the South African army, and some camps were like rest stations, where soldiers could make a stop to recover or sleep when *en route* to or from a mission. I would define a camp as a permanently or semi-permanently occupied settlement with infrastructure in place, such as accommodation, clinics, schools, dining halls and other basic structures. Such camps could cater for soldiers or civilians. Military posts or transit camps were the ones used only occasionally by soldiers *en route* to a mission, or people fleeing Namibia to go into exile in neighbouring countries. They often lacked basic infrastructure and as such were not considered to be camps.

The first camp for Namibians established in exile was Mbeya in Tanzania. SWAPO refugees who went into exile in the early 1960s shared this refugee camp with members of SWANU and FRELIMO.<sup>6</sup> The camp was soon abandoned as being too far from Namibia. The first soldiers leaving Tanzania to participate in the August 1966 Omugulugwoombashe attack experienced this.<sup>7</sup> The SWAPO refugees in Mbeya were moved to Zambia, whilst a SWAPO office remained in Dar-es-Salaam.

After the 1974 exile exodus, there were many Namibians held by the Zambian government in the refugee camp, Mayukwayukwa. Most people in Mayukwayukwa expressed their desire to be placed under the direct care of SWAPO. The Zambian government donated a piece of land 15 kilometres from Lusaka called the 'Old Farm.'<sup>8</sup> The Old Farm was organized from scratch. It was situated in a riverbed, where malaria became a problem. There was no school and no clinic. Although a clinic was built later, the majority of serious cases were transferred to the hospital in Lusaka. Approximately a year or two after becoming a SWAPO

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<sup>6</sup> Sellström, T. *Sweden and National liberation in Southern Africa. Volume 1: Formation of a popular opinion 1950-1970*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p. 272. The government of Tanzania allowed only four representatives per liberation movement in Dar es Salaam. Other members were sent to the refugee camp in Tanzania.

<sup>7</sup> See Namhila, Ellen. *Kaxumba KaNdola, Man and myth: The biography of a barefoot soldier*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Interview 12/11/2008.

settlement, a school was created. Nahas Angula, the SWAPO Secretary for Education, was instrumental in the establishment of this school. Lessons were given under trees as no buildings were available. Later an administrative office and a logistics office were built. Old Farm was maintained by SWAPO for about five years.<sup>9</sup>

Around 1976 when the exile population began to swell, Old Farm became too small and the Zambian government provided another plot, 200 km west of Lusaka at Kawuma, where SWAPO established a camp known as Nyango. This place was next to a river, which became useful before water pipelines were constructed. People had to construct Nyango themselves as it had not been occupied before. They cut trees to build rooms and grass to thatch huts. Dr. Libertine Amathila was actively involved in the construction of this camp. A clinic was constructed and hospital beds were made out of sticks. She made a 'traditional fridge' from mud to keep the medicines in a cool place. Later an administration block was built followed by a kindergarten and hospital, which also catered for the Zambian population.<sup>10</sup>

When Angola got its independence in 1975, SWAPO was offered plots in Viana, Lubango and Kassinga, which served as transit camps because Zambia was found to be too far away.<sup>11</sup> Soldiers returned from their missions inside Namibia sometimes brought with them others who wanted to join the struggle. They needed a place not far from the border. Kassinga in southern Angola was about 260 km from the Namibian border. After the 4 May 1978 attack by the South Africans, Kassinga was permanently vacated as it was felt unsafe to live there.<sup>12</sup> The government of Angola allocated SWAPO a place further inside the country at Kwanza Sul, where the Namibian Health and Education centre was later built. It became SWAPO's biggest camp. Situated 250 southeast of Luanda, the camp was divided into different units or smaller camps, such as kindergartens ("Meekulu Putuse Kindergarten", "Mungunda Kindergarten"), a maternity hospital (the "Penny Hashoongo maternity hospital"), a camp for elderly people, a camp for able bodied people and people with disabilities, etc. "The Natalia Mavulu Kindergarten" was moved from Ndalatando to Kwanza Sul. By 1988 the camp accommodated a population of 43,000 people, the majority of whom were women and children.<sup>13</sup>

PLAN had its own military camps. PLAN had three major fronts known as the north-eastern region, north-western region and the northern region. Each region had bases and outposts that were mainly used as stations for soldiers en route to and from their missions. They were used to receive and treat wounded soldiers and it was here that people fleeing Namibia could stop whilst in transit to the main settlements inside Angola or Zambia.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, *Action on Namibia* Autumn 1988

These bases, however, were often abandoned due to persistent attacks or other issues such as a lack of water. Some of the well known bases were Efitu, Olumana, Ohaipeto, Oham'nime, Okambwambwena, Oshinota, Okahama, Oshana sha Nghalama, Onalumono and Oshalamba.<sup>14</sup> The headquarters and the training centre was named after Tobias Hainyeko. By 1988, the refugee population of Namibians who were in Zambia and Angola was estimated to be 10,000 and 75,000 respectively.<sup>15</sup> These numbers indicate the enormous responsibility for SWAPO in terms of maintaining security, discipline and the provision of necessary welfare services.

## Arrival at a camp

After walking long distances, crossing rivers and transiting through various camps, people would eventually arrive at a settlement camp. They would then be officially registered. Shaketange who detailed her journey, has described how, once they arrived, they were given basics, such as a bar of soap, lotion, a plate etc. and had a sleeping place allocated. She did not shed any light on the process of going through the interrogation or vetting process. However, a commander who had trained in intelligence work indicated that initially arrivals went through what he called a 'soft vetting examination.' This meant that the arrivals were asked 'unsuspecting' questions and then the intelligence official registering the newcomer could spot those who had different or hidden agendas or different party affiliations rather than an interest in joining SWAPO.<sup>16</sup> Those with subversive agendas would either be too nervous, too withdrawn, too willing to take orders or would know too much.<sup>17</sup> This implied that the new arrivals would need to accept SWAPO affiliation if not already affiliated to the movement in order to get a place in a camp.

There were also efforts to introduce new arrivals to the rules of the camp. A former SWC chairlady<sup>18</sup> indicated that her duty was to speak to the newly arrived women immediately and advise them as to how to behave, especially on the issue of men who might ask them to have sex with them or become their girlfriends.<sup>19</sup> She indicated that her aim was not meant to prevent them from taking boyfriends, only to warn them, especially when going through transit bases explaining they had a long way to go and if they slept with a man in all the camps they had to go through, it meant they would end up sleeping with many men by the end. She also advised them that they should not give in when men, even with guns, might

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<sup>14</sup> Interview 26/07/2008

<sup>15</sup> *Action on Namibia* Autumn 1988

<sup>16</sup> Interview 03/01/2009.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Women known as chairladies were appointed in various camps to act as representatives of SWC.

<sup>19</sup> Interview 05/08/2009.



force them to have sex with them. “What these girls did not know was that those men who proposed to them in a particular camp would have to leave them there and not proceed with them. The same thing could happen to them in all the camps they would pass through.”<sup>20</sup> In the end, her male comrades hated her. They regarded her as a vulture that was just hovering around the new arrivals and telling them not to sleep with men. “It became a conflict of interest from the male comrades.”<sup>21</sup>

As not all people who went into exile were political at the time of leaving, the next step was to brief the new arrivals. They were made to understand that their lives would change and that there was no turning back. A former commander said that it was made clear to them that there was only an entrance door and no exit door; they had to stay with SWAPO.<sup>22</sup> He explained further that this was done mainly for security reasons. “We could not afford to have people coming in and leaving our camps when the going got tough, it was just too risky.”<sup>23</sup>

## Structures and infrastructures

The camps were not fenced and thus had no gates; however, there were specific points of entry. They were constantly patrolled for security and civil order reasons by soldiers and at some point in the camps in Zambia, this was done by Zambian soldiers.<sup>24</sup> During the 1974–6 ‘Shipanga crisis’, the Zambian army was used to patrol both the military and civilian camps.<sup>25</sup> In the camps, people were grouped into formal military structures; the smallest unit was called a ‘section’, which was composed of 11–15 people; three sections formed a ‘platoon’, three platoons formed a ‘detachment’ and three detachments formed a ‘company’. For security reasons people were not allowed to move in and out of the camps as they wished. Those who wanted to leave the camp had to obtain permission from their commander. The processes followed a hierarchal structure. Authorization would be given depending on the reasons the applicant provided. A permit was issued with the stipulated time of return. Those coming from another camp needed to present their permits upon

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 03/01/2009.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Shaketange, L. *Walking the Boeing 707*. Windhoek: Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS), 2008. P. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Saul, J. S. And Leys, C. Liberation without democracy? The Swapo crisis of 1976. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 20, no. 1 (March 1994), Pp. 123–147. The dubbed ‘Shipanga Crisis’ was a power struggle between the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) and the SWAPO leadership in exile between 1974–1976. It saw a number of SYL members arrested and jailed. The Zambian soldiers helped SWAPO in arresting the SYL members and patrolling the camps (military and civilian).



arrival at the camp they were visiting.<sup>1</sup> Although it was heavily punishable, people still managed to sneak out of the camps without permission. Namhila narrated an incident where she sneaked out of Kwanza Sul camp and went to Kalulu, the nearest town, without permission.<sup>2</sup> In another case, an Information Officer in Lubango in 1982 wrote a letter listing the names of women who allegedly slept outside the base without the knowledge of the base authority.<sup>3</sup> People who had friends outside the camps especially boyfriends or girlfriends were the most likely to sneak out of the camps without permission, despite this being heavily punishable.<sup>4</sup>

Accommodation in the camps varied depending on whether it was a transit, civilian or military camp. It could depend on the rank or position one held in a camp. People who went into exile took different routes to reach the SWAPO camps exposing them to different experiences. Shaketange, narrating her journey into exile in more detail, indicated how they went through different transit camps and at times slept in dormitories, the compounds of various chiefs or, at times, slept under trees, no matter what the weather was.<sup>5</sup> When new arrivals reached a civilian camp, they were usually accommodated in communal tents and wooden paddocks or barracks. Up to twenty people of the same sex would be accommodated in one place. Schoolchildren used tents for accommodation. The children, *uupionelu* (pioneers) and the young children, *okinda* (kindergarten) had large zinc-roofed structures, where about 20–40 of them shared.<sup>6</sup> The longer a camp existed, the more permanent structures were built. Sometimes a campsite included larger buildings that could be used.

Adult residents were encouraged to build their own houses using bricks or prefabricated materials. The camp administration provided the materials and people were obliged to use them to build a private house and not for other purposes. Beds and bedding were provided, but people with means could buy their own furniture to make the places look attractive.<sup>7</sup> However, the lazy ones who did not want to build houses lived in thatched huts. The commanders and leaders had their own houses and were provided with bodyguards. Teachers and nurses had private accommodation.<sup>8</sup> Accommodation and sleeping quarters in the military camps were slightly different. Men and women had separate sleeping quarters but

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<sup>1</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009; 21/04/2009.

<sup>2</sup> Namhila, E.N. *The price for freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997. p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> SPARC, Item number 02001290.

<sup>4</sup> Interview 12/08/2008 (a). People were given passwords that they had to recite when found outside their rooms, especially late at night when everybody was meant to be inside their rooms. Shaketange, *Walking Boeing*, 2008, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Shaketange, *Walking Boeing*, 2008, pp. 23, 26, 35, 44, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009.

<sup>7</sup> Online interview 21/04/2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

were close to each other. People from the same platoon, for instance, would have quarters next to each other although they would not share rooms.<sup>9</sup>

As the liberation struggle advanced most, if not all, camps obtained a clinic, an administration block and a school. The services improved as well; there were modern brick houses, electricity and running water. Food, clothes, basic needs (soap, lotion, sanitary towels) medicines, education, water and transport services were provided free. Every centre had a public kitchen. Students and those not wishing or having no time to cook could eat at the public dining hall. It was mainly the older men who cooked and who were in charge of these communal kitchens. It was normal to hear something like *ekulo lya tate Kapanya nenge tate Haingura* (the kitchen of Mr Kapanya or Mr Haingura).<sup>10</sup> Chores regarding the preparation of food were distributed during the morning parade according to companies. For example, one particular company had to fetch wood whilst the other had to fetch water and clean dishes.<sup>11</sup> Some people had their own houses or family; apart from their own children they might at times take several young people under their wing. These people had their own procedures for distributing chores and eating arrangements.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-1980s when the situation in the camps improved, there was a greater variety of food such as rice, maize, fish and occasionally meat. Bread was in regular supply, especially in Kwanza Sul where there was a bakery.<sup>13</sup>

## A normal day in a camp

An ordinary day in a camp would start as early as four o'clock in the morning with exercises for each company for an hour. That would also be the time the company commander would make sure that all members of his group were present or identify any who were missing. If so, he immediately had to report to the Camp commander, the highest commander of the camp.<sup>14</sup> For security reasons anyone absconding or missing from the parade would be severely punished. After an hour of exercising people would go for breakfast and then proceed to the parade where the camp commander addressed.<sup>15</sup> Information was exchanged at the parade. Issues regarding the camp and the liberation struggle were addressed and this included news that was important to the struggle. People would receive training on

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<sup>9</sup> Interview 24/11/2008.

<sup>10</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009.

<sup>11</sup> Namhila, *The price for freedom*, 1997, Pp. 93-96; Online interview 21/04/2009.

<sup>12</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009.

<sup>13</sup> Online interview 21/04/2009.

<sup>14</sup> Of all people that I interviewed, none recalled ever being in a camp where a woman was a camp commander.

<sup>15</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009; 21/04/2009.

political theory. Concepts like 'liberation struggle', 'guerrilla warfare', and 'freedom fighter' were introduced. People learned about the socialist countries that supported the struggle and the capitalist countries that were against the liberation of Namibia.<sup>16</sup> "We learned to say 'viva' to the countries that supported us and down with those that opposed our freedom."<sup>17</sup> At the parade, chores were distributed. Young people would go to school, fetch firewood for different kitchens, wash clothes and blankets for the young, etc. After lunch, most chores would be done and people were free to do personal things, such as plaiting hair or washing their own clothes. Some would continue with other chores, for example, helping around the clinic. After dinner people returned to their various companies to be accounted for and receive further information. In the evening there were evening or literacy classes; large numbers of students and few teachers or classrooms sometimes made it necessary to introduce evening classes.<sup>18</sup>

The same duties were given to all people irrespective of gender. If a company were assigned to dig a ditch for instance, men and women would do the same job. However, generally men cooked in the common kitchens because the pots were always large. For those who lived in family structures, women cooked. Women cooked when they had to cook for a few people and they cooked for commanders or people with special needs. For instance, in May 1988 the Chief Protocol and Liaison office in Viana asked the SWC office "as a matter of extreme urgency to kindly assist Comrade Eliaser Kaxumba with a female comrade to assist in preparation of food ...".<sup>19</sup> It seems as if men cooked only in the common kitchens out of necessity, not because there was a perceived change in the traditional division of labour. However, when there was a lack of food women were not given preference in getting food before the men. All were treated equally. Preference was given to children, pregnant and breastfeeding women or the sick – men and women.<sup>20</sup> The principle of double standards applied to different situations (women were treated as equal to men in some circumstances, but men would not cook at the family level for instance) and this raises the question of whether men were really ready and willing to do 'women's jobs', or whether it was only women who were prepared to enter into the male arena in addition to doing traditional 'women's chores'?

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<sup>16</sup> Namhila, *The price for freedom*, 1997, P. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009; 21/04/2009.

<sup>19</sup> SPARC 02004579. The letter is dated 2 May 1988.

<sup>20</sup> Interview 16/07/2009.

## Normality against all odds

Despite the war situation, people tried to lead a normal life. Without doubt the displacement of people altered lives. However, they selected some activities that they used to do whilst inside Namibia and continued to practise them in exile.

The most striking practice that was revived in some civilian camps was the full-moon dances. After the curfew was imposed in northern Namibia, social gatherings of young people were no longer possible. In Nyango when it was a full moon girls would again play '*Nali ye mo na li ye meendalaye*' (let it turn). Girls would stand in a circle clapping their hands and singing while two or three girls took turns and danced in the circle. This was the main activity of the evening. The boys would make jokes about the girls and call them from the circles asking them to become their girlfriends.<sup>21</sup>

Some people continued the habits with which they had grown up. People could attend church services if they chose. Some camps had pastors and held services whenever possible. Pastors Kaishala and Katalala, for example, catered for the spiritual well-being of the exile community. Various pastors from inside the country and elsewhere in the world would visit the camps. Those wishing to could have their children baptised, but those choosing not to attend church services or observe church procedures were not forced to do so.<sup>22</sup>

As with any group of people living together, conflicts could arise among the exile community living in camps. Stories of witchcraft circulated in some camps. Nauta, a camp commander at Onalumono was, for example, accused of having bewitched a girl named Ndaenda. When Ndaenda was taken to a herbalist, the head of Nauta allegedly appeared in the herbalist's glass as having been the one who had bewitched the lady. Seemingly people had earlier seen Ndaenda and the commander eating a chicken together. Ndaenda died the following day and Nauta was branded as a witch from that point.<sup>23</sup> After the Kassinga attack, some women attributed their subsequent sickness to witchcraft. Even symptoms of sickness such as malaria were often regarded as a product of witchcraft. People would name those they suspected of bewitching them, although there was never evidence to explain how they had reached that conclusion. Some 'Casanova' type comrades also linked some of their illnesses to witchcraft. They realized that they were only sexually active when they were with one of their many girlfriends and completely inactive when with others. Stories of witchcraft were always brought to the attention of the camp commander, but as there was never evidence to prove witchcraft, these were usually dismissed.<sup>24</sup> Among those who were convinced witchcraft existed, accusations of witchcraft and witch-hunts escalated during

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<sup>21</sup> Shaketange, *Walking Boeing*, 2008, pp. 69–70.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 24/11/2008.

<sup>23</sup> Namhila, *The price for freedom*, 1997, pp. 35–37.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

times of upheaval and stress because of social, political and economic factors. Accusations would also escalate when there was increasing insecurity and unfamiliar phenomena that could not be explained.<sup>25</sup>

Formal procedures of ceremonies such as marriage were observed. People tried to keep to the ceremonies as they were practised inside the country. Namhila in her autobiography narrated the proceedings of her wedding to Billy Matengu. She recounted how they tried to make sure that there was food and drink and that they had nice clothes to wear. The magistrate conducted the ceremony and after that, people were in a festive mood. They sang, danced and ululated. Both parties had people acting as parents and speeches were given before people started to eat.<sup>26</sup> After the wedding ceremony was officially over, one of the bridesmaids was asked to stay with the newlyweds for two weeks to help, as this was the traditional practice of the Aawambo community where Namhila originated. What is striking though, whether or not it was a conscious omission in Namhila's narration, is the paying of *oiyonda* (bride wealth).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, perhaps, the paying of *oiyonda* was one of the 'backward traditions' or superstitions that women were fighting to abolish, as articulated by Pendukeni Ialoi Jang'ana, the Secretary General of SWC.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this was why *Oiyonda* was not practiced in the exile camps as a revision to tradition to counter women's 'double oppression'.

A section of the speech delivered by one of the guests during the wedding ceremony of Billy and Ellen (Namhila) is worth mentioning. The guest talked of men who got married to women just to ill-treat and beat them. He did not want to hear any of that. He directed his words to Billy and said, "If you want to fight go to the border where men are fighting the war. I will not entertain nonsense of men fighting women in the camps,"<sup>29</sup> he concluded. The question of domestic violence in the camps was not a subject discussed in SWAPO's publications, autobiographies or the interviews conducted for this research. However, the speech directed to Billy cannot be ignored, especially when reading the tone in which it was said. It was most likely that domestic abuse was an occurrence that had been observed in

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<sup>25</sup> Irish, J. Massacres, muthi and misery: Women and political violence. *Agenda*, no. 16, 1993, pp. 5–9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 85–93.

<sup>27</sup> The paying of bride wealth has not been without controversy. It has been represented in various ways. Those supporting the practice of bride wealth advocate argue that it is merely a token of appreciation to the parents for bringing up the woman and it is a valued part of the African culture. However, those against it have argued that it is a financial /goods transaction that disadvantages women because they are treated as commercial commodities that a man buys and then feels justified to ill-treat later. For the contested meanings of bride wealth, see Ansell, Nicola. Because it's our culture! (Re)negotiating the meaning of Lobola in Southern African Secondary schools. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 27, no. 4 (December 2001).

<sup>28</sup> *Namibia Today*, 2/82, 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Namhila, *The price for freedom*, 1997, p. 88.

the camps. It would be interesting to track how women (especially those in the leadership) dealt with it and what it meant in the fight for equality between men and women at a domestic level.

## Threats and challenges

### Attacks:

The concentration of many people at one place made them an easy target for the South African forces to attack. Although the camps were outside the borders of Namibia, that did not deter the South African army from going after the Namibians in exile and to attack them. The worst and bloodiest battle was the Kassinga massacre in Angola on 4 May 1978. Allegedly, it was mainly women and children who were victims of this attack, as outlined in the previous chapter.

Namhila in her autobiography talked of various attacks or threatened attacks from the South Africans. For example, on one (undated) occasion people had to be evacuated from Kwanza Sul and remain in the bush for a week because unidentified planes were seen hovering about. SWAPO's offices in Lusaka were bombed and people from Nyango camp had to be evacuated because of an imminent attack.<sup>30</sup> The threat did not just come from South Africa; UNITA in Angola, which collaborated with the South Africans, was also a threat to Namibian refugees.<sup>31</sup> "Knowing that our lives were being hunted worsened my fear of the war,"<sup>32</sup> Namhila commented. As attacks against the camps increased, it became necessary to make sure that everyone, both men and women were trained militarily. When the enemy attacked it killed indiscriminately irrespective of any gender.<sup>33</sup>

### Lack of basic necessities:

From the mid 1970s Namibians started arriving in the SWAPO camps in large numbers.<sup>34</sup> Their arrival caught the SWAPO leadership unprepared to accommodate them logistically. Food, clothes and medicine were scarce.<sup>35</sup> A former female exile remembered the following when arriving in 1981: "People were starving, if you are naive you would think people are

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 56, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Interview 25/07/2008.

<sup>34</sup> The collapse of the Portugal state in Angola led to the opening up of the borders, which enabled mass exodus of Namibians to enter Angola.

<sup>35</sup> Dobell, Lauren. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000. p. 47; cf. Saul, J. S. & Leys, C. Liberation without democracy? The Swapo crisis of 1976. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 20, no. 1 (March 1994), pp. 123-147.

fat, because their necks were swollen ... we used to get a thin porridge kind of drink. Adults received only once a day and children received three times a day ... I tell you ... that was not really funny.”<sup>36</sup> She continued to narrate how a year or two after that she was moved to a different camp. There was a shortage of soap and lotion and to make matters worse the camp was attacked by *onkana* (scabies), a skin disease. The girls who had boyfriends were better off. Their boyfriends used to give them cosmetics, but “some of us who had no boyfriends used to collect the small pieces of soap left over and put them in a sock, make it wet and it would produce lather.”<sup>37</sup>

Sanitary towels and underpants were other critical necessities that women in exile were often lacked. Ellen Musialela talked of the difficulties women faced in the military camps. She related: “... I saw with my own eyes when I went to the battle field in May how women were forced to use grass during their periods and had to go without panties ... ”<sup>38</sup> Another former female exile remembered how tough it was for them when there were no sanitary towels. “In times like that, you use a cloth – if you have one and then you wash it and use it repeatedly. Fortunately, our male comrades understood, sometimes they would give us their clothes and then would cut that into small pieces to use.”<sup>39</sup> Sanitary towels were distributed to women only when available and were distributed according to companies. The logistic department managed this. In Kwanza Sul, towels were sometimes distributed according to classrooms and this was to encourage people to go to school; in such cases teachers facilitated the distribution.<sup>40</sup>

### **Access to positions of leadership and control:**

Evidence suggests that it was mainly men who had positions of power and leadership within the structure of SWAPO in the camps and PLAN (see also Chapters two and five). It was predominantly men who were commanders, chiefs of the communal kitchens and other logistic departments. This disadvantaged women and made them vulnerable to abuse forcing some to enter into agreements or relationships from which they might benefit (see also Chapter five).

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<sup>36</sup> Interview 24/11/2008.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in White, M. A. Fanon & the African woman combatant. Updating Fanon’s psychological perspectives on anti-colonial and post colonial wars. In: Nhema, A. And Zelela, P. T (Eds). *Roots of African conflicts: Causes and conflicts*. Oxford: James Currey, 2008. p. 159.

<sup>39</sup> Interview 05/08/2008.

<sup>40</sup> Online interview 11/04/2009.

### **Helplessness and despair:**

Many people who went into exile had no idea of the type of life they were going to lead until they arrived. They did not know whether it might be twenty years or more before they would get to see their families, or whether they would ever see their families again. Being far away from their families and not knowing when they were to see them again or how they were surviving in Namibia, whether they were dead or alive, did not make their lives easier. Constant attacks made them realize the thin line dividing life and death.<sup>41</sup> Namhila explains how some survivors of Kassinga fell into depression because some saw people being killed or lost their friends in the attack. The change in lifestyle also affected them. Namhila referred to a particular Hamsta who was a bank clerk in Namibia and had no experience of living with so many people at one place, unable to speak the language he became thinner and thinner and was not coping. The nurses in the camps were not always well trained to deal with such situations.<sup>42</sup> In 1976 there were numerous reports of people committing suicide. John Jason committed suicide by shooting himself with a gun, saying: "I can no longer suffer this way."<sup>43</sup> Some people tried to run away from the camps, either to go back home or to look for work with the MPLA.<sup>44</sup> Life was tough. However, the longer people stayed, the better they adjusted to life in exile and became accustomed to different ways of surviving. Before they knew it, they were calling exile life and camps 'home' with pride.<sup>45</sup>

### **Reminiscences: The good old days**

After listening to the hardships and some gruesome stories about the camps, I was surprised to hear that some respondents today miss the exile camp life. They highlighted some aspects of the camps that they missed. Some even wished to live that life again. In this respect it is imperative not to ignore Connerton's argument on 'how societies remember'. He argues that memory and remembrance of the past depend on how one experiences the present, making it difficult to extract the past from the present because present factors influence the recollections of the past.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Namhila, *The price of freedom*, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Basler Afrika Bibliographien AA3 SWAPO Archives Accession: General Reports.

<sup>44</sup> Inaccessibility to information and minutes from the camps makes it impossible to know how many people tried running away or how serious the problem was.

<sup>45</sup> Online interview 21/04/2009.

<sup>46</sup> Connerton, P. *How societies remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 2.



## Comradeship:

"I miss the comradeship, the sisterhood, brotherhood ... I really miss that about the camps ... the togetherness was genuine."<sup>47</sup> That is how a respondent summed up her answer when asked if she had anything else to say about the camps. People in the camps had to learn that they needed each other to survive and that sharing was very important. People shared everything, even the smallest thing. They shared food and necessities, in fact everything one could think of.<sup>48</sup>

Women looked after children collectively. If a mother was needed for any mission, whether going to the front or abroad for further studies, she needed to know her children would be well cared for. There were people ready to look after the children and they did that with love and care.<sup>49</sup> Some families adopted children, cared for them and they loved them as their own. "I still meet many people who were my 'children' when in exile and they still call me 'mom'. People deeply cared for each other."<sup>50</sup>

## "SWAPO was our mother and our father"<sup>51</sup>:

"SWAPO provided people with everything. People did not have to worry about anything. When available, all things were given for free. Food, clothes, accommodation, you name it."<sup>52</sup> Parents did not have to worry about paying for their children's school fees, students did not have to worry about looking for schools or scholarships. When it was time to collect clothes or blankets, a platoon or two would be allowed to 'storm' the bundles of clothes and people would spend hours and hours searching for the best parts. A few lucky ones got better clothes; however, in the end everyone would lay their hands on something. The fact of the matter was "SWAPO really looked after us."<sup>53</sup> As time went by SWAPO was in a better position to look after its people in exile and secure the support of many countries and solidarity movements that were committed to offering support; some were specifically devoted to giving humanitarian support only.

However, some people feel that although the handouts were appreciated, it created a mentality of dependency.<sup>54</sup> SWAPO provided everything and in the end some people thought things would continue like that and they neglected, for example, their education whilst in exile. In independent Namibia it is "every one for themselves and God for everyone."<sup>55</sup> "When

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<sup>47</sup> Interview 12/07/2008.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 16/07/2008.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 23/04/2008.

<sup>50</sup> Interview 06/05/2008.

<sup>51</sup> Interview 18/06/2008.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Online interview 21/04/2009.

<sup>54</sup> Namhila, *The price of freedom*, 1997, p. 95.

<sup>55</sup> Interview 18/06/2008.

we arrived (in Namibia) at the beginning we still used to share, if you get 50 dollars, you would share with your comrades and you would all be with nothing, only later we realized that it is different; it is not like in the camps anymore. People started focusing on their families and own interest only, or perhaps what they were being paid was not enough to share with others anymore, as now they had bills to pay, loans to repay, school fees for their children etc. but things changed completely.”<sup>56</sup> Some people whose expectations for education and a career in independent Namibia have been disappointed remember the camps more nostalgically than others do.

**“We left those issues here and found them when we got back to Namibia”<sup>57</sup>:**

Some respondents reminisced about the stigma-free life they had lived in exile. Issues surrounding pre-marital sex, out-of-wedlock children and different children from different fathers and other issues concerning sexuality were not viewed with shame and disgrace in exile. However, these issues were heavily stigmatized in communities inside Namibia and are still stigmatized in post-independent Namibia.

In exile, it was seemingly not a problem at all for a woman to fall pregnant even if she was not married. A woman could have many children with many men; no one would look at her in disgrace unless the girl was under age, as this was a serious problem. With men, it had never been a debate even before people went into exile.<sup>58</sup> People cohabitated as well and this was not a problem. Even having children before marriage was not an issue, no one would be forced to go to church and confess their sins and some children were not even baptized. In fact, people who had children were looked up to with respect; people were referred to by their children’s names, especially by the young ones. For example, a woman would be referred to as *meme wa Mekondjo* (Mekondjo’s mom) and those who did not have children were referred to as *meme wa djilo* (zero’s mom); one could also hear something like *meme wa djilo oo tadi oko!* (Here comes zero’s mom). People were just proud to have children, whether married or not.<sup>59</sup> Although having a child was viewed with pride, the camp discourse still situated women primarily as mothers. In addition, the impression of a stigma-free exile life sharply contradicted the milieu in which most people had grown up in.<sup>60</sup> However, whenever people find themselves in a new context, they show agency by developing new meanings to cope with the new environment. There is, however, no evidence indicating whether there was a systematic and collective effort to eliminate stigma or whether it

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 24/11/2008.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See a section on changing sexuality patterns in this book, Chapter 5.

was simply an individual response. One can only assume that the setting (time, place and the situation) in which people found themselves had a big impact on their behaviour.

Another respondent tried to explain how different the situation in exile was. He indicated that the issue of girl or boy friend should not be looked at the same way as when people live in a normal situation. "If you transit in a certain camp and reach an agreement with a woman for that night, you could not claim her as your girlfriend and she would not claim you as a boyfriend; you might not see each other for the next five years. In the meantime what should she do? Wait for you? Maybe you are gone to the front or other missions for a long time, or you might be dead even and she does not even know. ... Other comrades who transit the camp before or after you might do the same, reach an agreement with her ..., you cannot call such women whores, it was the situation. Those women were not looked at as loose or anything bad."<sup>61</sup> However, some people had steady relationships and got married in the end or those who lived in the same camps could keep steady relationships, otherwise it was difficult for people who lived in different camps or men who were at the front to stay in steady relationships.<sup>62</sup>

In her autobiography, Namhila talked about her marriage to Billy while in exile. They lived together for six months before they got married.<sup>63</sup> However, when she returned to Namibia and was ready to enter into her second marriage with Werner, the local pastor expected them to make a public confession before he could marry them because they had lived together and had sex before marriage. The congregation was to pray for them so that God would forgive them so that they could have a clean marriage. In the end, they got married at the magistrate's office in Ondangwa and not in her local church.<sup>64</sup> A respondent summed up the stigma attached to sexuality as "We left those issues here and found them when we got back to Namibia."<sup>65</sup> I asked the respondents if the experience of the lack of stigma attached to these issues in exile was regarded as sexual liberation and a breakthrough in their quest for gender equality and liberation? One female respondent was quick to 'correct me': "Women were not promiscuous, it was just that no stigma was attached to issues of sexuality."<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the ideological and mythological sexual inhibitions instilled in women to be submissive, that a 'good' woman maintains her dignity and chasteness, might have led them to reject the suggestion that this might have been a sign of women's emancipation and liberation. Instead of ticking this off on the 'achieved issues on the women's liberation agenda' and welcoming it as an achievement, women themselves clung to 'society's expect-

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<sup>61</sup> Interview 06/08/2008.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Namhila, *The price of freedom*, 1997, pp. 83–84.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 177-178.

<sup>65</sup> Interview 24/11/2008.

<sup>66</sup> Interview 06/05/2008.

ted mythological conceptions' of sexual submissiveness and chasteness. Alternatively, the temporary phase of 'sexual liberation' (as I prefer to call it) did not come about because of a campaign by women. The 'abnormal' situation (life in exile) presented itself by chance and as soon as the situation returned to normal (a relaxed post-independent Namibia), it was reversed again to what it used to be (a stigmatized situation). In independent Namibia the stigma continues. Perhaps this can be understood in a different light to explain why women in independent Namibia refuse to describe the 'phase' as sexual liberation. After independence some people allege that women who were in exile did not fight the enemy, they only fought *oita yongali*,<sup>67</sup> which means if they admit having achieved sexual liberation, it might reaffirm the allegations made.

## Summary

This chapter looked at the history and structures of SWAPO and tried to locate women in the camps, their experiences and the ways in which these might have had an influence on how they survived in the camps. Katjavivi summed up the role of women in the SWAPO camps as being substantially different from the traditional societies they came from. Women had opportunities to further their studies, manage the provision of training programmes, run the centres and train as mechanics and accountants, etc. He indicated, however, that for women to achieve equal opportunity in society, they also had to participate in the political, economic and administrative life of the society: "SWAPO still does not reflect in its administrative structure the commitment it claims to women's equality."<sup>68</sup> The structure of having a separate women's council, might have sidelined the interests of women although it was established with good intentions.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Oita* means war and *ongali* means lying on one's back facing up. This by implication means that women's contribution was through having sex and not fighting with guns and other means. Interview 05/08/08.

<sup>68</sup> Katjavivi, P. *The rise of Nationalism in Namibia and its international dimensions*. (PhD Thesis, St Antony's College, 1986), p. 311.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Four

### Sexual Politics in the Camps

This chapter plainly looks at the sexual (heterosexual) politics of the SWAPO camps (civilian and military) in Angola and Zambia. The purpose of this chapter is to explore issues around allegations of sexual abuse and unwelcome sexual advances and issues of sexuality. Did these allegations undermine the goal and objectives of the leadership, particularly the women's leadership that had gender equality and women's emancipation as one of its main goals? This chapter will seek to question whether rhetorical commitments to equality were translated into practical equality in terms of the political structures and socio-economic power relationships in the camps. Chapter two focused on what women did in wartime and the actions they took. Chapter three focused on the ideological representation of women as equal to men and argued that equality between men and women was strongly represented as a central principle of the SWAPO party and a central theoretical position. The depiction and representation of women in the liberation movement had reached an advanced level of liberation from gender oppression. However, it will be argued, this might have been far from the truth. Allegations of sexual abuse and the enforced control of female sexuality were levelled against those in power; this suggests that, despite the vocal advocacy of equality, men and women in exile were not equal after all. During the war people found themselves in situations that they were unaccustomed to and this might have had an impact on the social construction of gender, as gender power relations and gender identities and meanings shifted.

#### Shifting sexuality patterns in Namibia

Namibians who found themselves in the camps, came from a society that had its own ideas, beliefs and understanding of issues surrounding sex and sexuality. Patterns of sexuality have changed over time and the following is a brief summary, which attempts to contextualize perceptions of sexuality during the 1960s to the 1980s.

Before the arrival of the missionaries, some kingdoms in northern Namibia practised an initiation ceremony known as *efundula/olufuko/ohango yiitsali*. Once a woman had been initiated and fell pregnant, the baby would be regarded as legitimate. In this period, *ewilo/okugwila* was practised. This allowed an unmarried couple to sleep together, a man or wo-

man could lay his or her head on the partner's arm, hold hands, and touch; sexual intercourse, however, was not permitted.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the event that a woman fell pregnant before *efundula*, the man responsible, together with the pregnant woman, would be thatched with grass and burned to death (*okukumbwa/okuxuvilikwa*).

There were many traditional myths and taboos surrounding the issues of sex and sexuality. It was believed that sex outside marriage could cause an illness; an unfaithful married woman, when pregnant, would die of cramps whilst delivering (*oshaatu, oshiwato, oshihi*) or the baby would die of cramps. Husbands' extra-marital affairs (*oshithitikila*) might cause death to the woman or problems during delivery. If a breastfeeding mother had sexual intercourse with someone other than the father of the child, the child would get diarrhoea, a mental illness or a disability. If people had sex during the day, some of the cattle might die. A pregnant woman had to wake up early every day and get out of her sleeping hut before anyone who had slept somewhere else during the night could enter the house, it could be someone from the same house or neighbours (*okulyatelela*), otherwise it was believed that she would have difficulties during delivery.<sup>2</sup> Mufune argues that these taboos were used to explain unfortunate consequences that followed when the accepted principles around sex and sexuality were not followed; as a result, taboos increased a sense of responsibility and helped to create a moral code relating to sexual behaviour. However, with advanced medical technology and access to health facilities, maternal deaths and child mortality are reduced, hence the taboos have been eroded. Consequently, people ignore these taboos as they are no longer relevant in restraining immoral sexual behaviours and do not explain the misfortune that might happen to people.<sup>3</sup>

With the coming of missionaries and the introduction of Christianity, the practices of *efundula*, *ewilo* and polygamy were pronounced heathen. Men who had more than one wife were asked to relinquish all but one. *Ewilo*, *efundula* and polygamy were strongly discouraged and eventually ceased to exist (*Efundula* has been revived since independence). People were encouraged to marry before engaging in sexual activities. A consciousness of sin concerning sex before marriage was developed.<sup>4</sup> The missionaries monitored sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Becker, H. *Efundula: Women's initiation, gender and sexual identities in colonial and post-colonial Northern Namibia*. In: Arnfred, Signe (Ed). *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004; Loeb, E. *In Feudal Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Research Centre in Anthropology, Folk role and Linguistics, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Mufune, P. Changing patterns of sexuality in Northern Namibia: Implication for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. *Culture, Health and sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 5 (Sep–Oct 2003), pp. 425–438; Personal communication.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 435.

<sup>4</sup> Becker, H. *Efundula: Women's initiation, gender and sexual identities in colonial and post-colonial Northern Namibia*. In: Arnfred, Signe (Ed). *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004, p. 47.

behaviour through confession and used threats or condition-oriented methods to influence sexual practices. A woman who fell pregnant before marriage was regarded as having transgressed the sixth commandment: 'Thou shall not commit adultery' (even though adultery technically refers to a person who is already married and who cheats on their partner). Both the woman and the man had to go through *oskola ye kuthilo* (lessons of repentance) initiated by the church. They had to confess their sins and afterwards would publicly stand in front of the congregation and had to ask for forgiveness from the members of the congregation. If they did not confess they would be excommunicated from the church. Falling pregnant before marriage was regarded as shameful and sinful and the confession of sins is still practised today.<sup>5</sup> The missionaries introduced new concepts as to what should entail accepted forms of sexuality which, they argued, should constitute the maintenance of virginity followed by a monogamous marriage. It is interesting to note that if a person stole, for instance, they would not be required to confess sins and ask the congregation's members to forgive them, although 'Thou shall not steal' is the seventh commandment of God.

As Namibia became more heavily Christianized some people continued practising polygamy whilst others shifted from being open to concealed polygamists. Namhila, in her autobiography, remembers that her grandfather had four wives. After being converted to Christianity he was forced to separate from all but one. Although the three other women were no longer his legal wives, he extended his homestead, built each of them a house and gave them land to farm. The wife who remained had to look after all the children and grandchildren of the wives who left. The children could visit their mothers whenever they wished as they all lived around the grandfather's house. What the church did was to change him from being an open polygamist to being a hidden one.<sup>6</sup>

At the traditional level sex before the initiation ceremony (*efundula*) was condemned. The rite marked the transition to adulthood and, after going through *efundula*, a woman could fall pregnant, although she was not 'married'. If a woman fell pregnant, the responsible man was made to pay (*ofuto*) a certain amount of money or a number of head of cattle for 'ruining' (*a yona*) the woman. However, if a woman fell pregnant before she had been through the initiation or marriage ceremonies, she was regarded as a shame and disgrace to her family and community at large.<sup>7</sup> It seems as if a woman was regarded as a subordinate and irrational person who could not think and act for herself. One might argue that the rational male should have been sensible enough to control his urges but, instead, he simply

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>6</sup> Namhila, E. N. *The price of freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997. This must have been around 1969 because in the story Namhila indicated that she was about five years of age at the time. She left Namibia for exile in 1976 when she was twelve. This was not a special and isolated case, it was a familiar experience.

<sup>7</sup> Mufune, 2003, p. 427.



had to pay for making the weak and frail woman pregnant. One of the stories in Christian belief is that Eve led Adam astray in the Garden of Eden; which resulted in dishonour, immorality, original sin and banishment. Alternatively, the Christian bible provides an example of a case of reverse seduction when King Solomon of the Jews seduced Makeda, the queen of Sheba, a sexual encounter that produced the royal patriarch, Menelik I.<sup>8</sup>

Upon impregnating a woman, a man was traditionally made to pay damages; however, the payment was handed to the pregnant woman's maternal uncle, who decided what to do with it. In the case of money, he could share a part with or hand the whole amount over to the pregnant woman, or hand it to the mother of the pregnant woman, or keep it for himself, making clear that it was a man who controlled this payment. Abstinence and virginity were highly regarded and valued, and women who gave birth before marriage were stigmatized, as opposed to the men who had become fathers. Such women are sometimes referred to as *oshikumbu* or *omufuko* (loose woman) while men retain their titles as men, irrespective of how many 'illegitimate' children they might have; contrary to this, the more children the woman has outside marriage, the worse her prospects of ever getting married become.<sup>9</sup>

However, the discouragement from the church and the community did not really deter young people from having sex outside marriage. Although premarital sex was not as extensive as today, the stigma attached to it was very strong. After independence, women could have premarital children without being denounced and this is the time when people started having free access to contraceptives.

## Polygamy and the colonial state

The colonial state had a big influence on the control of polygamy. Customary law never enjoyed legal recognition prior to independence, more particularly customary law marriages because of their polygamous nature. Native Administration Proclamation of 1928 (Proclamation No. 15 of 1928) did not recognize marriage under customary law and, as a result, a person married under customary law, while so married, could conclude a subsequent marriage under common law and would not be guilty of bigamy.<sup>10</sup> However, Marriage Act No. 81 of 1963 and regulations under it prohibited a person married under common law, while married, to conclude a subsequent marriage under common law. Bigamy was now a common law offence. The second marriage would be void and would not have the nor-

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<sup>8</sup> Bullough, V. Sex education in medieval Christianity. *The Journal of sex research*, vol. 13, no. 3 (August 1977), pp. 185–196.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Uilika Kangulohi.

<sup>10</sup> Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC). Law Reform and Development Commission on Customary law marriages. Windhoek: LRDC (12), October 2004, pp. 7–8. Available at [www.lawreform.gov.na](http://www.lawreform.gov.na), accessed 07/04/2009.

mal consequences of marriage.<sup>11</sup> In 1957, the 'Native Commissioner' for Owamboland was quoted by a Finnish anthropologist as describing a marriage to be "a monogamous relationship, established by means of a state ceremony, between a male and female who have agreed to get married, obliging them to live together until the union is set aside by a competent court and to afford each other conjugal rights."<sup>12</sup> This was the idea of a marriage the state regarded as legal and acceptable. It was supposed to be monogamous, heterosexual and conducted by the state, and the couple had to live together. In contrast, customary marriages were potentially polygamous and it was generally acceptable for a husband to have extramarital affairs. The wife was expected to remain faithful to the husband.

Although the church and the state tried to discourage people from practising polygamy, some communities did not give it up. People in the Kunene region, especially the Himba community and communities in the Caprivi, Kavango and Oshana and Ohangwena regions are reported to still be practising it more than other regions.<sup>13</sup> A trend called 'second house' relationships has also emerged.<sup>14</sup> The LAC and LRDC describe this practice where a married man sets up a house with another woman without having followed common law or customary law formalities.<sup>15</sup> I would extend this further placing within the migrant labour system. The colonial administration, together with the local elite (both consisted mainly of men) conspired to control the sexuality, labour and mobility of women.<sup>16</sup> Women were required to report their presence to the municipal offices of that respective town and required to carry passes in order to stay in the police zone.<sup>17</sup> This was aimed at forcing women to remain in the homelands maintaining their households whilst awaiting their husbands' return as the latter were only allowed to stay in towns when working. Men would also have to leave if they were injured or sick, or when their labour was no longer needed.

In addition, men on migrant labour contracts were not allowed to move with their families to their new places of work. They would be away from home for a period of 12 months or more. Due to the loneliness and inaccessibility to their families, some men resorted to second house relationships. Most of the 'second house' relationships were public knowledge. In some cases, even the legally wedded wives knew about this. Children born out of these unions grew up seeing their fathers having multiple partners and their mothers tolerating this whilst not choosing additional partners themselves. There were no laws to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Legal Assistance Centre (LAC). Proposal for law reform on the recognition of customary marriages. Windhoek: LAC, 1999 p. 46. Available at [www.lac.org.na/projects/grap](http://www.lac.org.na/projects/grap), Accessed 08/04/2009.

<sup>13</sup> LAC 1999, pp. 27–28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 39; LRDC, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Becker, 2004, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> SWAPO, *Namibia News* (September/October) 1972.

regulate 'second house' relationships and informal cohabitations. The 'second house' phenomenon was not just practised by men who were away on contract labour, it was also common to find a man who had more than one 'house' in his village or neighbouring villages. In Namibia adultery is not a crime but can be grounds for divorce.<sup>18</sup> However, at a traditional level, adultery is acknowledged only when a man (married or not) 'cheats' with a married woman, but not when a man (married or not) 'cheats' with an unmarried woman. A man who cheats with a married woman would be asked to pay, for 'stealing' from the other man (the husband of the woman).<sup>19</sup>

## Definitions of rape and sexual abuse

Notions of rape and sexual abuse have been understood in different ways, hence the definitions varied. In 2000 Namibia changed the rape law because it was 'based on false ideas and myths' and to 'send out signals that false ideas about rape will no longer be accepted by the law or the courts.'<sup>20</sup> In Southern Africa the law on sexual offences has changed dramatically,<sup>21</sup> Tanzania, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho all have different definitions of rape that were amended between 1998 and 2006.

In exile SWAPO was guided by the following definition of rape: 'whoever acquires a carnal knowledge (sexual intercourse) of a woman not living in matrimonial union with him and does so by violence or by threatening with a direct attack on life or limb shall have committed a felony.'<sup>22</sup> The following features were part of the definition of rape: it involved women who were not married and the use of violence (physical or psychological); if consent was not given before or during the act, or if the victim was a young girl even if the threat was very mild. As such, domestic violence issues involving married women were not considered as rape.

The colonial rape law used in Namibia before 2000 had much in common with the definition used by SWAPO. During apartheid, rape was defined as 'intentional unlawful

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<sup>18</sup> Hubbard, D. *Faithfulness, adultery and the law*. Windhoek: LAC, 2003. Available at [www.lac.org.na/projects/grap](http://www.lac.org.na/projects/grap), Accessed 08/04/2009.

<sup>19</sup> Mufune, P. Changing patterns of sexuality in Northern Namibia: Implication for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. *Culture, Health and sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 5 (Sep–Oct 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Legal Assistance Centre, *Namibia Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service Directory* (Windhoek, LAC, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Legal Assistance Centre, *Rape in Namibia* (Windhoek, LAC, 2006), pp. 74–77.

<sup>22</sup> SWAPO Department of Legal Affairs, SWAPO documentation: *Laws governing the Namibian people's Revolution*. SWAPO Department of Information and Publicity. Luanda, 1977. This section will only focus on the situation in exile. This does not mean in any way that the acts of sexual abuse were not committed inside the country as well, but the exclusion is due to limited time and resources. The author is well aware that the situation and dynamics were not similar so a blanket conclusion cannot be used to reach a conclusion that the circumstances were the same.

sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent.<sup>23</sup> The definition had limitations as it did not make it possible for men or boys to lay charges of rape; wives could not lay charges against their husbands and it focused on the question of consent and not the level of force or coercion used by the rapist. In legal terms, rape could only be said to have happened where a penis had been inserted into a vagina; other acts did not qualify as rape.<sup>24</sup>

Under the Namibian Combating of Rape Act, No. 8 of 2000, SWAPO's definition of rape would be classified as archaic and outdated. The new Rape Act redefines rape in gender-neutral terms, recognizes that boys and men can be raped, includes an array of sexual acts, and prominence is not placed on the victim's absence of consent, but rather placed on the rapist's use of force or coercion. Rape is committed when a sexual act is committed with a boy or girl under the age of 14 by someone more than three years older, and it recognizes that rape can occur within marriage. In this Act, a sexual act covers the most intimate kinds of sexual contact, not just sexual intercourse.<sup>25</sup> In SWAPO's document, *Laws governing the Namibian People's Revolution*, as laid down during exile, 'coercion as a general crime was not included,'<sup>26</sup> however, the Combating of Rape Act No. 8 of 2000 placed a lot of emphasis on 'coercive circumstances' that included, but were not limited to, physical force, threats (verbal or physical), and situations where the complainant is unlawfully detained, unable to communicate or expresses unwillingness or mental incapacity (permanent or temporary).<sup>27</sup>

The Combating of Rape Act 2000 triggered a public debate. This section will focus on the debate that occurred within parliament especially on the discussion around the new clause, which allowed for the possibility of rape within marriage. Some male MPs argued that the impending anti-rape law would make it easy for men to be accused of rape. Nahas Angula, Minister of Education, called for caution to be exercised in the section dealing with rape within marriage. Angula argued, "a woman out of the blue might shout attempted rape when her husband comes home drunk demanding certain things where the wife is not in the mood."<sup>28</sup> He continued that it would be a case of one person's evidence against the other and "when a woman is crying too much, there is an inclination to believe her."<sup>29</sup> Hifikepunye Pohamba objected to the prosecution of husbands, suggesting that marital rape should be dealt with in counselling, not in court. The victim should only go to the police once the

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<sup>23</sup> Legal Assistance Centre, *A guide to The Combating of Rape Act*. (Windhoek, LAC, 2006) p.7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Legal Assistance Centre, *Namibia Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service Directory*. Windhoek: LAC, 2005; Legal Assistance Centre, *Rape in Namibia*. Windhoek: LAC, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> SWAPO Department of Legal Affairs, SWAPO documentation: *Laws governing the Namibian people's Revolution*. Luanda: SWAPO Department of Information and Publicity, 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Legal Assistance Centre. *Namibia Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service Directory*. Windhoek: LAC, 2005; Legal Assistance Centre. *Rape in Namibia*. Windhoek: LAC, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Amupadhi, T. Male MPs object to 'wife rape' clause. *The Namibian*, 04/06/1999.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

abuse becomes intolerable.<sup>30</sup> Clara Bohitile objected to the male MPs, saying that a woman was raped every hour in Namibia, HIV infections were on the increase and children, even toddlers, were not spared; hence it was imperative to have the law passed.<sup>31</sup> Ngarikutuke Tjiriange the Minister of Justice who had tabled the bill commented that there were wives who argued that they should simply accept what their husbands want in the field of sex. "I have no sympathy for people with such view,"<sup>32</sup> he said. He warned fellow MPs not to end up doing nothing about rape, adding that they can never agree on everything.<sup>33</sup>

## **Circumstances under which rape and sexual abuse was committed against women**

### **The trips between Namibia and the host country:**

When people left the country they could leave as a group of friends, they could be abducted, or they could co-ordinate their departure with soldiers who were operating inside the country. The main aim of these soldiers would be to help others cross the border of Namibia into Angola, Zambia or Botswana using the route that was safe at the time. A former male PLAN soldier put it this way:

"Mhhh ... for instance young girls coming from home, 16, 17 years or so on. They find the soldiers; the soldiers take them, those who are responsible for taking them to the nearest camp. Sometimes they spent time, up to weeks with these girls because of the situation of the war and that is when the soldiers might help themselves to these girls. At the end of the journey, when they drop them, and in the situation of the war, they (the soldiers) are not supposed to tell them when they are going back. After a month, the girl might find out that she is pregnant and when asked who was responsible, she would say it is Bazooka or Pepesha [combat names], When asked; which one? She would say; the one we came with, and there were so many Bazookas and Pepeshas. Wherever there are people, things will not always go, as you want, it happened, especially in the military situation."<sup>34</sup>

Shaketange described her journey and others in her group through to Lusaka in Zambia. It had taken them about two months of being transported in buses, trains and trucks, and involved the crossing of deep and dangerous rivers during long and exhausting daily walks. They went through different military camps first before they eventually arrived in a civilian camp in Lusaka. As soon as they crossed the border into Angola, a group of SWAPO leaders

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<sup>30</sup> Grobler, J. Progressive anti-rape has divided Namibian parliament along gender lines. Mail & Guardian, 14/06/1999, available at [www.unwire.org/unwire/19990618](http://www.unwire.org/unwire/19990618), accessed 06/04/2009.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Amupadhi, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, 8 July 2008.

met them and that was the beginning of their transit through various military camps. In the military camps, they used to sleep under trees in mixed groups.<sup>35</sup> Keeshi narrated their journey into exile, how they crossed the borders and how, upon their arrival in the military camp, the leaders of SWAPO selected a number of women from their group, treated them to drinks and spent a night with them.<sup>36</sup> Shikola did not narrate her journey to Angola in so much detail. However, she indicated that they were seven girls when they crossed the border into Angola in 1977. Upon entering Angola they were arrested by members of the MPLA, four of her friends were taken to jail, whilst she and her other two friends were left with three MPLA chiefs who told them that they were going to marry them so that they could not join SWAPO, meaning they were going to have sex with them. They narrowly escaped rape as the SWAPO soldiers came just in time to rescue them.<sup>37</sup>

In situations like these it is not very clear how things happened.<sup>38</sup> A former male ex-combatant depicted a scenario of how a sexual act might take place. People trying to cross the border might meet the soldiers and spend weeks or even months with them. They slept in the open and might not have enough blankets. A soldier would, on purpose, insist on sharing a blanket with a girl and this could be the time when a rape might happen. Whether the sexual acts were consensual or not is difficult to determine; however, one cannot rule out the impact which the presence of guns and uniformed men would have had on these young people.

### **“Ondjolo”: Goodies for sex:**

*Ondjolo* literally means bait. When the deprivation became particularly harsh some women used their bodies to obtain certain necessities simply by exchanging sexual favours for basic goods – favours or opportunities with the men who were in a position to provide them with those things. A former male PLAN commander comments:

“There are so many things that attract women to men. Wealth, beauty, intelligence, fame etc. There were times during the liberation struggle... well the question of wealth was not in question, because we did not really possess much. If somebody goes for training in the USSR or wherever, when you come back, you might come back with a few things, sweets, soaps, underwear...this was to target the vulnerable or the material girls out there. You could do anything

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<sup>35</sup> Shaketange L. *Walking the Boeing 707*. Windhoek: AACRLS, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Nathanael, K. P. *A journey to exile: The story of a Namibian freedom fighter*. Aberystwyth: Sosiumi Press, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Shikola, T. We left our shoes behind. In: Turshen et al (Eds). *What women do during the war*. London: Zed Books, 1998.

<sup>38</sup> Of all the people that I have interviewed, no one has admitted to being a victim or a perpetrator. Apart from the narration of Keeshi, many accounts are nationalist and would be unlikely to touch on issues that might be regarded as unpatriotic.

with a packet of sweets...You know..., '*Oha ka kwatwa naashi ha ka li*<sup>39</sup>'. It is still happening here, it is natural."<sup>40</sup>

The blame cannot be placed entirely on the men who were mainly in powerful positions; women themselves could make themselves available to the men from whom they could benefit. This makes sense because it was mainly the commanders who would leave the camps to go to the nearest towns or foreign countries on various missions. It was from these missions that they would return with the nicer things that were not available in the camps. A female ex-combatant recalls that:

"Commanders could get any girl they wanted, not because they were forced, but the girl would have a special status if she was dating a commander. The girl would get good things that other people would not get; she would get things like soaps, sugar, milk etc. when the commander comes back from town. She could also eat well as commanders used to get better food comparing to others."<sup>41</sup>

Although many women interviewed restated the same thing, not a single woman that I spoke to disclosed that she had ever had a relationship with a commander. Whilst such an experience might be fondly remembered, particularly with the associated status and pride, in contemporary Namibia such memories might be viewed differently. In fact women spoke of other women's experiences instead of their own, a sign that this might now evoke a feeling of humiliation and indecency or possibly that individuals are reluctant to discuss intimate details about their own past. A male respondent, who was just an ordinary soldier in a camp, was more outspoken and explained that what was happening was often the forming of relationships-for-benefits, rather than a mutual relationship based on love. He recalled that:

"Women did not want us, the ordinary soldiers. We had nothing to offer them, an ordinary soldier can stay at the front even up to five years without having gone anywhere, may be you can go on a mission, inside the country to fight, but not to foreign countries where you can bring nice things. In addition, in the situation when there is not enough food, commanders can have better food, like meat. Ordinary soldiers would only eat *omahola*, [boiled mahangu] if a girl is going out with a commander, then she gets to eat those nice food...You know... you girls... [He laughs sarcastically]. However, it was not all commanders who did that, only some individuals who took advantage of that and abused their positions."<sup>42</sup>

Everyday survival was not the only force that lured women into having affairs with commanders, long-term benefits influenced women as well. The opportunity to study was

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<sup>39</sup> This can be translated as 'it is entrapped with what it eats.'

<sup>40</sup> Interview, 12 August 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 29 August 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Interview, 06 August 2008.



one reason. The commander of the camp mainly did the preliminary selection. When the headquarters sent a message that they needed a number of people to go on a mission as it was called, the commander of a certain camp had the responsibility of choosing who would be sent away for study. That created an opportunity of which women took advantage in order to leave the camps and the front and, even better, to go and study.<sup>43</sup>

The commanders<sup>44</sup> too exploited the vulnerability of women and used it to their advantage. A former ex-combatant woman, who spent five years at the front, reveals that:

“The commanders used to pull that on new soldiers or recruits maybe coming from education. When they come, they would find the chiefs lined up waiting for them. When you are coming in the camp, you are new, the people you find in the camp know what they are doing and you would be waiting to be told what to do. The commanders would then divide among themselves the beautiful ones. They were innocent, you know. However, the old ones and those who have been in the camps, they would never do that. Maybe it is like now in the independent Namibia, if a person wants a position, she might say yes to the manager, because of your own personal interest. However, it was not a SWAPO policy; people were just doing that individually. What the commanders used to do, was to put the beautiful women on medics and communication that would be where they would look for girlfriends. Those who were not so beautiful would be sent to infantry, those would be running and running in the sun. They [commanders] would not want their girls to run in the sun and sweat. They would want their girls to rest and do the work that would allow them to sit down. That was part of life.”<sup>45</sup>

Although the situation was open to exploitation, there were people who taught and enlightened the women to ‘maintain their dignity’. However, some people argued that in the absence of strict control and parental guidance, the “women lost the values and the moral fibers of the homes and became loose.”<sup>46</sup>

It is interesting to note that the men to whom I spoke, indicated that there used to be ‘women’s meetings’ organized by SWAPO Women’s Council (SWC) that they were not allowed to attend; indeed, there is archival material that suggests that a number of these meetings did take place. The agenda was not always given in the letters of invitation and that makes it difficult for one to figure out what ‘women’s’ meetings’ were all about. However, men pointed out that they never had meetings to be taught to ‘maintain their dignity’. It was assumed that it was the responsibility of women to make sure that ‘they do not just give

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> This is not to imply that all commanders of PLAN were taking advantage of women, only some individuals. Other men who were not commanders but in a position of power were doing it as well.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, 16 July 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Casual conversation, November 2007.

themselves to men' (*omukainhu ito li ya ndje ashike nga ho*)<sup>47</sup> and 'within SWAPO only the women are blamed when they fell pregnant.'<sup>48</sup>

Women were represented through the image of an armed soldier who had successfully entered the male domain, which gave a picture of shifting gender roles and identities; but when their circumstances worsened, the same women (the combatants) used their bodies as bait and resources to obtain scarcities or basic needs. This reaffirms that the body was used as both a symbol and as terrain in the construction of gender and power. That supports the image of 'woman subordination vs. man domination' as men took advantage of the power they had (physical, political and social) to obtain sexual gratification.

### **"No comrade says no to another comrade":**

Some commanders and others who were in positions of power used the "no comrade says no to another comrade unless you are an agent" line to sleep with women. Within the context of the Lubango dungeon or spy drama,<sup>49</sup> no one wanted to be labelled a spy so the women would just give in. This would mainly happen to the new arrivals who were not yet familiar with the way things worked in the camps. The commanders liked these new arrivals, as they were still fresh. A former occupant of a camp commented that:

"People preferred the new arrivals as they were still fresh. When they are just coming from the country they still had roll-on and nice lotions, unlike those who have been in the camps for long, they did not have roll-ons and their armpits smelled and would smell of *ekandanga* (a type of soap that was used to bath with and had a particularly unpleasant scent)."<sup>50</sup>

Rumours would circulate that some women who were sent as agents to go into exile had poisoned blades inserted in their vaginas and had instructions to go and have sex with specific top male leaders of SWAPO. This apparently meant that if that specific male leader were to sleep with such a woman (with a blade), then he would be cut and bleed to death. When the twin sisters Panduleni and Ndamona Kali were recalled from their studies in Cuba to return to Angola 'to answer few questions,' they were first searched by the security in Cuba. Later, a woman ordered them to undress. She put on gloves and 'examined us internally.' When they arrived in Angola, Panduleni and Ndamona learned that the main accusation against 'alleged female spies' was that they were supposed to be carrying poisoned

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, former female commander, 27 July 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Sex Education, Katjavivi's collection. Undated. UNAM archives.

<sup>49</sup> This was a group of people who were suspected of being South African agents and were believed to have been spying on the activities and programmes of SWAPO in exile and reporting back to the South African Administration. They were detained and kept in the dungeons. The ex-detainees alleged that there was a gross violation of human rights on the side of SWAPO. They alleged that they were mistreated, starved, interrogated, imprisoned without trial and, even, executed.

<sup>50</sup> Casual conversation, November 2007.

blades in their private parts.<sup>51</sup> Physiologically, this would not be possible. However, one can just imagine that some men took advantage of these allegations and put women under pressure to prove that they did not have razor blades by having sex with them.

Although there were different wings present in the camps (the SWC, SYL and SEC), life was mainly organized and operated on military grounds. New arrivals were made to understand that in the army “discipline and obedience are supreme, a non-negotiable item. If I told you to jump, you cannot ask why, maybe you can ask how high...,”<sup>52</sup> a former male camp commander said. He added:

“That is why some people abused their authority. They would use their messengers and tell them like around nine, go and get me this girl and... When she comes, you tell her to sleep with you. If she says...‘I do not want’...then you ask her if she is an agent or whether she thinks that you are an agent or why was she refusing a comrade? If you are new, and scared... you know... some would not even question... but these are isolated cases.”<sup>53</sup>

A former female soldier said that:

“What I noticed is that we were disciplined. May be even in some instances, if we were abused, we would not have noticed, because the discipline that we had was so good. I compare SWAPO with a church service, even if you do not understand; you would not stand up and question the pastor that, I do not understand this or that.”<sup>54</sup>

This was how some women fell prey of the men who used their positions to get sexual pleasure from women. Resisting an order issued by a superior was one of the more serious offences against military and political discipline in SWAPO. It is loosely defined and this ambivalence can be misinterpreted by anyone with ulterior motives. In the *SWAPO Documentation: Laws governing the Namibian People’s Revolution*, published in 1977, it is explained that “any member of the movement who resists an order issued by his superior and refuses to execute it shall have committed an offence.”<sup>55</sup> ‘An order issued’ does not indicate that it should be related to the activities of the movement; indeed, when it is left hanging in the air like that, it can be misinterpreted and used the wrong way. It would be interesting to know whether all people knew about and in fact had access to this important document explaining the laws governing the liberation struggle.

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<sup>51</sup> *Uncovering the exile history of ANC and SWAPO*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2009. pp. 147–148.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, 8 July 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 16 July 2008.

<sup>55</sup> *SWAPO documentation: Laws governing the Namibian People’s Revolution*, 1977.

### **“Rape? I do not know what you are talking about”:**

The question of rape in the camps was one of the eye-raising questions during my interviews. One can understand this because there was a lot of secrecy and taboos surrounding issues concerning sex and sexuality. After a couple of interviews I decided to avoid the word rape and replace it with ‘unwanted sexual advances’, but still there were some people who dismissed it and answered in a manner that indicated that I should not ask any more questions about it. Two female participants who were in exile responded:

“That allegation I do not know. Maybe it was happening at the camps that I was not staying, but I stayed in Nyango but I have not experienced it.”<sup>56</sup>

“Rape? I do not know what you are talking about. I do not want to talk about things that I do not have basis to stand for. It could be allegations or propaganda.

If there is any one that can justify that, they can, but in my view, I have not experienced that, what I can call sexual abuse.”<sup>57</sup>

Some participants were quick to ask what I was referring to when asking about rape:<sup>58</sup>

“Through my 15 years of the liberation struggle, I have not heard about that. I have heard about three official cases where action was taken. But rape is difficult to define, what constituted rape? If we were to define it (rape) the way it is defined now in Namibia, and then I would say yes... Now you can even rape your wife, so then ... but rape by the way of forced sex, people did not walk the street or bushes, like now people lay an ambush in the riverbeds, it was the rape like ... but things like ... I invite you for dinner or to spend a night at my place ask you to have sex with me, you refuse ... I insist, insist ... until you give in, that happened.”<sup>59</sup>

One male respondent was quick to remind me that I must not confuse issues as things have to be looked at in terms of the context and with regard to who had made any allegations and when.

“Those were the influence of the western culture, people became brainwashed, and when you read it in the context of a white person... people can come up with things like I was raped or so on. It is only the mentality of young people of today who want to sell the country ...easy... because they do not respect the culture. They are mentally destroyed, they do not go home, and they do not talk to their mothers, when they have problems, they run to their friends, not to their mothers... in which context did women claim that they were raped? Was it in the context when a woman came back to the barracks and say she was raped? Or was it when people heard her screaming, or was she beaten? On the other hand, was it after independence when you

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<sup>56</sup> Interview, 18 June 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Interview, 7 May 2008.

<sup>58</sup> The Combating of Rape Act no 8. Of 2000, redefined the colonial rape law.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, 12 August 2008.

read the books? In reality if you are saying people were harassed like that in the barracks, then women were harassed like that everywhere in the world, it was happening everywhere in the world, even in my mother and father's house. Look at things in perspective."<sup>60</sup>

The question of rape in the camps is something that was not written about in any of the SWAPO publications. Even the 'three official cases' that one respondent talked about are not mentioned anywhere in the publications. Even in the post-independence literature on the liberation struggle, it is completely absent. However, some authors like Shikola considered what was happening in the camps "not really rape in a direct way as such, it's only that they train you in the army to say yes, when someone in charge calls you, you should not refuse, you do not say no."<sup>61</sup> However, she continued that officers made love to women (especially new ones coming from home) and some got pregnant without knowing which commander impregnated them or without even knowing his name. In addition, some commanders had up to eighteen children,<sup>62</sup> which indicates that the commanders were sleeping around with a lot of women at the same time. The attitudes of people like Shikola indicate a process that Cockburn termed the normalizing or invisibilizing of abuse.<sup>63</sup> That is why she concluded that what was happening in the camps at that time was normal. On the issue of commanders having many children with different women, sex and procreation possibly took on a different meaning during the war, as death was viewed as very probable; thus men were anxious to have children to carry their name through in case they died during the war.<sup>64</sup>

Training people to say 'yes' all the time is one thing; getting people to obey might be another. There must have been people who were opposed to saying yes to sleeping with people that at times did not even know their names. Connell has summed it up well in her chapter on gender in personal life.<sup>65</sup> She argued that although people might go through the same socialization, they do not internalize what they have learned the same way. Life involves distinct moments and stages; that is why it does not unfold seamlessly. One's identity, Connell argues, lies in its uniqueness rather than what is shared, it is "who one is against, who one is not."<sup>66</sup> It is against this background, that identity is revealed as plural and not unitary. For this reason, one tends to be suspicious that although people in the camps were socialized to say 'yes', there must have been some who resisted the advances made and others who violated the principle of obedience.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview, 20 June 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Shikola, T. We left our shoes behind in Turshen et al (Eds) *What women do during the war*. London: Zed Books, 1998, pp. 140–141.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> This concept is borrowed from Cockburn, C. The continuum of violence. In: Giles et al (Ed) *Sites of violence*. London: University of California press, 2004, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Nhongo-Simbanegavi, J. *For better or worse*, Harare: Weaver Press, 2000, p. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Connell, R.W. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 83, 86

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Workshops were held to highlight the need for sex education and family planning. In one particular workshop, the main concern was that in the “exile situation where there was no parental control and supervision, young women who had crossed the border were made pregnant at random, resulting in too many babies being born annually without acknowledged fathers. In one case, there was a report of one male comrade impregnating five comrades without remorse for the consequences.”<sup>67</sup> However, in this report it is not indicated whether ‘impregnating young women at random’ was done by force or with consent; it is indicated that some men did not acknowledge their responsibility and had impregnated many partners at a time and this indicates that traditional social conventions and sexual practices were not followed in exile.

However, a male who had been an ordinary soldier disagreed with the common claim that rape was not taking place. He described the scenario when soldiers could be at a post and men and women being present. They could be at that post for five months without going to the main camp. He said:

“While at the post, anything could happen. A commander can rape a woman and what can she do? The person she is supposed to report to is the perpetrator and she would not be allowed to leave the camp without his permission and even if she leaves, between the post and the camp is the jungle, wild animals and the enemy. If she reports that after five months when she goes to the camp or head quarters, there will be no evidence and that case could just get dismissed.”<sup>68</sup>

In any case, leaving the camp without the permission of the commander would amount to evasion of duties, which was regarded as an offence.<sup>69</sup>

However, some people who belonged to SWAPO and are now regarded as dissidents have alleged that there were sexual abuses committed in the camps in exile. As early as 1985 the allegations of sexual abuse were already circulating inside Namibia. In April 1985, a German reporter ran a story in a local newspaper exposing the allegations. Hilda Tjongarero, one of his informants, revealed that as an occupant of the camp “you cannot say no to a commander or camp officer if he wants you.” Those who resisted were simply raped. She was raped so many times that “later they did not have to force me anymore.” She continued that those who entered into relationships with guards received food, even sugar or milk. She stated that there were girls as young as 14–16 years old who had children with SWAPO officers.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Katjavivi’s collection. Undated. UNAM Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Interview, 06 August 2008.

<sup>69</sup> SWAPO documentation: Laws governing the Namibian People’s Revolution, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> Lützenkirchen, W. Could this be true? *Windhoek Observer*, 20 April 1985.

Lisa Ngenyone fled the SWAPO camps in 1983 and narrated the same ordeal. She explained that she could not take it anymore. There were women who went out of their mind and would run throughout the camp with “naked and fixed eyes.”<sup>71</sup> Looking for help was hopeless as the Zambian police did not want to get involved and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Zambia refused to help; she described the relationship between the latter institution and SWAPO as having been ‘hand in glove’.<sup>72</sup> Cecilia Nafenda, a Namibian ex-combatant, claimed to have been sexually abused by male combatants when they were at the battlefield. When she and others complained, they were accused of being disobedient and that they were enemies of the movement. She even fell pregnant.<sup>73</sup>

### **One hand washes the other:**

Nathanael, a former freedom fighter, in his book *A journey into exile*, described how women in exile were violated sexually.<sup>74</sup> He noticed the very first night when they arrived in a SWAPO camp in 1974 that some young women were taken to the officials’ private quarters to spend the night. The women joined them the following morning, very excited about the money they had received from the officials.<sup>75</sup> During the time they spent at this camp, the officials continued spending money on drinks and gifts for the ‘good-time girls’, a thing that left some young men bitter because they lost their girlfriends to the senior officials.<sup>76</sup> However, some women were left with no choice but to ‘make themselves available to the male occupants of the camps to protect their boyfriends from being sent away on suicide missions’<sup>77</sup> for, according to Nathanael’s claims, commanders loyal to Sam Nujoma were abusing their power and taking liberties with girls while threatening to send their boyfriends on missions from which they would never return. As a result, many girls became pregnant by men who had fathered from five to eight children at the same time in the same camp.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Groth, S. Namibia, *The wall of silence*. Claremont: David Phillip, 1995, p. 97.

<sup>74</sup> Nathanael Keshii was among the 27 members of SWAPO Youth League (SYL) that were involved in a power struggle with the older SWAPO leadership in 1976. Andreas Shipanga who was not a youth, but part of the SWAPO leadership supported them. Hence the power struggle that led to the spilt is referred to as the Shipanga crisis of 1976. At the request of SWAPO the 27 members of SYL were arrested by the Zambian police, jailed in Zambia and later transferred to prison in Tanzania. Between 1600–2000 dissident PLAN fighters were also rounded up and taken to Mboroma Camp in Zambia. Upon release, most of them were offered asylum in the Nordic countries. Shipanga formed the SWAPO Democrats (SWAPO D) in 1978 and returned to Namibia later. Nathanael is still in exile in Europe.

<sup>75</sup> Nathanael, Keshii. *A journey to exile: The story of a Namibian freedom fighter*. Aberystwyth: Sosome Press, 2002, p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, pp. 66–67.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.93.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

During the Shipanga crisis there were women who were in detention who took Zambian soldiers as boyfriends because it was important for them to obtain basic necessities. This took place despite the orders from SWAPO that any women sleeping with Zambians would be stripped and flogged on their bare buttocks.<sup>79</sup>

### **Controlling female sexuality: No foreign men**

Marriage was an institution that SWAPO encouraged and supported. SWAPO drew up a Family Act issued by the Department of Legal Affairs consisting of twenty-nine articles, which laid down the principles under which people should marry. In the policies and requirements for the act of marriage, sexuality took centre stage. In the Marriage Act, 'marriage shall be valid when two parties of different sex state their agreement to marry before a body and person authorized by the Act' and 'persons intending to marry would be bound to advise each other of their state of health prior to the contract of marriage so that the matrimonial union shall fulfill its social function.'<sup>80</sup> The reproductive role is clearly singled out as the main 'social function', as which other functions in a matrimonial union, except bearing children, would require health checks in order to fulfill the 'social function'? In many African traditions the woman is blamed in the event of a childless marriage. Some authors have argued that SWAPO's public discourse was Marxist; however, SWAPO did not reject marriage as a bourgeois institution.<sup>81</sup> On the contrary, most people I spoke to who had lived in the SWAPO camps indicated that marriage was strongly encouraged for both men and women. A woman who was a commander and a member of the military council stated:

"I used to tell the men that if you impregnate someone, marry ... marry, the war has many things. You might lose your legs, who would want you if you do not have legs? But if you marry before you are crippled, your wife would look after you and I used to tell the women to maintain their dignity because they will have to start a family one day, even when the war comes to an end."<sup>82</sup>

It is interesting to note that her main emphasis is that women should look after themselves, but that men should marry in case they need a woman to look after them. Although the SWAPO Family Act indicates that, "Namibians may establish matrimonial and family rela-

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>80</sup> SWAPO. SWAPO Family Act of 1977. Lusaka: Department of Legal affairs, 1980.

<sup>81</sup> See Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000. Marxism views that a marriage institution offers the husband a position of supremacy especially if he earns a living and supports his family. The relationship between husband and wife will be husband as a bourgeois- master and the wife as a proletariat-servant.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 26 July 2008.



tions with foreigners under different conditions outlined in this Act,<sup>83</sup> it became apparent that Namibian women were strongly discouraged or even not allowed to marry men who were foreign nationals.

“Women were not allowed to marry foreign nationals, that is true, because if they were allowed to marry foreigners, they might give away important information about the liberation struggle; may be the man you are marrying is sent by the enemy.<sup>84</sup> You [a woman] would not be allowed at all...to marry a foreigner and go live in a village in Zambia, Angola etc. They would come and get you without delay.”<sup>85</sup>

It was for this reason that the SWAPO Family Act of 1977 stipulated that the person officiating at the marriage ceremony should establish the identity of parties to get married and that this had to be corroborated by the statements of witnesses, prior to the marriage.<sup>86</sup> The disclosure of secrets and classified information is listed as an offence against military and political discipline.<sup>87</sup> Women in this case are stereotyped as the weak and fickle ones, who risk revealing important information about the liberation struggle.

The risk of women revealing important and confidential information was not the only reason why women were not allowed to date or marry foreign nationals. Traditionally when a marriage took place a woman had to leave her place and move in with her husband. The fear was:

“Traditionally when a woman gets married, she has to move to her husband’s place. But it was as well true, many women could have left, who would want to stay in the camp if your boyfriend is outside.”<sup>88</sup>

A former male commander echoed the same sentiment:

“But if we allowed them [women to marry foreign nationals], we could have lost about fifty percent of them today, there is no question about that.”<sup>89</sup>

A woman who was in exile correspondingly agrees that:

“Who would want to live in a camp if you can get married to a Zambian and live in a house? Or eat *Omahola* [boiled Mahangu] in a camp if you can get married and eat meat in a house.”<sup>90</sup>

It was very clear that Namibian men did not approve of Namibian women courting foreign men. The tone of a letter written by the Information officer in Lubango, and carbon copied

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<sup>83</sup> SWAPO Family Act of 1977.

<sup>84</sup> Interview 06 August 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 26 July 2008.

<sup>86</sup> SWAPO Family Act of 1977.

<sup>87</sup> *SWAPO documentation: Laws governing the Namibian People’s Revolution, 1977.*

<sup>88</sup> Interview, 16 July 2008.

<sup>89</sup> Interview, 12 August 2008 (b).

<sup>90</sup> Interview, 12 August 2008 (a).

to the information officer in Kwanza Sul, the Director of the SWAPO Centre, the Camp Commander in Lubango and CAF in 1982 is explicit about the security concerns. It listed the names of women who had, allegedly, slept out of the base without the knowledge of the base authority: "... they [ the women] left just for interest of sexual indulgence ... the men condemned their women going to Lubango."<sup>91</sup>

Even in independent Namibia, two former male commanders think that what was done was a good idea:

"Men were just guarding jealously their own women. Namibian women are beautiful."<sup>92</sup>

However, when it came to men marrying foreigners, the whole thing was seen differently. Apparently, even though men were 'not really' allowed to marry foreigners, in most cases it was acceptable because of various reasons.

"Those men who married foreigners...it was not seen as a big problem, because the women they married were activists and involved in the solidarity movements, so they were regarded as part of us. In the same manner...Do you know this man...Papa François? His government officially donated him to SWAPO to teach our people about music. He was allowed to marry Linekela, a Namibian woman."<sup>93</sup>

Other interviewees felt that it was understandable and tolerable for Namibian men to be allowed to marry women of other nationalities because they could 'tie and bring' them with (to the camps and eventually to independent Namibia).<sup>94</sup> Other respondents felt that it was mainly the early exile community that got married to foreign women due to the lack of Namibian women at that time. It was believed that after 1974 when a great exodus of Namibians into exile took place, those men divorced their foreign women and got married to Namibians.<sup>95</sup> This cannot, however, be applied across the board as not all men who married foreign women divorced them after 1974 or even after independence, and some Namibian men got married to foreign women only in the 1980s. Toivo ja Toivo, a former Robben Island political prisoner, married a non-Namibian woman. He was released from prison in 1984. Helao Shityuwete, released from Robben Island in the mid 1980s, married a non-Namibian woman. Other SWAPO political bearers, such as Theo-Ben Gurirab, Mosè Tjitendero, Peter Katjavivi, Mvula ya Nangolo, Iiyambo Iindongo, just to mention a few were married to non-Namibian women while in exile. This gives an indication that the motivation for marrying foreign women was not simply the lack of Namibian women in exile.

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<sup>91</sup> Swapo Party Archives and Resource Centre (SPARC), Item number 02001290.

<sup>92</sup> Interview, 25 July 2008, Interview 12 August 2008 (b).

<sup>93</sup> Interview, 26 July 2008. This man up until now resides in Namibia.

<sup>94</sup> The most common example given was that of a Namibian doctor who married a Zambian woman who came to live in the SWAPO camp.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, 25 July 2008, interview 12 August 2008 (b).

However, when women were caught or were alleged to be dating foreign men, they could be in big trouble. It was a transgression and severely punishable. A gender expert who was in exile recalled:

“Controlling of women’s sexuality was real. I saw women in Zambia imprisoned because they allegedly slept with Zambian men. Every morning they had cold water poured on them and when they come for breakfast they would be shivering...when you look at them, you tell yourself that you would not cross to go to a Zambian man. Some women did it but in fear, because there was a strict control from men. It was tough, especially in the camps. Maybe those who were at schools, even there you have to do it secretly otherwise you will be regarded as a sell-out, a spy.”<sup>96</sup>

However, on this particular issue, she acknowledges that the situation was a challenge, especially to the women in the leadership.

“SWAPO had a responsibility over the people. The movement had to make sure that as a guardian, people were returned to the motherland and to their parents. In addition people had to contribute to the liberation of the country.”<sup>97</sup>

Another woman who was a commander as well echoed the same sentiment:

“We were not to give our women. They had to come back home and maybe their biological parents can let them get married and leave with foreigners. As long as they were under the care of SWAPO that was not going to happen.”<sup>98</sup>

Accountability of SWAPO towards its people and making sure that they contributed to the liberation struggle was comprehensible; however, allowing only men to marry foreign nationals and not allowing women to date foreign men or subjecting them to punishment, amounted to total control of female sexuality.

### **Some relationships were genuine**

Not all relationships that were formed in exile were forced. Many were genuine and formed out of mutual agreement and love. Some people married while in exile and kept their partners when they returned to Namibia. Some even had second wedding ceremonies in independent Namibia, with the same partners. The main reason for many of those who had second ceremonies was to have a church wedding, to celebrate their homecoming with their families and to be able eventually to give a bull to the woman’s family.<sup>99</sup> This defied the

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<sup>96</sup> Interview, 12 August 2008 (a).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Interview, 26 July 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Informal conversation with Theo Nampala, November 2007. In the Owambo tradition, a man has to give a bull to the woman whom he is to marry.

rumours that circulated around the return of the exiles. One of the most widely circulated rumours was that women were put in an enclosure surrounded by a fence and that the men would queue outside that enclosure. A woman would be led out of the enclosure and the next man in the queue would take her, and they would be pronounced a married couple there and then. There were various reasons given for that. Apparently, as the exiled persons were not sure how their families and communities would receive them, it was important that they had their own comrades that they could trust.<sup>100</sup>

## The position of SWAPO regarding rape and sexual abuse

Every person spoken to without any doubt and hesitation agrees that SWAPO as a movement was very serious when it came to issues of sexual abuse and rape. SWAPO had in place the *Laws governing the Namibian People's Revolution*. The liberation struggle of the Namibian people was opposed to any form of felony and dishonesty and regarded acts like rape, murder, theft etc. as indirect attacks against the objectives and accomplishments of the movement, which is why they were included as the gravest crimes among the non-political crimes.<sup>101</sup> The laws were adopted by the Central Committee of SWAPO in 1977 and signed by president Sam Nujoma.<sup>102</sup> This shows the total commitment of the movement at the highest level to ensure the maintenance of law and order among the people. However, when the respondents tried to make a distinction between SWAPO as a movement and the people who were committing these acts of abuse, it implies that they wanted to defy the slogan of "SWAPO is the people and the people are SWAPO."

Rape is one of the crimes addressed in that policy. Rape was defined as "carnal knowledge of a woman obtained by using violence or by threatening with immediate attack on the life or limb of the women ... ." Rape could only happen to a woman not living in matrimonial union with a man and, in cases where a victim was a very young girl, it would be assumed that rape had taken place even if the violence or threat was very mild.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the respondents echoed the view that sexual abuse did not happen and would not have been tolerated, but a few individuals took advantage of the positions and the power that they had. It is very evident from the definition given, that only women who were not married could claim to have been raped as rape could not take place in the matrimonial union. Another shortfall in the definition is that a possible case of rape would be considered only if there was evidence of violence or the threat of an immediate attack. By implication if there was no

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<sup>100</sup> Informal conversation with Laina Iileka, Sacky Iileka and Simeon Iingwapha. June 2008.

<sup>101</sup> *SWAPO documentation: Laws governing the Namibian People's Revolution, 1977.*

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

evidence of physical attack or harm, then the case would not be regarded as rape. The term 'very young girl' in the definition is also unclear. There is nothing to indicate what constitutes a 'very young' age and different people might dispute what 'young age' means to them.

Although SWAPO took a strong stand against crimes, including rape, people used some of the elements listed as crimes to perpetrate acts that today would be viewed as rape and sexual abuse. Looking at the circumstances under which rape or sexual abuse was committed, there was always an element of abuse of office or official authority, extortion and blackmail and bribery, all of which are listed as crimes against the Namibian People's Revolution.<sup>104</sup> In this Act though, extortion and blackmail are defined and referred as follows: ". . . whoever compels another by violence or serious intimidation to do something or refrain from doing something to unlawfully acquire property and material gain shall have committed a felony".<sup>105</sup> The emphasis is put on property and material gain.

## Disciplinary measures and structures

As indicated earlier, SWAPO as the overarching body consisted of different wings and organs responsible for various duties and functions and the operations were carried out through military-oriented structures. The channels that the occupants of the camps had to go through if they had any complaints were those of the hierarchy of the military ranks. As mentioned before, 11 to 15 people in a camp were organized into a section, three sections formed a platoon, three platoons formed a detachment and three detachments formed a company. The camp commander would be the highest commander. Someone reporting a problem first saw the section commander; if it could not be settled there, the problem would be passed on to the platoon commander and following that the detachment commander until it reached the camp commander.<sup>106</sup> In most cases the military ranks were occupied by men,<sup>107</sup> which could prove to be an impediment in a situation of a rape or sexual abuse case. The issues of sex and sexuality are surrounded by secrecy and taboos, the victim might be too ashamed to report this to a man or, worse, the person to report to might be the perpetrator; the case might get held up at a certain level and might not be taken further.

The punishment given to the perpetrators seem to have varied. These seem not to have been documented. The judicial or military and political senior officials could give any pun-

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<sup>104</sup> *SWAPO documentations: Laws governing the Namibian People's Revolution*, 1977.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Interview, 8 July 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Of all the respondents that I have spoken to, no one can recall having a woman as a camp commander.

ishment that they considered fitting. Depending on how much the 'judge' weighed rape or sexual abuse as an offence, the sentence could be to dig a hole and when it reached your height, you would be asked to fill it in and dig another. Detention was also used; however, the common punishment was in the form of labour.<sup>108</sup> When you got a punishment, you could not negate the order (*Omhangongo iha yi patanekwa*). If you did something wrong, your commander would punish you as he saw fit. As a commander you could lose your rank or position or be demoted as one was now regarded as unworthy of a certain rank or office; there was a code of conduct all had to adhere to. One could be called to order, reprimanded and, if the offence is repeated, one could be punished, moved or debarred from the premises.<sup>109</sup> Moving a perpetrator from one camp was not a common practice, because the perpetrator not the location was the problem.

The lack of law enforcement agents such as a camp police force, was another problem. The problem would come to the attention of the commanders only when reported. The perpetrators might not swiftly be found guilty as the investigators could be the perpetrators or their friends and therefore prone to bias. Many respondents recalled that:

"The main aim was to fight for independence, other things were secondary."<sup>110</sup>

One commented that:

"When at the base or wherever, there was no police or telephone to phone the head quarter, nothing. In the war, you could expect anything; you could get bitten by a snake, shot by the enemy, rape or get raped. That was the struggle."<sup>111</sup>

The lack of urgency in dealing with issues of rape and sexual abuse must have meant that many perpetrators got away with rape; this in turn signalled that the law and the agents of the law could not contain the problem.

Even the SWC, the wing dealing with women's issues, appeared helpless in the face of these problems. During a workshop deliberating on the issues relating to family planning and sexual abuse, the women were worried that "the existing system of passing complaints should be streamlined and changed. Currently when complaints of forced pregnancy are made to the SWAPO Women Council in the camp, this is usually referred to the executive for decision. There is no feedback downwards to the SWC because the executive is overloaded with work and does not deal with such issues as fast as it is hoped."<sup>112</sup> In the same workshop, women proposed that the SWC "should set up mechanisms to enforce disciplinary measures agreed upon (having women in the executive, dealing with problems

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<sup>108</sup> Interview, 8 July 2008.

<sup>109</sup> Interview, 8 July 2008, 16 July 2008, 23 July 2008,

<sup>110</sup> Interview, 15 July 2008; 06/08/2009; 16/08/2008.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, 06 August 2008.

<sup>112</sup> UNAM Archives, Katjavivi collection, Family planning and Sex Education (1980?).

swiftly, etc.) by the Central Committee as part of its policy implementation.”<sup>113</sup> It was during the same workshop that women made additional proposals for short-term controls such as “to make it compulsory for men not to have more than one girlfriend, limit polygamous tendencies and to force men to marry the impregnated girls.”<sup>114</sup> This must not have yielded any fruitful outcomes because a former commander and now a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Defence stated that:

“I have many children. It is not a secret. I did not marry; I married when I came back. You see ... I spent 16 years at the front. The women ... those girls ... they fell pregnant, whether they wanted to have babies with the chief or they wanted to fall pregnant and go to the rear, one might not know. But other men have many kids as well; some of us are singled out because we are in the limelight.”<sup>115</sup>

A former ordinary soldier illustrated how a commander might end up with many children. He earlier indicated that women did not like ordinary soldiers. He created a scenario that:

“When a woman came to the base, she starts dating a commander. She falls pregnant then she had to be sent to the rear for the duration of the pregnancy and she had to stay there until she delivers and breast-feeds the baby, she might not see the father of the child even for the next five years. In the meantime, another woman had to come and replace her. The same thing might happen to her and that might become a chain.”<sup>116</sup>

It has become evident here that the mechanism and the short-term proposals to control men were ineffective.

The insignificant representation of women in the leadership structure must have meant that the problems of women were not given the serious attention they deserved, even though it must not be assumed that only women could solve women’s problems. Although the laws governing the Namibian People’s Revolution were adopted by the Central Committee of SWAPO in 1977 and signed by the SWAPO President, by 1980 there were only three women on the Central Committee out of a total of 45. <sup>117</sup> Respondents recall that Ndaiponofi Nehova and Aira Schikwambi were the only women to become members of the Military Council, the highest decision-making body of PLAN (the military wing of SWAPO). During a workshop debating the issues relating to family planning and sexual abuse in 1980, the women suggested, “there should be representation of female members within the executive to ensure that such complaints [forced pregnancies] are handled as swiftly as possible.”<sup>118</sup> Lack of women’s representation in the decision-making process raises doubts as to how much

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Interview, 22 July 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Interview, 06 August 2008.

<sup>117</sup> Namibia Today, No 7/8/1980.

<sup>118</sup> Sex Education. Katjavivi’s collection, UNAM Archives. (1980?).

SWAPO was fundamentally committed to uplifting women's emancipation and gender equality. This can even raise questions as to how many women, if any, were part of the drafting and passing of these laws. For instance, Article 11 of the Laws Governing the Namibian People's Revolution, under the heading Apartheid, recognized only racial discrimination as a crime and not gender discrimination.<sup>119</sup>

## Attitudes towards polygamy in post-independent Namibia

At independence Namibia was obliged to revisit colonial Acts and laws in order not to contradict the many articles and clauses stipulated in the constitution of the country as well complying with international laws and conventions, to which it became a signatory. The constitution of the Republic of Namibia stipulates, "All persons shall be equal before the law" (Article 10), and it prohibits discrimination based on sex, creed, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, social or economic status. Article 14, which deals with the family, states that men and women of full age have the right to marry, and that they are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage, and at its dissolution. Article 66 provides that "(1) Both the customary law and the common law of Namibia in force on the date of Independence shall remain valid to the extent to which such customary or common law does not conflict with this Constitution or any other statutory law."<sup>120</sup> At the international level, Article 23 of the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that a family, which is the 'foundation of the nation', should be protected by the state; people of marriageable age should have the right to marry and that marriage is to be entered with the full and free consent of both spouses. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires the state to change customs and practices based on the inferiority of women and calls for equality in marriage and family life. Article 17(2) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights stipulates that people should be able to freely take part in the cultural life of their society and that the state must protect and promote the traditions recognized by different communities.<sup>121</sup>

In 1991 the Recognition of Certain Marriages Act 18 of 1991 was enacted in order to recognize the marriages contracted in terms of the SWAPO Family Act of 1977 and the adoption of children in terms of this Act. The original Act had been approved by the Central Committee of SWAPO and officially adopted by SWAPO on 1 December 1977. It was built on the principle of equality of men and women and was envisaged to regulate the family

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<sup>119</sup> SWAPO documentations: *Laws governing the Namibian People's Revolution*, 1977.

<sup>120</sup> *Constitution of the Republic of Namibia*; LAC 1999, pp. 7–11; LRDC 2004, pp. 9–11.

<sup>121</sup> LAC, Proposal for law reform on the recognition of customary marriages, 1999; LRDC, Law reform and Development commission on customary law reform, 2004.



relations of Namibians who had been in exile. It deals with the contraction, institution and dissolution of marriage, the matrimonial property consequences thereof and the legal relationship between parents and children, among others.<sup>122</sup>

The Traditional Authorities Act of 1995 was revised and replaced by the Traditional Authorities Act of 2000. The purpose of the Act was, among other things, to define the powers, duties and functions of traditional authorities and traditional leaders to provide for matters incidental thereto and to particularly administer and execute the customary law of that traditional community and to uphold, promote, protect and preserve the culture, language, tradition and traditional values of that traditional community.<sup>123</sup> However, what has not yet been promulgated is the Customary Marriage Act called for by some members of society.<sup>124</sup> A bill proposing the reform and recognition of customary marriages has been developed. The proposal went through consultations with traditional leaders, organizations such as the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), the Law Society, the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) and others. Among the recommendations the following were made: that customary law marriages are to be legally recognized fully to bring them on a par with common law marriages; that recognition will be given to both marriages entered into before and those completed after the proposed law came into effect. Those who were married under customary law before the law comes into effect will be able to keep all their wives (if they have more than one); however, those who conduct their marriage after the law has taken effect will not be allowed to marry more than one wife. A person married under customary law, while so married, will be prohibited from marrying another person under customary law or common law, or vice versa, and the offence of bigamy will be extended to cover this.<sup>125</sup> Simply put, no polygamy will be allowed; it will be a “one person, one marriage.”<sup>126</sup>

As expected, two camps with different opinions emerged, one condoning and the other opposing the proposal, particularly on the issue of polygamy. Some traditional leaders, mostly men, would like to see the retention of polygamous marriages, justifying it as the way of life of their communities.<sup>127</sup> The male respondents rationalized polygamy on the grounds that women outnumber men and argue that a man’s sexual organ is believed to be stronger than that of a woman. It is through polygamous marriage that men can dis-

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<sup>122</sup> SWAPO. SWAPO Family Act 1977 Lusaka: Department of Legal affairs, 1980.

<sup>123</sup> [www.aceproject.org/regions-en](http://www.aceproject.org/regions-en), accessed 09/04/2009.

<sup>124</sup> A reader sent a text message to The Namibia newspaper on 27 February 2009. “When will the Namibia government introduce the Customary Marriage Act? ... we are tired of living European style and not everyone is a Christian...”

<sup>125</sup> LAC, Proposal for law reform on the recognition of customary marriages, 1999; LRDC, Law reform and Development commission on customary law reform, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> One person, one marriage! Marriage law reform. *Sister Namibia*, 01 June 2005.

<sup>127</sup> LAC, Proposal for law reform on the recognition of customary marriages, 1999.

play their wealth and status. However, the general view deduced from the consultation is that female respondents maintain that polygamy is treating women as nothing better than “domestic servants” and therefore must be relinquished.<sup>128</sup>

However, what is striking is the position taken and the attitude shown by some male members of Parliament (MPs). They openly and publicly justified polygamy,<sup>129</sup> in both their actions and debates in the National Assembly (NA). During the various debates in the National Assembly, any topic that touched the subject of polygamy saw male MPs strongly supporting and justifying polygamy and at the same time female MPs heatedly opposing it. During the debate regarding a retirement package for the retiring president, a female MP asked whether, if the president had more than one wife, each would be entitled to a share of the former president’s pension upon his death.<sup>130</sup> The debate that followed lasted more than one hour as MPs exchanging their views on polygamy. Pendukeni Iivula-lithana (then the Attorney-General), a female MP, remarked that if the person occupying the highest position in society is living in contradiction with the number one law in the country (the Constitution) then they were sitting with a problem. Libertina Amathila (then the Minister of Health) reminded the house that bigamy was punishable by law. Clara Bohitile (then Deputy-Minister of Finance) asked whether women could marry more than one husband and a male MP retorted, “women could do it ... if they were brave enough.”<sup>131</sup>

Ngarikutuke Tjiriange (then Minister without Portfolio) commented that in Namibia many men had more than one wife and that it was quite possible that a future president could too. Helmut Angula (then Minister of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development) said that he was aware of a case where the pension fund of a political office bearer had paid as many as seven wives of that political office bearer. Albert Kawana (then Minister of Justice) said that customary law had been recognized by the constitution, unless it contravened the other laws and he confirmed that in the case that a retiring president had more than one wife, the wives would be paid in equal shares.<sup>132</sup>

Six years later, in 2009, the National Assembly found itself in a similar debate regarding polygamy. During a debate on the Second Namibian Constitution Amendment Bill, some male parliamentarians argued that customary marriages allow men to marry more

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<sup>128</sup> Ovis, M. H. Polygamy-To share or not to share? That is the question. *The Namibian* 10/06/2005. Also available at [www.lac.org.na/news/inthenews](http://www.lac.org.na/news/inthenews); accessed 09/04/2009.

<sup>129</sup> The NA proceedings are broadcast on national television and at the same time typed. The public upon request can view the transcripts.

<sup>130</sup> Dentlinger, L. Questions of polygamy, bigamy trip up law on package for presidents. *The Namibian*. 14/10/2004; available at [www.namibian.com.na/news](http://www.namibian.com.na/news); accessed 11/04/2009.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

than one woman. Phillemon Moongo, a DTA MP, remarked: "The law of nature dictates that a man can marry two women but that the opposite violates the same law."<sup>133</sup> Female MPs furiously objected, citing issues of equality in a polygamous marriage. For a while, party divisions were overlooked as several male MPs concurred that customary law in Namibia could allow polygamy and equality was possible in such a marriage.<sup>134</sup>

Parliamentarians do not simply condone polygamy through the debates in NA, some have practised it. When Moses Garoeb passed away in 1997, there was a battle for equal recognition from his two wives. Garoeb was a former SWAPO Secretary-General, a member of the SWAPO Politburo and Central Committee and the Minister of Labour at the time of his death. Apparently, Garoeb did not divorce his first wife, Caroline, before marrying his second wife, Monica. Consequently, both women were claiming official recognition and wanted to be afforded equal status at the funeral. Garoeb married both women while in exile.<sup>135</sup> This is the attitude the male Namibian lawmakers are displaying to the public. These are people who make the laws and they are the very same people who are not defending them. The reaction of Gwen Lister, the editor of *The Namibian* newspaper is worth quoting. She asked: "And now some of our 'honourable' male members of parliament justify polygamy. In this day and age, imagine!"<sup>136</sup> She questioned why resources are wasted on fighting HIV/AIDS and educating the youth on the danger of unprotected sex, when the leaders are setting a poor example. She further indicated that if the male members of parliament were not prepared to allow women to have the multiple partners they claim for themselves, then "equality in such circumstances is a myth. Not that we really think they believe in it anyway. They simply pay public lip service to equality as they do for the anti-AIDS campaigns, but they do not really mean what they say. Hypocrisy is alive and well, living in the Namibian parliament."<sup>137</sup> It is imperative to note that the present-day sexual norms have possibly been shaped and influenced by a number of aspects. Despite the gender awareness and sensitive campaigns that have been undertaken, it appears that cultural aspects and gender insensitivity still prevail.

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<sup>133</sup> Male MPs get Zuma-ed up. *The Namibian* 09/04/2009. Available at [www.namibian.com.na/news-articles](http://www.namibian.com.na/news-articles), accessed 09/04/2009.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Minister's funeral set as wives battle for equal recognition. Uganda Rural Community Support. 25 September 1997. Available at [www.ugandaruralcommunitysupport.org/](http://www.ugandaruralcommunitysupport.org/); accessed 009/04/2009. SWAPO Family Act did not allow polygamy.

<sup>136</sup> Gwen, L. Political Perspective. *The Namibian* 09/04/2009. Available at [www.namibian.com.na/columns](http://www.namibian.com.na/columns); accessed 09/04/2009.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

## **Momeya iha mu inyenge mwaana okapuka<sup>138</sup>**

Although interviewees made many comments such as “it is natural, that was part of life, these are isolated cases, it could be allegations or propaganda, look at things in perspective, what was happening in the camps was not really rape in a direct way as such,”<sup>139</sup> rape and sexual abuse should not be underplayed. Although some allegations were made by ‘dissidents’, some of their allegations have been confirmed by people who still hold the SWAPO party in high regard. During the liberation struggle this issue was at times tabled and discussed at the level of the Military Council.<sup>140</sup>

The manner in which this issue of sexual politics in the camps developed throughout the duration of the liberation struggle, and the failure to achieve gender equality, raises serious questions about SWAPO’s level of commitment to gender equality and the emancipation of women, despite the statements reiterated time and time again by SWAPO’s leadership of both sexes that SWAPO’s vision included greater freedom for women.

One central question should be asked. How autonomous was the SWC in executing its duties and activities, not forgetting that it was a wing of a main body, but that its main duties were to concentrate on women’s issues? When the SWC was launched, and during the course of its existence, it must have developed strategies and systematic methods, which benefited from the continental and international co-operative partnerships and contacts that it developed. A second question to consider would be whether the SWC had an agenda outlining how and when things had to be done. Was there an agenda for change before independence, with tangible, attainable and time bound objectives? Was there any reflection or assessment on the side of the SWC to evaluate how things could be done differently?

## **Summary**

There is no doubt that women entered the male domain whilst in exile; whether it was a breakthrough or due to the particular circumstances of the conflict because the situation demanded it, women did become soldiers and commanders and even sat on the military council. Regrettably, this did not fully guarantee them the equality and emancipation they were seeking. This was a challenge that woman did not overcome as this chapter

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<sup>138</sup> An Oshiwambo proverb that literally means ‘the water will not move unless there is an insect in the water’. It carries the same meaning, as there won’t be smoke without fire.

<sup>139</sup> Interviews, 12 August 2008, 16 July 2008, 08 July 2008, 07 May 2008, 20 June 2008, Shikola, T. We left our shoes behind in: Turshen et al (Eds) *What women do during the war*. (1998) pp. 140– 41.

<sup>140</sup> Interview, 22 July 2008.

indicates. It could have provided an ideal opportunity for the male comrades to prove and reinforce their commitment to the emancipation of women. In practice, some comrades were more equal than others, after all.

## Chapter Five

### Education and Training

A great deal has been written on the state of education in Namibia during the colonial period starting with the missionaries followed by the German and South African authorities. Much of this research focuses on how the colonial state wielded control over the people by providing them with a low quality education, which channelled them into subordinate roles in society. The education offered to Namibia's black population was even worse for black women.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will briefly look at the education and training of women in apartheid Namibia and black women in particular. The main part of the chapter will focus on the education and training of women embarked upon by SWAPO and the policies implemented by the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) during its exile years. Emphasis will be placed on formal education, the literacy programme and informal education and training, especially gender-based education with a feminist agenda. The chapter will carefully examine where learners went to school in exile, the level of funding invested in the education of women, the teaching materials and literature used, and the messages about gender roles that education contained. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of whether education liberated women after all.

#### Education and training in apartheid Namibia

Missionaries offered a western form of education with an emphasis on reading and writing in the mother tongue, religion and arithmetic. This type of education enabled converts to partake in the capitalist economy, as they were encouraged to become artisans, trained to do domestic service and perform practical skills.<sup>2</sup> In the early years of colonialism, education

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed studies on Education in Namibia, cf. Amukugo, E.M., *Education and Politics in Namibia. Past trends and future prospects*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1993; Salia-Bao, K. *The Namibian education system under the colonialists*. Randburg: Hodder & Stoughton Educational Southern Africa, 1991; Ellis, J. *Education, Repression and Liberation: Namibia*. London: World University Service, 1984; United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN). *Namibia: Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986; Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884–1984. Readings on Namibia's History and Society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and UNIN, 1988; Cohen, Cynthia. *Administering Education in Namibia: The colonial period to the present*. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, J. *Education, Repression and Liberation: Namibia*. London: World University Service, 1984. p. 18.

for 'natives' was left to mission societies and the colonial state concerned itself with the education of white people.<sup>3</sup> However, under apartheid the Eiselen Commission of 1949 put all educational services under one controlling body, the Department of Education of the South West African Administration. This drew sharp differences between educational services for whites, blacks and coloureds.<sup>4</sup> Even more so as blacks had two different education systems. The southern regions (the area inside the police zone) and the northern regions (area outside the police zone) had different arrangements regarding administration, school control, management, content and finance.<sup>5</sup>

In the northern regions, (Ovamboland, Okavango and Kaokoveld), Finnish and Catholic Missions ran schools. Individual mission schools were independent and the Department of Education did not exercise much control over these. They drew up their own rules and curricula and set their own examinations.<sup>6</sup> Although it is a challenge to reconstruct the syllabi of the mission schools, anecdotal evidence indicates that mission schools were the source of early militant nationalists and they produced more radical school leavers. Mission schools gave early opportunities to black teachers, different curricula and used a pedagogy that encouraged debate and critical thinking. Many of the early political activists attended mission or church-run schools such as St. Mary's Mission school at Odibo, Oshigambo High School, St. Theresa's (Tses) and St. Joseph's High School (Döbra) as well as various Secondary Schools or Training Colleges.<sup>7</sup> It was probably for these reasons that in the mid-1960s the Department of Education drastically reduced mission and church-run schools and implemented stricter control over the functions and duties of the recognized mission schools.<sup>8</sup>

All in all the provision of education to the black population under apartheid was poor and discriminatory, and kept deteriorating. The Bantu Education Act of 1953, made applicable to Namibia by the Van Zyl Commission of 1958, reinforced education for different races and ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup> The commission recommended the implementation of the same Bantu Education syllabus as in South Africa, setting up separate education departments for the different ethnic groups and races. Supporting the Bantu Education Act of 1953, H.F. Verwoerd, the Minister of Bantu Affairs, was of the opinion that "Education must train and

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<sup>3</sup> Ellis, J. *Education, Repression and Liberation: Namibia*. London: World University Service, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, C. *Administering education in Namibia: The colonial period to the present*. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1994. p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Hopwood, Graham. *Guide to Namibian Politics*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research and Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, C. *Administering education in Namibia: The colonial period to the present*. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1994, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, J. *Education, Repression and Liberation*. 1984, p. 23.

teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life according to the sphere in which they live. ... Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accordance with the policy of the state ..."<sup>10</sup> Bantu Education was of poor quality and, although over the years there was an improvement in the number of pupils enrolled, basic literacy was seldom achieved. Most pupils stayed in school for six years only. For various reasons the school dropout rate was high. Many families were too poor to spare money for school fees and many school-going children were expected to perform domestic chores. The teachers themselves were poorly trained and unable to deliver quality education.<sup>11</sup> When compulsory military conscription for black students was introduced in 1980,<sup>12</sup> male students were further discouraged from attending school. By this time a primary school certificate did not give automatic entry to secondary school and, eventually, rewarding jobs. The object of apartheid education was simply to provide migrant labour.<sup>13</sup>

To illustrate how desperate the situation was: In 1982 only 261 black students obtained school leaving certificates and only 23 qualified for university entrance. Namibia had no university and the Namibian students who qualified for university were directed to South African universities where some encountered radicalised students – especially Black Consciousness ideology. Between 1969 and 1974 only 147 black male students had been or were attending universities in South Africa and of these only 21 were black females.<sup>14</sup> The inequality is striking as this meant that only 8% of the first generation of black Namibian university students were women. Educational expenditure was distributed according to race and ethnicity. By 1983 an average of R 240 was spent on each Owambo student, R 673 per coloured student and R 1,763 per white student, every year at the school level.<sup>15</sup>

Although black students regarded their education with despair, black male students were better educated compared to black female students. Black men also stood a higher chance of obtaining the few elite jobs created in the early 1980s under the apartheid reforms than did black women. Few black women with training entered salaried jobs and, when they did, they were confined to the health, education and government administration sectors.<sup>16</sup> Black

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Cohen, C. *Administering education in Namibia: The colonial period to the present*. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1994, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Military compulsory conscription was enforced only in the police zone; however, becoming a soldier attracted many black men as it was better paying.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, 1994, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ndilula, N. Namibian education and culture. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884–1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988, p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 392.

<sup>16</sup> Allison, C. Women in waged employment: Some basic information and questions of relevance to



female teachers predominated at the primary levels. This was the lowest level of teaching and at the same time the lowest paying job in the educational sector. By 1981 it was reported that women could only enter the Senior Primary Education Certificate course if they had a standard X certificate, but men could enter the same training course with standard VIII. This decision served to confine women to the lower teaching ranks.<sup>17</sup>

Access to education was not the only barrier for women who wanted to pursue a career. The gendered inequality of the employment system restricted opportunities for women particularly from the North and for many years kept them based in rural areas with limited access to libraries and other facilities that could assist lifelong learning. The migrant labour system limited women's opportunities to enter wage employment. Black Ovambo women from the North were not allowed to enter the police zone; they were confined to the so-called homelands. A few women secured jobs with the government administration, schools, and clinics and found work in provision stores.<sup>18</sup> The majority of women who eventually entered the police zone<sup>19</sup> did domestic work and other unskilled jobs. Women mainly worked in the factories and as shop assistants. Women who were employed in the manufacturing sector were generally restricted to food processing, gutting, cleaning and packaging. Women were not employed in the mining sector, unless as auxiliaries. The mining industry paid slightly higher wages when compared to other sectors.<sup>20</sup> This meant that women had to depend on their husbands' remittances thus leaving the latter to control the money and other resources

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a future independent Namibia. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884–1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988. p. 360

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, C. *Administering education in Namibia: The colonial period to the present*. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1994, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Allison, C. Women in waged employment. 1988, p. 358.

<sup>19</sup> The mobility and presence of the black population, men and women, in the police zone was affected and influenced by economic necessities such as those that arose during the 1920s economic depression and by colonial legislation such as the Vagrancy Proclamation 25 of 1920, The Masters and Servants Proclamation 34 of 1920, The Natives Urban Areas Proclamation 34 of 1924, Pass laws Proclamations 11 of 1922 and 15 of 1928, and the Native Administration Proclamation 11 of 1927. The control of mobility and the presence of black men and women was sometimes relaxed and at times tightened. The marital status of women was one of the factors influencing this as the presence of unmarried and unemployed women was discouraged and, in the 1930-50s they were deported to the reserves. Ethnicity as well played a role. It was only Ovambo men who were considered as migrant workers and many did not qualify for house ownership. Those Ovambo men who married women outside the police zone had to wait for two years before they could bring them into the police zone. However, in one way or the other many black women made their way to the South. Most had jobs and some brewed and sold beer and food. For a detailed account, see Wallace, M. *Health, Power and Politics in Windhoek, Namibia 1915–1945*. Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2002; Pendleton, W. *Katutura, a place where we do not stay*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1974; Wagner, G. 'Ethnographic survey of South West Africa'. Unpublished manuscript, 1951.

<sup>20</sup> Allison, C. Women in waged employment. 1988, p. 359.

that were to be used, which led to unequal relations in the household. Unmarried women who fell pregnant were forced to resign from their jobs by some employers and could only re-apply for their jobs once they had delivered. However, they were immediately replaced as soon as they left the job to deliver. There were, as well, few childcare centres where mothers could leave their children in order to work. Ultimately, some women were either forced to stop working or had to give their children to their relatives in the reserves and homelands to bring them up.<sup>21</sup> The absence of extended family and relatives in the urban context in particular created challenges around the issue of childcare for women.

## Education in exile

Education in exile was regarded as a priority. SWAPO and the SWC positions regarding education were of critical importance. The 1976 political programme of SWAPO stipulated that “Namibia needs a profound socio-economic transformation to guarantee immediate development; hence, SWAPO was to embark upon on the serious training of technical and professional cadres at institutions of technical and higher learning at SWAPO institutions and around the globe, provision for work-oriented, comprehensive education and training for illiterate and semi-illiterate adults at SWAPO schools and lay the foundation of a free and universal education for all Namibians and by training teachers and educationists”.<sup>22</sup> The SWC was particularly concerned about the level of women’s education and indicated this very clearly in its constitution. In its constitution, the SWC strove to “bring women’s full participation in the productive work, in education ... and to campaign for the creation of nursery schools and day boarding to facilitate women’s full participation in productive work and in education.”<sup>23</sup> It was against this background that SWAPO placed a lot of emphasis on educating the exile community and women in particular. The generational composition of the camps, with relatively few ‘elders’ or extended family, as in urban areas inside Namibia, meant that childcare was likely to be a major role for women who wanted to work or pursue their education in the face of childcare responsibilities. The implicit assumption was that nursery schools would free women, i.e. that it was the women, and not the men, who would be at home looking after young children.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 359.

<sup>22</sup> SWAPO political programme. Adopted by the meeting of the Central Committee 28 July–1 August 1976, Lusaka. Lusaka: SWAPO Department for publicity and Information, 1976.

<sup>23</sup> Constitution of SWAPO Women’s Council.

## Pre-school education

There were two main reasons why pre-school was crucial in the SWAPO settlements. Firstly the number of children was growing and it became essential to provide them with early schooling.<sup>24</sup> The other pressing reason was the one stipulated in the constitution of the SWC, namely to free mothers from sole childcare responsibility and enable them fully to participate in education and productive work.<sup>25</sup> Lack of childcare centres in apartheid Namibia was identified as one of the barriers that blocked women from performing productive jobs that would earn them money and combat unequal relations at the household level.<sup>26</sup> SWAPO had various kindergartens in its settlements: Natalia Mavulu kindergarten in Ndalatando, Meekulu Putuse kindergarten in Kwanza Sul, and other pre-schools.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, in terms of the Party's programme these kindergartens were collectively organized and run by women only. The establishment of childcare centres was meant to release women and to avail them of other opportunities, but eventually it was still women who were bound to these centres. Against the backdrop of gender equality, one might ask, once women stopped breast-feeding, was there any reason why men should not be the primary caretakers of children?

## Formal education

Formal education in the SWAPO settlements started from humble beginnings. Initially there were no teachers, infrastructure or teaching materials.<sup>28</sup> The first primary school started operating in 1973 at the Old Farm in Zambia with 40 learners. The exodus of Namibians into exile from 1974 onwards pushed the pupil numbers up to 1,000 by 1975. It is not far-fetched to speculate that after the mass exodus there was a significant change in the gender profile of those living in exile, with the arrival of more women.<sup>29</sup> The gender balance of the camps changed significantly at this date and this shifted gender roles and relationships. The need for education was becoming desperate and various primary schools were built in different SWAPO settlements as time went by. The primary education was structured to last six years, followed by three years of lower secondary education.<sup>30</sup> English was the major language of instruction in the first three stages of schooling (pre-primary, primary and

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<sup>24</sup> UNESCO and UNDP. Study tours of Namibian Women to Mozambique and the Congo and the SWC workshop, Lusaka, 1-5 December 1979. Report prepared for SWAPO by UNESCO and UNDP. Paris: UNESCO and UNDP, 1981.

<sup>25</sup> Constitution of SWAPO Women's Council.

<sup>26</sup> Allison 1988, p. 360.

<sup>27</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Autumn 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis 1984, p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> Due to the unavailability of statistics, it is impossible to give an exact number.

<sup>30</sup> Ndilula 1988, p. 397.

secondary education). English was adopted as the language of communication at all levels. Each stage of schooling was almost equal to a normal school year, but due to the abnormal situation of the war, it could take longer to complete.<sup>31</sup>

## Secondary Education

After completing their primary education, pupils continued with the Lower Secondary (the last three years of basic education) and then advanced to the next stage. Learners had three possibilities of furthering their education. One was to enter Upper Secondary, which served as a prolongation of the lower secondary education curriculum. The second possibility consisted of vocational training in specific occupations (this was shorter than upper secondary education). The third possibility was made up of technical training in various skills.<sup>32</sup>

### Upper Secondary Education:

In the early 1960s, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner for Namibia, negotiated with various governments to provide secondary schooling and university places for Namibians in their countries. These included Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Cameroon, Mauritius, Congo and, especially, Zambia and Tanzania. SWAPO had schools at the Island of Youth in Cuba as well. The Hendrik Witbooi School was opened in Cuba in 1978 and had 650 students by 1984 and was supplemented by the Hosea Kutako School, which had 525 students.<sup>33</sup> Various UN and NGOs bodies funded the programme and during 1975–6, approximately 500 Namibians were placed in secondary, commercial and technical schools in Africa.<sup>34</sup>

### The Namibia Secondary Technical School in Loudima:

Norway supported SWAPO with the planning, construction and running of the Namibia Secondary Technical School in Loudima in southern Congo. As a pilot project, the aim of the school was to provide Namibians in exile with secondary education and, at the same time, provide SWAPO with experience in building a new secondary education system in Namibia after the liberation struggle. The curricula and syllabi for Namibian secondary schools were developed there.<sup>35</sup> After extensive planning and various deliberations between the Norwegian government, SWAPO and various other agencies, the school was finally opened.

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<sup>31</sup> Ellis 1984, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup> Ndilula 1988, p. 398.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Østbye, E. H. The Namibian liberation struggle: Direct Norwegian support to SWAPO. In: Eriksen, T. L. (Ed) *Norway and National liberation in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000, p. 112.

The first group of students arrived at Loudima in June 1986. It was comprised of 113 girls and 8 boys from various SWAPO's educational centres in Zambia and Angola. By the end of 1988, there were 386 Namibian students.<sup>36</sup> Students were prepared for further studies at university level or began work. The programme consisted of three years of junior secondary education with theoretical and pre-vocational training or two years of secondary education with the possibility of entering a vocational programme.<sup>37</sup> After Namibia achieved independence, the school was closed down.

### **Vocational training:**

SWAPO also ran various workshops in different settlements. The party thought it fit to train men and women with the aim of transforming the population from being semi-skilled to skilled professionals. Women were encouraged to participate not only in the stereotyped gender fields, but also to enter into male-dominated areas. Eventually there were women in the fields of plumbing, bricklaying, welding, truck driving, and mechanics.<sup>38</sup> The United Nations Vocational Centre in Sumbe in Angola was one of the training centres producing skilled artisans. The dispersed and ephemeral nature of these schools and lack of available documentation makes it impossible at present to obtain data on their gender composition or on any differences in the courses taken by men and women.

## **Tertiary Education, scholarships and institutions of Higher Learning**

### **United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN):**

UNIN's mission was to provide Namibians with education that would enable them to fully participate in the administration and development of their country once independence had been achieved. Established 26 August 1976, the institution's objective was to offer a five-year crash course training the work force at the lower and middle level of administration and management.<sup>39</sup> However, the independence of Namibia was not, as had been anticipated, achieved within a few years. The institution was open to Namibians only. It offered courses in Economics, Social Studies and Education and Teacher training and upgrading. UNIN had a historical, political and cultural division, an agricultural and land resources division, and an information and documentation division.<sup>40</sup> Between 1979 and 1989, 1456

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO and UNDP. Study tours of Namibian Women to Mozambique and the Congo and the SWC workshop, Lusaka, 1–5 December 1979. Report prepared for SWAPO by UNESCO and UNDP. Paris: UNESCO and UNDP, 1981.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN). A decade of progress, 1976–1986. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

students graduated from the institute, of which 917 were female. However, there seemed to be a gender disproportion in the intake of some courses. Out of 230 graduates who did secretarial studies, only 34 were male and out of 162 students who completed a teaching diploma in basic education, 102 were female.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note this clear gender imbalance at UNIN. This can be explained in various ways, but largely because women were more likely to be sent to study than to be sent for military training, while men were more likely to choose military training.

### **International universities and scholarships:**

The international community and anti-apartheid movements greatly assisted in training and educating Namibians. Early in the 1960s there was a great interest on the part of Namibians to get university education. This was expressed by individuals and through political organizations such as SWAPO and SWANU.<sup>42</sup> As early as 1961 (under Resolution 1705 (XVI) of 19 December 1961) the United Nations General Assembly established a United Nations Special Training Programme for South West Africans.<sup>43</sup> The same resolution invited member states to make available all-expenses paid scholarships to enable 'South West Africans' to complete secondary school and qualify for institutes of higher education overseas.<sup>44</sup> In July 1962 SWAPO sent a letter to the UN Secretary General recapping the 1705 (XVI) resolution and attached to it a list of Namibians who wished to embark on further studies and a list of the courses they intended to take.<sup>45</sup> In addition, by November 1962 E.P. Nanyemba, the SWAPO Acting Representative in Bechuanaland (Botswana), had written an urgent petition addressed to S.F. Cottrell, (UN) Officer in charge of Trusteeship, for immediate intervention in helping a group of Namibians who had been arrested in Southern Rhodesia (they did not have passports) en route to Tanganyika with the purpose of taking up scholarships to study in the United States of America. He indicated that he anticipated receiving more Namibians.<sup>46</sup> Individual member states could offer scholarships to Namibians. It was, however, made clear that the offers were to be made through the Secretary-General of the UN.

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<sup>41</sup> UNIN. Graduation statistics, 1979–89. Lusaka: UNIN, 1990.

<sup>42</sup> To narrow this down, I will concentrate on the educational support offered to Namibians through SWAPO.

<sup>43</sup> Some documents indicate that it was 1962 before the Programme was established.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Archives, New York. United Nations General Assembly. Special committee on the situation with regard to the implementation of the declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. Interim report by the secretary-general. 15 May 1964.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Archives, New York. Letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General, signed by Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, dated 22 July 1962.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Archives, New York. Letter signed by E. P. Nanyemba dated 18 November 1962, addressed to S.F. Cottrell, (UN) Officer in charge/division of Trusteeship. At the time the SWAPO headquarters was situated in Tanganyika.

Individual states made offers in diverse areas of study with varying periods of study and different packages (covering items such as a monthly allowance, medical insurance, travel allowance, book allowance, and clothing). These countries included China, India, Poland, Tanganyika (Tanzania), the United Arab Republic, the USSR, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.<sup>47</sup>

In 1975, the Commonwealth Heads of Government also established a programme, The Commonwealth Secretariat's Fellowship and Training Programme (FTP). The programme helped Namibians in three main areas, one being the full-time award programme to Namibian students.<sup>48</sup> By 1989 the FTP had supported over 1500 Namibians on full-time courses of study and training. Several hundred full-time awards were made available to SWAPO by Commonwealth governments on a bilateral basis. During 1987/88, 357 Namibian students were being supported by the FTP. The figure increased to 887 in 1988/89 with 21 countries providing study places at a subsidised rate or on a no-fee basis.<sup>49</sup> The Office of the UN Commissioner for Namibia (UNOCN) and SWAPO indicated that Commonwealth support was the most significant contributor to the UN coordinated Namibian Nationhood Programme's efforts to prepare skilled personnel for Namibia's post-independence development. Most trainees pursued courses in managerial, technical and vocational fields. Some of them were equipped with skills to train others.<sup>50</sup> 1989 saw a rapid expansion of the programme in response to the urgent needs generated by the imminent transition to independence. Over 500 students were accepted on short, intensive courses in the areas of customs and excise, immigration control, public administration, banking and labour education. By mid-August 1989, most of the students had been repatriated to Namibia to assist the UNHCR with the election and to participate in the rebuilding of the country. The Commonwealth's full-time award scheme did not just rely on the 48 Commonwealth countries and on the provision of the training places in over 20 countries. It received support from various non-Commonwealth co-financing partners as well.<sup>51</sup>

The second area of support extended by the FTP was distance education. The distance-learning scheme for Namibian exiles in Angola and Zambia was established in 1981 in Lusaka. It made steady progress after its introduction and by 1989 about 7000 students had benefited from this programme under the Namibia Extension Unit (NEU). The main

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<sup>47</sup> United Nations Archives, New York. Circular announcing the availability of scholarships.

<sup>48</sup> The Fellowships and Training Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat (FTP). Education and Training Assistance under the Commonwealth Programme for Namibians. Seminar on contingency planning for technical assistance to Namibia during the transition to independence. Vienna, 24–28 July 1989.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

courses were English,<sup>52</sup> mathematics, mother and childcare, community health, nutrition and agriculture.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from the Commonwealth sources, donors included the governments of Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Funding was also received from the Commission of the European Communities, the Africa Educational Trust, the Ford Foundation, OXFAM, the United Nations Association of the People's Republic of China and the World University Service.<sup>54</sup>

The scholarships were provided by various Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries.<sup>55</sup> One of these was Finland. Finland and Namibia had a long history, dating back to the days when Finnish missionaries first arrived in the country. Finland had started a scholarship programme with the Ambo-Kavango Lutheran church, training students to study theology.<sup>56</sup> On his way to Finland in 1974, Leonard Auala, the Bishop of that church, visited the SWAPO refugee settlement in Zambia, where his host was Sam Nujoma. The idea of Finland supporting Namibians with scholarships was discussed. A bilateral education programme providing opportunities for Namibians to study in Finland was developed out of the joint Swapo and church interests. The SWAPO representatives and the Finnish Embassy in Lusaka already enjoyed a cordial relationship.<sup>57</sup> The practical arrangements were made and it was agreed that the government of Finland would pay the cost of the students' education so that they might take on professional work in the refugee camps and in a future independent Namibia. Finland appointed Finnchurchaid to administer the process of selecting students and conducting all logistical issues, performing medical checks, preparing visas and organizing warm clothes.<sup>58</sup> What is interesting to note is that, although Finnchurchaid selected the students as it saw fit, SWAPO changed some of these to show it

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<sup>52</sup> While in exile, SWAPO opted for English to be the official language in independent Namibia, hence it was imperative that it was taught in schools in exile. The intention was to replace Afrikaans, which was regarded as the language of the oppressors, a lingua franca and medium of instruction in Namibia during apartheid. Ironically, while many Namibians spoke Afrikaans as a first or second language, English was seen as the language of liberation. Phillipson, R. Et al. English for liberation or neo-colonialism. In: Spolsky, B. (Ed). *Language and education in multilingual settings*. Clevedon: Multilingual matters, 1986. p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> The Fellowship and Training Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat (FTP). Education and Training Assistance under the Commonwealth Programme for Namibians. Seminar on contingency planning for technical assistance to Namibia during the transition to independence. Vienna, 24–28 July 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> To highlight this, I shall look at the support given by Finland.

<sup>56</sup> Soiri, I. & Peltola, P. *Finland and National Liberation in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p. 113.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 115.



(SWAPO) would control the allocation of places on the programme.<sup>59</sup> In January 1976 the first group of 18 Namibian students, comprising both men and women, arrived in Finland. The scholarship programme was a huge success and 58 students obtained professional diplomas or degrees in the areas of geology, nursing, dentistry and medicine in Finland.<sup>60</sup> As it was not explicitly indicated how many men and women were offered the scholarships, I have found it impossible to break down the gender proportion.

### **Informal education: Adult education programmes and skill development**

As indicated in Chapter three, unlike some liberation movements such as FRELIMO, SWAPO did not have liberated zones inside Namibia where it could conduct literacy campaigns and other programmes, hence many people who went into exile could not read or write. Literacy for all Namibians was one of the main objectives of SWAPO. The SWC declared during the 1980 congress that a special emphasis should be put on education and literacy to examine and implement new strategies for the social and economic transformation of women during the struggle and in the future Namibia.<sup>61</sup>

The degree of literacy varied. Some Namibians were totally illiterate, others semi-illiterate and a few were literate in vernacular languages only. However, their skills in reading and writing were not put to any useful purpose.<sup>62</sup> The Namibia Extension Unit (NEU) and SWC put a lot of energy into making sure that the literacy programme was a success. The programme was well structured and people were encouraged to attend literacy courses. Facilities were specially constructed and some lessons took place in the evening. In some cases, crèches were organized at literacy centres so that women did not need to bring their children into literacy groups. It was observed that more women attended the courses compared to men.<sup>63</sup> The SWC played a major role in soliciting donations from various solidarity movements, the British-based Namibia Support Committee in particular.

### **Women's programmes**

After 1980 the SWC embarked upon various skill development activities that “would let Namibian women organize themselves in order to be able to meet pressing national devel-

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> *Information and Comments*, Vol. 2, no. 2. February 1980.

<sup>62</sup> Dossier on literacy in the Namibian refugee settlements. Report of the second SWAPO literacy seminar, organized with the assistance of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia and the Namibia refugee project, UK. Luanda: SWAPO, 1985.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

opment needs within the existing camps and in the building and reconstruction of a future and independent Namibia.”<sup>64</sup> It is noteworthy that the programme that meant to uplift the status of women and to meet national needs covered subjects that were traditionally regarded as feminine roles, despite the fact that at different times the SWC insisted it had tried to avoid channelling women solely into stereotypical roles and professions.<sup>65</sup>

### **Nutrition and childcare:**

This programme was run by the SWC in the 1980s to uplift the standard of nutrition of the children who were hard hit by malnutrition. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) engaged a nutritionist to train and conduct classes in the Zambian and Angolan settlements. Workshops were held for women where the subject of nutrition received lively attention as it formed an important aspect of everyday life in the camps. Women cadres were sent to various institutions to study nutrition and measures to prevent malnutrition; in return, these trained women had to educate other women in the field of nutrition.<sup>66</sup> Women ran chicken, rabbit and fresh produce projects. These projects supplied eggs, meat and fresh fruit and vegetables to SWAPO communities on a daily basis, especially to children and the sick. Members of the party raised the funds needed to maintain the project.<sup>67</sup>

### **Tailoring, weaving and knitting projects:**

Established in Kwanza Sul, this project came into being because of the assistance of various organizations, UNICEF, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Norwegian Namibia Association. The project taught women how to make uniforms for the school population. The Norwegian Namibia Association sent two women to train the Namibian women in the camps. Goods such as fabric, sewing machines, accessories, needles and oil were donated to the SWC. The SWC motivated the request as being of importance as it would “enhance and advance the level of our women.”<sup>68</sup> The irony here is that women inside Namibia during apartheid used sewing classes as cover to mobilize themselves politically because the

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<sup>64</sup> UNESCO and UNDP. Study tours of Namibian Women to Mozambique and the Congo and the SWC workshop, Lusaka, 1–5 December 1979. Report prepared for SWAPO by UNESCO and UNDP. Paris: UNESCO and UNDP, 1981.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, *Information and comments*, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1980.

<sup>67</sup> A letter dated 4 June 1985, signed by Pendukeni Kaulinge addressed to Mr. Minaard of the Interchurch Co-ordination Committee, Holland. The support was aimed at building a training centre in a SWAPO settlement. (SPARC, 02008407–002).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid; Gift certificate from World University Service Denmark certifying a list of free gifts shipped to Luanda. The certificate is dated May 1989 (SPARC 02005673–001); Letter sent by Holland Committee on Southern Africa to SWAPO Dept. of Finance in Luanda responding to the SWC request of sewing machine catalogues. (SPARC 02007629).

police thought that it was a woman's job and not a platform to organize politically.<sup>69</sup> It was perceived that women in the higher age brackets would find it difficult to learn new occupations; hence improving sewing, knitting (and other tasks seen as traditionally female) was regarded as a means of upgrading family skills.<sup>70</sup>

## Teaching materials and content

This book questions whether the curriculum developed in exile served to challenge the basic tenets of sexism in Namibian society. It is crucial to think about how books were 'rewritten,' if they were rewritten at all, in order to make both men and women visible in the textbooks; and the extent to which they were shown performing non-sexually stereotyped chores. To illustrate this, I will look closely at the contents of the adult education literacy programme.

One might argue that this programme, with about 80% of its learners being women,<sup>71</sup> was developed relatively late (1980s) in the liberation struggle. I argue that it also used educational materials, which were slanted towards traditional stereotypes. Its materials included booklets entitled; 'Nangula is pregnant' and 'Nangula looks after her baby' and Oshiwambo titles such as *Okuhovela oshikunino shoikwambidi* (Starting a vegetable garden), *Okukelela nokuhakula oshimhela omanga ino ya koshipangelo* (How to prevent and treat diarrhoea before you go to a hospital) and *Oukoshoki meumbo no momudingonoko* (Hygiene in the house and in the environment).<sup>72</sup> The images in the handbooks for the basic education courses of the SWAPO literacy campaign are stereotyped as well. Apart from a few non-sexual stereotyped images, for example, men tailoring, most of the images reproduce gender stereotypes. On the topic of farm animals, there are images of men ploughing and skinning a dead animal; in a lesson about kindergartens with young children, women are shown as the caregivers. In the lessons about childcare, there is an image of a female nurse and a woman carrying a baby on her back while holding another.<sup>73</sup> The content of these lessons simply reinforced the socially defined role of women as mothers and homemakers. Such issues undermined SWAPO's principle of 'equality between men and women' and the promotion of an alternative vision of a more egalitarian role for women in Namibian society.

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<sup>69</sup> Interview 26/07/2008, 19/08/2008, *Action on Namibia*, vol. 1 no. 4, July–August 1979.

<sup>70</sup> UNIN. *Namibia: Perspectives for national reconstruction and development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986, p. 896.

<sup>71</sup> UNIN. *Namibia: Perspectives for national reconstruction and development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986. pp. 897–8.

<sup>72</sup> Noisser, N. H. (ed). "Education for all – preparing for the future from exile." Documentation on the exhibition shown at Estorff-Library, Windhoek, 19-26 March 1990. Windhoek: Centre for Resource and Transformation (CERET)/Namibia Project. 1990.

<sup>73</sup> *Promoter's handbook for the basic education course of the SWAPO literacy campaign*. Windhoek: Namibia Literacy Programme. 1990, p. 31, 76, 88, 136.

Equal access to education between men and women is one thing, but it is imperative to consider what women and men studied. Between 1979 and 1989, out of 230 secretarial graduates, 196 were women compared to 34 men. Out of 50 magistrate graduates, 20 were women and 30 were men.<sup>74</sup> Women tended to take courses that were linked to work in areas normally defined by society as 'feminine' instead of breaking into male-dominated fields.<sup>75</sup> That meant that women were inclined towards low-ranking and low-paying jobs. It is not clear whether women were consciously encouraged to study subjects that were previously male dominated. It seems possible that even teachers unconsciously propagated gender stereotypes through their ideas on the suitability of certain careers for men and women.

### **Feminist-oriented education**

"Feminism? What is that?" asked one of my informants. "Our concerns were more serious than the burning of bras, lesbianism, wearing of trousers and promiscuity or that thing that they called sexual liberation."<sup>76</sup> That was one of the many strong reactions that I received when I asked whether SWAPO as a liberation movement embraced the concept of feminism. Although the SWC claimed not to have identified itself with feminism but rather with the 'emancipation of women', it demanded an education which was linked to some of the issues that were the campaign priorities for feminists worldwide, for instance, access to contraceptives and reproductive rights. "SWAPO women are creating a new society, a society in which they will insist on their rights to participate and decide, as well on their rights to control their own bodies."<sup>77</sup>

### **Family planning:**

The question of family planning was a bone of contention and for this reason the SWC saw fit to embark on a campaign aimed at educating men and women on the issue. In apartheid Namibia rural women had no access to contraceptives and for urban women, who had the possibility of accessing them, the availability was limited and they had no range of alternatives to choose from.<sup>78</sup> An article in a special edition of *Namibian Woman*, the magazine for

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<sup>74</sup> United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN). Graduation statistics, 1979–1989. Lusaka: UNIN, March 1990.

<sup>75</sup> During colonialism the teaching (primary level) and nursing professions were dominated by women, although with the introduction of Christianity, missionaries used the same word *omuhongi/omuhonge* to refer to a teacher and pastor. This was a linguistic indication that pastors and teachers should be men. Traditionally, it would be accurate to say that Agriculture and Food manufacturing might be described as traditional female tasks.

<sup>76</sup> Interview 18/04/2008.

<sup>77</sup> *Action on Namibia*, Jan–Feb 1979. Martha Ford (SWC) quoted while on a tour to Britain in 1979.

<sup>78</sup> *Namibian Woman*, July 1985 (special edition) The article is titled "Institutionalised apartheid and

the SWAPO Women's Council, detailed the Council's concern about access to contraceptives inside Namibia. Depo-Provera, which black women could access in apartheid Namibia, had a bad reputation. Only black women used this contraceptive. It was made compulsory for mothers immediately after delivery, without any explanation. The state hospitals gave this contraceptive to all female TB patients as part of their normal treatment, whether a woman was or was not of childbearing age.<sup>79</sup> The article labelled Depo-Provera as a "dangerous drug," and identified various reasons why it was used on black women only. It was argued that as the contraceptive was still at an early stage of development, black women were used as guinea pigs; it was believed that the effects of this contraceptive included loss of vision, sterility, nervousness, skin allergies, jaundice etc. The contraceptive was believed to cause infertility and was suspected to be a trick used by the South African authorities to make sure that the Namibian black population was kept low enough to ensure its submission.<sup>80</sup>

In exile, family planning and sex education became the official SWAPO policy. However, before this was adopted, the topic of family planning generated much debate. As a matter of procedure the SWC could not implement the policy without the approval of the main body, SWAPO. A member of the SWC remembered how tough it was to convince the leadership of SWAPO, which was mainly male, why it was important for women to have access to contraceptives:

"The question of family planning ... mhh, when we started to talk about, it was very hard to make them (the male leadership) understand that we felt depressed. However, we went to explain to the president, (Sam Nujoma) we made him understand and he supported us. Luckily, we had women like Libertina Amathila who have medical background; she had to give a lecture to these men. You could see the ignorance that men had, that when they heard about a loop, they thought it is a long and big wire which... (She laughs lightly) which could hurt them...we were surprised about the ignorance they had. Some thought that when you give my wife contraceptives, she would never give birth again, all these kinds of things. Some even thought that Namibia had not enough people, why should people not give birth."<sup>81</sup>

When SWAPO endorsed the use of family planning, the SWC had to explain to women why family planning was important. Women, too were skeptical about it. SWAPO officials explained to them that it was of no use to have ten children, of whom six could easily die of malnutrition if there was no care. In addition, it was not healthy for women to have too many children especially when they could not adequately space them. Women were to become mothers when they were ready to become mothers; having sex should not lead directly to motherhood. People were reminded to think about the economic viability of having

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dangerous use of birth control on black women in Namibia."

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid; *The Combatant*, Vol. 10, No. 5, December 1988.

<sup>81</sup> Interview 06/05/2009.

too many children. When people were in exile SWAPO was feeding them, but what would happen if every woman had ten children and when it was time to go home?<sup>82</sup>

The SWC invited the International Parenthood Association (IPPA) to come to the camps and hold meetings with them. It was explained that family planning was not to encourage prostitution, but to lessen the trauma of the parents, as it was very disheartening to lose a child. It was better to prevent that.<sup>83</sup> Having access to family planning could enable women to participate more fully in the struggle. It would also counteract and correct the South African propaganda, which depicted women in exile as falling pregnant or acting as sex workers who did not participate in the liberation struggle or obtain educational opportunities.<sup>84</sup>

Although women were educated to have children when they were ready, or to wait until they had finished their education, some women insisted that they wanted 'to complete the SWAPO flag' by having three children, each child to represent one colour in the flag (blue, red and green).<sup>85</sup> The majority of the men interviewed, especially those who were just ordinary soldiers, maintained that they knew nothing about contraceptives and that it was not explained to them at all.<sup>86</sup>

## **The relationship between education, development, employment, power sharing and equal relations**

There is no doubt that education performs interlinked functions. A lack of access to education directly affects development, employment structures and gender equality in both the public and private spheres, i.e. in the work place and in the household. That is why during apartheid education was used as a tool to maintain social and economic inequalities.

One of the primary objectives of SWAPO was to educate its cadres in order to create a highly skilled labour force that would be instrumental in the development of independent Namibia. It was anticipated that at independence, the whites in Namibia might emigrate, and that this would leave a big gap in the labour market and eradicate the structural income inequalities between Africans and whites in the workforce. Therefore, Namibians had to be educated and trained.<sup>87</sup> It was also for this reason that the number of Namibians sent

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid; *Action on Namibia*, January 1990.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> UNESCO and UNDP. Study tours of Namibian Women to Mozambique and the Congo and the SWC workshop, Lusaka, 1–5 December 1979. Report prepared for SWAPO by UNESCO and UNDP. Paris: UNESCO and UNDP, 1981.

<sup>85</sup> Interview 12/08/2009.

<sup>86</sup> Interview 15/07/2009; 16/07/2009; 06/08/2009.

<sup>87</sup> Allison, C. Women in waged employment: Some basic information and questions of relevance to a future independent Namibia. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884–1984: Readings on Namib-*

to study was increased as the prospect of obtaining independence became more likely.<sup>88</sup> The most important key economic sectors were identified as priorities to restructure the economy of the country. The targeted sectors were agriculture, mining, manufacturing and tertiary industries.<sup>89</sup> It was an undoubted fact that the Namibians who were abroad had better educational opportunities compared to those inside the country. This was due to the fact that opportunities, especially in terms of higher education, were wide due to the number of scholarships offered by the international community.

Education is a great equalizer in the job market. Having good education increases the possibility of someone getting a well-remunerated job. Namibian women were all too familiar with this state of affairs. In apartheid Namibia, women's opportunities of getting waged employment was limited and those that had paying jobs occupied the lowest strata and lowest-paying positions.<sup>90</sup> This is why the SWC in its constitution aimed "to achieve equality for women, plus their full participation in the struggle for national and social liberation; to bring about women's full participation in the productive work, in the public administration, in education and to prepare them for productive jobs; to campaign for the creation of nursery school to enable women's full participation in productive work..."<sup>91</sup> The SWC as a wing for women encouraged women to get education and to subsequently fully participate in salaried jobs.

Although women were subordinated to men before the arrival of the Europeans, colonialism deepened this. Colonialism added new layers of oppression to women, black women in particular. Women were not permitted freedom of movement and they could only live in towns or on white owned farms as dependents of men.<sup>92</sup> The colonialist era created a form of oppression that was specific to women as they became dependency-trapped.<sup>93</sup> Although men and women were deeply dependent on wages, black women in particular those who seldom had paid jobs, relied more on their husbands or men to support them. The SWAPO

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ia's history and society. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988.p. 358 and Shamapande, Y. Perspectives for post-independence development in Namibia. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988. p.365, 368.

<sup>88</sup> The Fellowships and Training Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat (FTP). Education and Training Assistance under the Commonwealth Programme for Namibians. Seminar on contingency planning for technical assistance to Namibia during the transition to independence. Vienna, 24-28 July 1989.

<sup>89</sup> Shamapande 1988, p. 369.

<sup>90</sup> Allison 1988, p. 358.

<sup>91</sup> Constitution of SWAPO Women's Council.

<sup>92</sup> SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign (SWSC). Women in production and reproduction. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988, p. 353.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 353.

Women's Solidarity Campaign (SWSC) summed it up well: "What money migrant labour brings in has concentrated power in the hands of the man; only they have access to it ... The migrant system therefore deepens the age-old exploitation of women and the weak."<sup>94</sup> Men made meager money from work as contract labourers, but it was the "husband's hands" that had access to and controlled the money – and in the end this economic power gave men the ability to rule over women. This argument could, however, not only apply to those areas of the country that were involved in the contract labour system; the same argument could be extended to all the situations where the husband (migrant labourer or not) was employed and the wife was not.

SWAPO's viewpoint was that access to education and training would lead to the greater representation and participation of women in politics and the government that they would help create. Education was to equip women with the know-how to make sure that women would be part of the structures and participate in making influential decisions and policies that affecting women and ensure their interests would be advanced and safeguarded at policy formulation, implementation and evaluation stages.<sup>95</sup> An effort was to be made to enable women "not only to become party members, but actively participate in the political process at all levels."<sup>96</sup> This chapter has demonstrated that a substantial number of women were educated through SWAPO. However, the SWAPO leadership structure was and is still dominated by men. This somewhat contradicts the pronouncement that "Education was to equip women with the know-how to make sure that they would be part of the structure involved in making decisions and policies ... ."<sup>97</sup> Perhaps one should conclude that there is no correlation between educational qualifications and leadership appointments in the party structures. One might be led to think of gender as the most determining factor; women were offered the opportunities to study, and yet there had never been an equal representation of men and women in the party structure. After all, in most countries, Namibia included, the president is not necessarily the most highly qualified member of the cabinet in terms of formal educational qualifications.

## **Liberation of women through education**

A provocative question arising from this was just how liberating the education offered to women by SWAPO was? There is no doubt that SWAPO was committed to non-sexist educational opportunities for all its cadres. However, it is worth investigating whether this

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.354.

<sup>95</sup> UNIN. *Namibia: Perspectives for national reconstruction and development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986. pp. 912–3.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



education was sufficiently liberating or were there other ways and means, which SWAPO explored to show its commitment to the question of women's liberation? Were women themselves opening up to the opportunities offered to them?

SWAPO asserted that "Education is one of the birthrights of every Namibian. Democratization of education remained a SWAPO objective both during the struggle and post independence."<sup>98</sup> Evidence points to the fact that SWAPO was devoted to educating women. Between 1976 and 1986, more than 60% of students at the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) were female.<sup>99</sup> Women constituted the majority of the students sent to secondary schools in African countries, Cuba and elsewhere. More than 80% of people involved in the Namibia Extension Unit (NEU) programme were women.<sup>100</sup> More than 40% of female students were involved in the fields of economics, law, medicine and development studies.<sup>101</sup> This can be explained by the fact that most men were probably at the battlefield, but also suggests a serious commitment to the education of women.

However, whilst there were high numbers of women at the secondary school and diploma level, men outnumbered women at the post-diploma levels. Women were more likely to start working in the settlements because many were caring for their children. From 1981 new mothers were required to give up their studies or other duties in SWAPO for three years after giving birth in order to dedicate their time and energy to looking after their infants.<sup>102</sup> This was not expected of the fathers of the children. Namhila remarked that Namibian female students who fell pregnant while on scholarship in foreign countries were recalled back to Angola and Zambia, but the men who were responsible for these pregnancies were allowed to complete their studies.<sup>103</sup> The outputs of education in this case might be skewed; men and women had equal access to secondary and diploma level education, however, women had fewer opportunities to continue their education beyond the diploma level, and it was only women who lost time looking after babies.

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<sup>98</sup> Cited from SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign (SWSC). Education for subservience and liberation: Another perspective. In: Wood, B. (Ed). *Namibia 1884–1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. London and Lusaka: Namibia Support Committee and United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988.

<sup>99</sup> *United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN). A decade of progress, 1976–1986*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986.

<sup>100</sup> This was a distance education programme established in 1981 for Namibians in the Zambian and Angolan refugee Camps.

<sup>101</sup> UNIN. *Namibia: Perspectives for national reconstruction and development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986, pp. 897–8.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 898.

<sup>103</sup> Namhila, E.N. *The price of freedom*. Windhoek: New Namibia books. 1997. p. 124.

## Gender equality and family relations

The SWAPO Family Act of 1977<sup>104</sup> explicitly states that family and marriage would provide the fundamental structure of society. The three principles governing this Act that were to be promoted, supported and protected, are the equality of men and women, the elimination of forms of discrimination based on sex, and the equality of children born in and out of wedlock.<sup>105</sup> This is where the transformation of family and relations within the family, especially with the sexual division of labour, is meant to be addressed. It would be meaningless to create a new society where women are educated and can do salaried jobs on an equal basis with men and yet, at the same time, not bring about a restructuring of the sexual division of labour at the family and household level. SWAPO publications do not suggest that there were efforts to collectively and publicly address the issue of the unequal sexual division of labour at the household level. Some actions imply that no effort was made to change the situation. For instance, it became evident that men cooked in the big common kitchens, but at the household level, women cooked, or women cooked for commanders because the “commanders’ kitchens” were small or they specifically requested a female comrade to do the cooking for a SWAPO official (see also Chapter four on these issues).

Allowing women to fully participate in productive work, and not addressing the sexual division of labour at the household level does not signpost a comprehensive strategy towards the liberation of women. Instead, it doubles the burden of women, as they revert to feminine roles and continue with the domestic chores of cooking, washing, looking after children after they return home from work, whilst being expected to shoulder increased responsibilities in the workplace.

The interviewees showed mixed reactions to the slow pace or minimal effect education has had on the emancipation of women. Some were hoping that after returning to Namibia women were going to be rewarded substantially, only to realize that nineteen years after independence, this has not been accomplished. While some women are frustrated and feel betrayed, some are still hopeful, citing the argument that people need to give ‘change’ a chance because it is a process that takes time.

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<sup>104</sup> The Act was endorsed by the Central Committee of SWAPO on 1 December 1977. The Act deals with the fundamental principle of equality between men and women and was a guideline to family relations. It deals among other matters with the contraction, institution and dissolution of marriage, the matrimonial property and the legal relationship between parents and children. SWAPO Family Act of 1977.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in UNIN. *Namibia: Perspectives for national reconstruction and development*. Lusaka: UNIN, 1986, p. 898.

## Summary

This chapter has described the structure of the apartheid education system and its impact on black people and black women in particular. It continued to look at the educational opportunities, which SWAPO offered its exile community and the extra effort put in by the SWC to make sure that women benefited equally from education and training. In the process more women than men got opportunities to study up to secondary and diploma levels, however, more men proceeded to the post-diploma level. As education is aimed at curbing various inequalities and aims at providing many opportunities and possibilities, especially for women, a number of issues arise. These raise questions of SWAPO's commitment to bring about the emancipation of women through education. Most importantly, they raise questions about the party's ability or capacity to bring about equality between men and women.

## Chapter Six

### **“All has not been won. Not everything has been lost”<sup>1</sup>: Women in post-independent Namibia**

At independence, hopes and expectations were high, given the effort that had been put in and the many promises made during the liberation struggle. SWAPO’s speeches and songs encouraged people to fight with hope and determination as they would enjoy the benefits after independence. This chapter will first recapitulate the ‘gender agenda’ contained in the SWAPO policy documents using these as a benchmark to weigh and assess the extent to which the promises made during exile have been delivered since independence.

The SWAPO Women’s Council (SWC) strove “to achieve equality for women and participate fully in the struggle for national and social liberation ... to bring women’s full participation in productive work, education and public work ... to campaign for the creation of nursery schools to facilitate women’s full participation in productive work.”<sup>2</sup> The 1989 SWAPO election manifesto summed this up. It declared that the SWAPO government “will accord full and equal rights to women in all aspects of our future democratic society. Their full and unfettered admission to all levels of government responsibility and to the industrial, commercial, agricultural, scientific, academic and professional life will be defended.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter particularly looks at how far women have benefited from new policies and practices and at what promises have not been kept after independence. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give an in-depth representation and analysis of the situation of women in independent Namibia. However, I will look at some priorities concerning women’s issues that have been successfully achieved as well as some areas where women’s issues are still lagging behind. The chapter will focus on formal equality as stipulated in the constitution and the substantive efforts made to tangibly implement gender equality between men and women such as the creation of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, and the extent to which Namibia has formulated national policies and signed international conventions to ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment is achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement to the world summit on social development by Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwa, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Copenhagen, 8 March 1995. Available at [www.un.org/documents/ga](http://www.un.org/documents/ga).

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of SWAPO Women’s Council.

<sup>3</sup> *SWAPO election manifesto. Towards an independent and democratic Namibia: SWAPO’s policy positions*. SWAPO Directorate of Elections, 1989.

## Formal equality

A fundamental right enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Namibia is that “everyone is equal before the law and that discrimination based on sex, race etc. is prohibited.”<sup>4</sup> The Government of the Republic of Namibia acknowledges that women were previously disadvantaged and encourages policies and reformation of laws to enable women to have equal opportunities. The constitution clearly indicates that women’s social, economic and legal status should be improved.<sup>5</sup> However, having a constitution and a government, that advocates equality for women is one thing, but having this commitment translated into tangible results requires result-oriented policies, effective institutions and an enabling environment.

## Substantive equality

Namibia has put in place a number of measures to ensure that gender equality is not merely ornamental in the constitution but yields tangible results. National programmes and international agreements and mechanisms have been put in place to guarantee and affirm the implementation of the commitment to gender equality.

### From a Women’s Desk to a fully-fledged ministry:

Immediately after independence, women demanded ‘actual programmes’<sup>6</sup> to be put in place to improve their situation. In a statement issued on March 8 1991 to commemorate International Women’s Day, 12 women’s organizations indicated that the constitution was not enough to ensure women’s equal rights, as “It is relatively easy to insert sentences in a constitution.”<sup>7</sup> “Even though the laws which kept us in subjugation have been scrapped, we find we are no better off now than we were before independence.”<sup>8</sup> This was an indication that women were eager and determined to claim equal status with men. The organizations included the Council of Churches in Namibia, Sister Collective, the Namibian Federation of Business and Professional Women, the SWAPO Women’s Council, the Women’s Section of the DTA and NUDO.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.

<sup>5</sup> Le Beau, D & Iiping, E. Namibia’s progress towards gender equality: Post-Beijing policies and programmes. In: Hunter, J. (Ed) *Beijing and 10, the way forward. An introduction to gender issues in Namibia*. Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Women say constitution is not enough. *Namibia Brief*, April 1991, no 5. (A fortnightly newspaper service for NSC members).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

In April 1991 women staged a march demanding that a Ministry for Women be established. They were not satisfied with only 'a women's desk' which was established in 1990 and operated under the Office of the President. In 1997 the Women's Desk was upgraded to the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) but was still attached to the Office of the President. Finally in 2000 the DWA was elevated into a fully-fledged ministry, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare (MWACW),<sup>10</sup> renamed in 2005 as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW). The objectives, mission and vision of MWACW and MGECW were more or less the same. The functions of the ministry include: advocating and lobbying policies and law reforms to heighten women's equality; lobbying for the inclusion of women in decision-making positions; facilitating the implementation of the national, regional and international instruments.<sup>11</sup> The MGECW trains Gender Focal Points in all the government ministries whose main aims are to promote gender issues, raise gender awareness, assist their respective ministries to review policies and programmes from a gender-sensitive point of view and to draw an annual budget relating to gender for all the ministries.<sup>12</sup>

### **National policies and documents:**

Documents have been developed to guide Namibia in addressing gender issues at a national level. The National Gender Policy (NGP) highlights ten critical areas of concern, which the Namibian government is addressing. The identified areas of concern include: gender, poverty and rural development, gender balance in education and training, gender and reproductive health, violence against women and children, gender balance in power and decision-making, the girl child, and gender and legal affairs.<sup>13</sup> The National Plan of Action on Gender identifies the *modus operandi* and strategies of how the government would achieve policy goals.<sup>14</sup> The National Gender Mainstreaming Programme (NGMP) was an attempt by the then Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare and various stakeholders to map out a strategy to mainstream gender at all levels of decision-making and in all sectors of development.<sup>15</sup> These attempts at the national level indicate a willingness and commitment to address gender issues.

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<sup>10</sup> LeBeau & Iiping. Namibia's progress towards gender equality, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> [www.mgecw.com.na/gender](http://www.mgecw.com.na/gender). Accessed 10/08/2009.

<sup>12</sup> LeBeau and Iiping. Namibia's progress towards gender equality, 2004, pp. 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Republic of Namibia. *National Gender Policy and National Plan of Action on Gender*. Windhoek: Department of Women Affairs, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Namibia. *National Gender Mainstreaming Programme*. Windhoek: Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. 2003.

### **Various national commitments:**

Commitments and gender-related objectives at a national level have been outlined in several national planning documents. The National Development Plans (NDPs) and Vision 2030 identify short-term and long-term national goals respectively. Namibia has adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are the eight goals drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration. The declaration was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of states. The third goal of the MDGs is to promote gender equality and empower women. These goals are to be achieved by 2015 and they are constantly monitored and evaluated.<sup>16</sup>

### **International agreements:**

Namibia is a signatory to the international gender conventions that are against gender discrimination. In 1992, Namibia endorsed the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the CEDAW Optional Protocol was approved in 2000, in addition to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, the African Regional Platform for Action and the African Charter on Women's Rights and the Beijing Platform for Action and the African Regional Platform for Action. All these agreements advocate the principles of gender equality.<sup>17</sup> The conventions identify critical areas of concern, diagnose the problems and propose suitable strategies in order to reach desirable outcomes. Some of the Namibian Government's national programmes and its vision of gender equality are based upon and guided by these international policies. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare was commissioned with the implementation of the CEDAW.<sup>18</sup>

### **Law and policy reform on gender:**

Namibia inherited apartheid laws, which remained in force unless repealed or amended. Some of the laws discriminated against women. In order to put into practice the new Namibian constitution's pronouncement that everyone is equal before the law, most of the laws needed reform. The necessity to reform the law was to substantively improve the situation of women in relation to family structures, employment relations, customary laws, gender-based violence and with reference to the land issue. Women in exile under SWAPO

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in LeBeau and Ipinge. *Namibia's progress towards gender equality, 2004*, pp 6; [www.undp.org/mdg](http://www.undp.org/mdg).

<sup>17</sup> LeBeau and Ipinge. *Namibia's progress towards gender equality, 2004*, pp. 3–5; Ipinge, E. & LeBeau, D. *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek & Harare: UNAM & SARDC, 2005, pp. 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

and in various women's movements inside the country (established before and after independence) campaigned for these issues.<sup>19</sup>

The first family law reform was an amendment in 1991/2 affecting income tax.<sup>20</sup> The law removed discrimination against married women. The Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996 was a major achievement that abolished the automatic marital power vested in men by the Roman-Dutch law applicable to civil marriages in Namibia. Wives were considered as minors under this law and husbands had absolute power over their wives and property within the marriage.<sup>21</sup> The Combating of Rape Act no. 8 of 2000 was described as a 'progressive law on rape'<sup>22</sup> and generated a lot of public debate, especially from male members of the public regarding some of its content.<sup>23</sup> The Combating of Domestic Violence Act no. 4 of 2003 defined domestic violence broadly to include a variety of forms of abuse ranging from physical, sexual, economic, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse. It covers violence between husband and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends and family members.<sup>24</sup>

The Affirmative Action (Employment) Act (AAA) no. 29 Of 1998 focuses on disadvantaged groups including women, people with disabilities and racially disadvantaged people. The Act makes provision for people in specified groups to get equal access to employment opportunities and to ensure that they are equitably represented in the work force.<sup>25</sup> The Communal Land Reform Act no. 5 of 2002 protects women's rights to communal land tenure. Under this Act a widow has the right to remain on the land after her husband dies; does not have to pay and the husband's relatives have no right to chase her out or inherit the land as was the case during apartheid.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that Namibia as a nation is showing serious commitment to eliminating inequality by empowering women with legal

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<sup>19</sup> Women say constitution is not enough. *Namibia Brief* (A fortnight news service for Namibia Support Committee), April 1991. From 1983 onwards, different community based organizations emerged. The number ranged between 50-100. Most of the organizations were urban based, although some spread to the rural areas. The organizations included Khomasdal Burgervereeniging (KVB), Katutura Residents' Action (KARA), Namibia Nationhood Programme Coordinating Committee (NNPCC) and Namibia Women's Voice (NWV). Cited in Becker, H. *Namibia Women's Movement 1980 to 1992: From anti-colonial resistance to reconstruction*. Frankfurt: IKO, 1995, pp. 171–226.

<sup>20</sup> Hubbard, D. Gender and sexuality: The law reform landscape. In: Hubbard, D & LaFont, S. (Eds). *Unravelling Taboos: Gender and sexuality in Namibia*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), 2007, pp. 101–102.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 102: Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) and Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC). *Beyond Inequalities 2005: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek: University of Namibia (UNAM) and SARDC, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Hubbard, D. Gender and sexuality, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter five above.

<sup>24</sup> Hubbard 2007, p. 106; WIDSSA 2005, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> WIDSSA 2005, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



instruments and to ensure that they have a legal basis on which to demand their rights in case of any infringement. However, although there is legislation in place to protect and advocate the advancement of women, this does not guarantee that they are practised. The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) reported that, for various reasons, people sometimes withdraw cases, or law enforcement agents turn people away or there are long delays in dealing with cases and, as a result, the legal mechanism put in place does not necessarily yield the intended results.<sup>27</sup> The conclusion is that more needs to be done to increase women's awareness of their new rights and to ensure the effective implementation of the new laws.

### **Non-governmental organizations and civil society:**

Before and after independence a number of gender-based organizations were formed. Today, in independent Namibia, they lobby and demand the government accountability on gender-related matters. They deal with women's rights, law reform, sexual rights and campaign for gender equality. *Sister Namibia* transformed itself from a media project organization to an organization dealing with the rights of women with HIV/AIDS, and supports the elimination of patriarchy.<sup>28</sup> The Namibia National Women's Organization (NANAWO) deals with issues of reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, inheritance issues, collaboration among women (looking beyond political party affiliations, race, color and religion), the elimination of discriminatory laws and upliftment of women. The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) became a forerunner in the reformation of specific gender laws. The LAC conducts lawsuits, offers advice, carries out research and training and makes recommendations regarding human rights and women's rights. The LAC runs a Gender Research and Advocacy Project, which deals with issues of gender equality.<sup>29</sup> Namibian Men for Change, established in 2000, is a male-based organization that addresses gender issues in Namibia. It is aimed at men urging them to end violence against women and children and cultivate changes in abusive attitudes and behaviour. Women's Action for Development (WAD) founded in 1994 trains rural women for socio-economic and socio-political empowerment. WAD organizes women into self-help groups by training and promoting income-generating activities.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See, Legal Assistance Centre. 2008, *A year in review: LAC 20 years*. Available at [www.lac.org.na/pdf/lacannualreport08](http://www.lac.org.na/pdf/lacannualreport08).

<sup>28</sup> WIDSSA, 2005, p. 17; The LAC was found in 1988 and initially concentrated on representing and defending victims of human rights abuses during the war of liberation. It has since broadened its activities to litigation, information and advice, education and training, research, law reform and advocacy. ([www.lac.org.na](http://www.lac.org.na)). *Sister Namibia* was established in 1989, broadly to deal with issues regarding women.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

## The struggle continues

This section focuses on the areas where, despite legal efforts and in some cases what seems to be goodwill from various actors, there is still a struggle to ensure the achievement of equality between men and women.

### **Power-sharing and decision-making at the political level:**

After independence, Namibia inherited a society divided in many ways. Access to power-sharing and decision-making was gender stratified. An important task of SWAPO post independence was to transform the gender-biased society into a unified nation. The constitution of the country guarantees the equality of all. As the situation of women's subordination is complex and one of cause and effect, appropriate gender sensitive policies and legislation were put into place.<sup>31</sup> The aim of these are to ensure that women are equally represented and fully participate in the power sharing and decision-making structures in all sectors of the society. The Millennium Development Goal promoting gender equality and empowering women identifies women's participation in decision-making at both the national political, and the grassroots level as an important step towards women's empowerment. This crucial step will make sure that the interests of women are taken into consideration.<sup>32</sup>

Women make up 52% of the Namibian population. However, in independent Namibia, men still drastically outnumber women in their representation at the political level, despite the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development that called on member states to achieve 30% women's representation in political and decision-making structures by 2005.<sup>33</sup> The only exception has been at the lowest level of the political hierarchy. The Local Authorities Act of 1992 put Affirmative Action legislation into practice. By 2004 the local authorities governing urban areas in Namibia had reached the 30% target percentage. This was due to the Local Authorities Act stipulation that the local authority elections use the party list system and a local authority with 10 or fewer members had to include two women, whilst those that had 11 or more members had to include at least three women. This saw a 37% representation of women in the councils running local authorities following the first 1992 election, which rose to 43% by the 2004 election.<sup>34</sup> The same measures have not been introduced for other elections. The represent-

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<sup>31</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, the National Gender Policy, National Gender Plan of Action, Married Person's Equality Act of 1996, Affirmative Action (Employment) Act of 1998, Combating of Domestic Violence Act of 2004, Maintenance Act of 2004 are some of them.

<sup>32</sup> Republic of Namibia. 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium Development Goals report: Namibia. Progress at Mid-term September 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Hopwood, G. *Guide to Namibian Politics*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research & Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2004. p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid; Frank, L. "Moving towards gender balance in Elected positions of government in Namibia"

ation of women at the higher political levels has fluctuated over the years. In 2004 there were 27% women in the National Assembly (NA), while the National Council (NC) had 7.6%; in the cabinet 19% of the full members were women. In 2004 there was no political party headed by a woman. In 2002 the SWAPO party's Central Committee had 23% women and 19% were women in the Politburo. In 2004 the official opposition party, the Congress of Democrats (CoD), had 27% of women on its National Executive Committee. Overall, no political party represented in parliament had a majority of women in their party structure.<sup>35</sup>

There has been a public outcry over the under representation of women at the political level. In 1999 the female members of parliament from all political parties and various Non-Governmental Organizations mandated *Sister Namibia* to launch the Namibian Women's manifesto, a pressure group aimed at calling for a gender balanced 'zebra-style' candidate party list for the elections.<sup>36</sup> Despite that, there have been few favourable suggestions towards equal representation between men and women. During the 1997 SWAPO party congress, President Sam Nujoma suggested that the party should have a 50/50 representation on local and municipal election lists. However, despite such prominent promotion, the same congress only elected 12% of women to its Central Committee.<sup>37</sup> During the 2001 congress of the SWAPO Party Women's Council (SPWC), the Council expressed its support for equal representation of women in the government and in the party structure; however, there were no strategies laid out to illustrate how that was to be achieved.<sup>38</sup>

During the 2002 SWAPO party congress it was resolved that there be equal representation of women in all decision-making processes. At the same congress, President Sam Nujoma remarked that all Namibians, including women, should be mobilized in socio-economic development in order to realize the country's long-term development goals and programmes.<sup>39</sup> However, the November 2007 SWAPO party congress's outcome told a different story. Only three women out of a total of 21 members were elected to the Politburo, and the Central Committee (CC) elected only 14 women out of its 83 members.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the representation of women actually dropped. In 2002 there had been 19 women in the Central Committee and four in the Politburo.<sup>41</sup> The hypocritical outcome of the congress aroused

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available [www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs-namibia/Frank\\_10-6-2004.pdf](http://www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs-namibia/Frank_10-6-2004.pdf) .

<sup>35</sup> Hopwood. *Guide to Namibian Politics*, 2004. p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> "Moving towards gender balance in elected positions of government in Namibia" available at [www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs-namibia/Frank\\_10-6-2004.pdf](http://www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs-namibia/Frank_10-6-2004.pdf) .

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Activists challenge SWAPO on women's representation. Available at [www.peacewomen.org/news/africa](http://www.peacewomen.org/news/africa); Weidlich, B. The Swapo party congress 07, *The Namibian*, 26/11/07.

<sup>40</sup> Activists challenge SWAPO on women's representation. Available at [www.peacewomen.org/news/africa](http://www.peacewomen.org/news/africa).

<sup>41</sup> Hopwood, G. *Guide to Namibian Politics*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research and

public debate. Women's activists, women SWAPO members themselves and the general public all expressed disappointment at the outcome. "What happened last year at the congress ... that was a disaster, I am very, very disappointed, not that I am not there but by the reduction. It was women ourselves, we undermine ourselves." This is how a woman who was not re-elected to the CC during the 2007 congress expressed her views.<sup>42</sup> Another woman remarked that "at the congress, women voted for men and men voted for men, it looks like the cultural and attitudinal change has not taken place."<sup>43</sup> However, some members of the public viewed the outcome of the conference differently. A male member of SWAPO party remarked: "The outcome just shows who women want to see as their leaders. This has nothing to do with backsliding as some call it. I think this is maturity at its best; women vote for whom they think is capable .... and by the way they (women) scored the highest position."<sup>44</sup> (Here he is referring to the fact that the Secretary-General of the SWAPO party for the first time in the history of the party was a woman, Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana).

The current President of Namibia and the SWAPO party, Hifikepunye Pohamba, in August 2009, revived his predecessor's (Sam Nujoma) wish by declaring his readiness to nominate more women to narrow the gap between men and women in the decision-making positions.<sup>45</sup> However, a month later when the SWAPO party revealed its list of candidates for the National Assembly for the 2009 election, it did not reach the desired 50% representation. In addition, only two women made it into the top 19 places and out of 72 candidates, only 24 were women.<sup>46</sup> CoD referred to the list as a betrayal of women and the youth by SWAPO. The spokesperson for CoD claimed that "Swapo has rejected the women and the youth in totality for the upcoming polls and thus showed complete disrespect to them. It [Swapo] shows betrayal of the highest order and that a troop of arrogant old men wanted to decide for them."<sup>47</sup> It was anticipated that President Pohamba would use his power to appoint six additional women to the National Assembly; however, they would have no voting power.<sup>48</sup>

### **Power-sharing and decision-making in the employment sector**

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare's (MGECW) objectives include the lobbying for inclusion of women in decision-making at all levels. In 2006 the ministry com-

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Namibia Institute for democracy, 2004. pp. 63-64.

<sup>42</sup> Interview 26/06/08.

<sup>43</sup> Interview 07/05/08.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 30/06/08.

<sup>45</sup> Sibeene, P. President wants more women in Parliament. *New Era*, 03/08/09.

<sup>46</sup> Mongudhi, T. and Maletsky, C. Haingura blamed for poor showing of women. *The Namibian*, 07/09/09.

<sup>47</sup> Maletsky, Christof. Swapo betrayed women and the youth, charges CoD. *The Namibian*, 09/09/09.

<sup>48</sup> Mongudhi and Maletsky. Haingura blamed for poor showing of women. *The Namibian*, 07/09/09.

piled three volumes of a booklet monitoring the extent to which the employment sector has gone in implementing the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, whose aim is to achieve a minimum of 30% of women in the decision-making structures of the public service, private sector and in the parastatals of Namibia by 2005.<sup>49</sup>

In the public service of Namibia, amongst those government offices, ministries and agencies that submitted information, 48% have reached the 30% target while 52% have not reached the minimum target of including women in managerial positions. It was noted that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (75%) and the Ministry of Health and Social Services (57%) and the National Assembly (62%) are among the ministries and offices that have reached 50% representation of women. However, the biggest discrepancy was observed in the Ministry of Defence (5%), Safety and Security (7%) and the Central Intelligence Office (11%). Other ministries where women were under represented are the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (12%) and the Youth, National Services, Sport and Culture (17%).<sup>50</sup> This can be explained by the societal belief that issues concerning land, security and defence should be controlled by men, while the areas of health services, gender and child well-being are women's areas.

Amongst the parastatals, 42% of the companies that participated in the study reached the SADC 30% target, while the remaining 58% under represented women in their management positions. However, only four of the company participants reached 50% of women in the management. It was noted that the Boards of Directors of the parastatals did not adequately include women in their structures. The representation ranged from 60% to 0%.<sup>51</sup> This is a clear indication that employed women continued to occupy lower positions.

By 2005 the private sector had achieved the targeted SADC of employing 30% women in the decision-making positions. 73% of the companies that participated in the study had reached the minimum required number of women in management. Although this indicates that the private sector is gearing toward gender equality, the boards of directors in the private sector were still performing poorly as women composed only 18% of the members of boards of directors.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. Statistics on men and women in the management positions in the public service, Parastatal and Private Sector of Namibia, Windhoek: Directorate of Gender Equality, Research and Legal Affairs. Volume 1, 2 &3. 2006 & 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. Statistics on men and women in the management positions in the public service, Parastatal and Private Sector of Namibia, Windhoek: Directorate of Gender Equality, Research and Legal Affairs. Volume 1, March 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, volume 2, August 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, volume 3, December 2006.

## Power-sharing and decision-making at the household level

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996 abolished the automatic marital power vested in men by the Roman-Dutch law applicable to civil marriages in Namibia. Under the Roman-Dutch law, wives were considered as minors and husbands had absolute power over their wives and the property within the marriage. Despite the new legal legislations and structures that govern the institution of marriage and abolish the tradition of the husbands becoming the automatic head of a household,<sup>53</sup> unequal power relations are still experienced in many Namibian households. There are a range of factors that leads to unequal power-sharing and decision-making at the household level. Unequal access to resources is in many cases gendered, with men having better access to and control over resources (money, property, land, livestock etc.)<sup>54</sup> exerting a greater degree of influence and power over women generally. Unequal power relations at the household level in many cases significantly increase dependency and insecurity on the wife's side and at times abuse by their husbands. The factor of patriarchal gender relations at the household level is another element that shuts women out of the decision-making processes. During the war some aspects of gender relations and identity changed. However, as soon as the war came to an end, the 'traditional' patriarchal power was resurrected and women's gains during the war of social transformation were not maintained.<sup>55</sup> It is against this background that in post-war societies people are encouraged to 'respect the culture', which includes patriarchal gender relations where men are automatically decision-makers.

## Education for all

Access to education for all Namibians was one of the major objectives of SWAPO and the SWC in exile. High on the SWC's agenda was the implementation of pre-primary schools, literacy programmes and access to formal education in general. SWAPO placed a lot of effort into making sure that the exile community had access to education and this trend was continued in the independent Namibia.<sup>56</sup> At independence the government issued a number of

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<sup>53</sup> Hubbard, D. Gender and sexuality: The law reform landscape. In: Hubbard, D. & LaFont, S. (Eds). *Unravelling Taboos: Gender and sexuality in Namibia*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), 2007. pp. 101–102.

Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) and Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC). *Beyond Inequalities 2005: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek: University of Namibia (UNAM) and SARDC, 2005. p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ipinge, E. M et al (Eds) *The national gender study*, Volume one. Windhoek: University of Namibia. 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Meintjes, S., Pillay, A. & Turshen, M. There is no aftermath for women. In: Meintjes, S., Pillay, A. & Turshen, M. (Eds). *The aftermath: Women in post-colonial transformation*. London: Zed Books, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> See: Duggal, N.K. (Ed). *Education Policy for Independent Namibia: Some fundamental considerations* (Based on the work of Mosè P. Tjitendero) Lusaka: United Nations Institute for Namibia

policy directives and guidelines towards education for all. Immediately after independence, pre-primary education was offered by Namibian schools under the Ministry of Education. However, in 1995, pre-primary was considered a function to be handled at the local and community level and was shifted to the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing.<sup>57</sup> That saw the closure of pre-primary grades in public schools, with the exemption of special schools. Church, community and non-governmental agencies took over the provision of pre-primary education. This caused a significant drop in enrolment at the pre-primary level. In 1992 5482 children were enrolled in pre-primary, which dropped to 432 in 1998.<sup>58</sup> When pre-primary education was privatized, the costs rose, forcing parents to withdraw their children from pre-primary education.

There is no disparity in the enrolment of male and female learners at the primary school level, and over the years since independence enrolment has been improving. It was estimated that the 2012 target of 99.1 % enrolments is “likely.”<sup>59</sup> However, enrolment should not be the only important factor as completion of school is as crucial. It was observed that at the upper primary to secondary school phase, more female students dropped out compared to male students. Teenage pregnancy was identified as the main reason.<sup>60</sup> In 2007, 1465 learners dropped out of school, 96% were female and was due to teenage pregnancy related reasons.<sup>61</sup> The policy on school pregnancy states that a pregnant girl may continue school until the pregnancy becomes visible, and can only be re-admitted a year after giving birth.<sup>62</sup> The policy discriminates against girls, as the same steps are not taken against boys responsible for the pregnancy.<sup>63</sup>

At the tertiary education level, it is noted that more female students are enrolled than male students. However, the fields of study that students choose reveal that their choices are typically stereotyped. In 1998/9, for instance, there were more male than female learners enrolled at government and private vocational centres.<sup>64</sup> At the University of Namibia

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(UNIN), 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Republic of Namibia. *Education for all: The year 2000 assessment*. Windhoek: Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 2000, p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid; cf. Republic of Namibia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium Development goals report: Namibia. Windhoek: National Planning Commission, September, 2008, pp.10–14; Ipinge, E.M. et al (Eds). *The national gender study*, Volume 1. Windhoek: University of Namibia; Republic of Namibia. *Namibia national progress report on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action*. Windhoek: Department of Women Affairs, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Tjaronda, W. School pregnancy policy set for revision. *New Era*, 03/02/2009.

<sup>62</sup> Shejvali, N. LAC calls for reform of school pregnancy policy. *The Namibian*, 10/02/09.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Republic of Namibia. *Namibia national progress report on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action*. Windhoek: Department of Women Affairs, 1999. pp 25–28.

(UNAM), statistics show that between 1994 and 1997 more female students than males enrolled for nursing studies and teaching related courses, and more male than female students were enrolled for Law, Science and Economics and Management Science.<sup>65</sup>

### **Women and employment**

Women are inadequately represented in the formal employment sector (31%) and, as indicated earlier in this chapter, those who are in the formal sector occupy lower paid jobs and fewer management positions.<sup>66</sup> In rural areas, women in formal waged jobs are employed in the teaching and nursing occupations. A few work in shops or government offices such as the regional councillors' offices. Very few work as domestic workers as the care of children is mainly done by extended families.<sup>67</sup> Women who do not have professional careers find it difficult to obtain casual jobs, unlike their male counterparts who might obtain employment in construction or occasional jobs such as the fixing of fences, brick-making or hut thatching, among other menial jobs.<sup>68</sup> Despite the fact that women in exile were trained in occupations that challenged gender stereotypes, this could not be observed in the post-colonial period.

Women in urban areas are in a better position in terms of employment opportunities comparing to their counterparts in rural areas. Apart from professional jobs, women have jobs in the public and private sectors. Women are employed in the fishing and mining industry and a number have jobs as domestic workers for upper and middle class families.<sup>69</sup> However, with rising unemployment a substantial number of young to middle aged women (and men too) have migrated to urban areas, although the majority of Namibia's population continues to live in rural areas. To generate income, women engage in petty trade and informal income-generating activities. The informal sector is gender stratified; men dominate the activities with high profit margins such as taxi driving, while women occupy the low profit sectors such as selling cooked food, brewing beer and basket making, although it is noted that some women have turned this into a profitable activity.<sup>70</sup> Due to the lack of collateral, it becomes difficult for women to get loans from financial institutions in order to start or expand their business, despite the fact that they should be priority beneficiaries of affirmative action loan scheme.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp. 25–28; Hubbard, D. & Tapscott, C. *Country gender analysis: Namibia*. Prepared for Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), October 1991. pp. 8–11.

<sup>66</sup> National sectoral report for Namibia. Women, agriculture and rural development, available at [www.fao.org/docrep/](http://www.fao.org/docrep/).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Jauch, H. M. *Affirmative action in Namibia: Redressing the imbalances of the past?* Windhoek:



## Women and the land

Despite various legislation on gender equality in Namibia, granting women equal land rights remains a challenge. The 2001 Population and Housing Census revealed that two-thirds of the Namibian population lived in rural areas and 43% lived in the crop-growing regions, i.e. the north-central regions. These regions have the highest number of female-headed households in the country, with the Omusati region topping the list with 62%.<sup>72</sup> In these areas subsistence farming is the main source of livelihood. Several formal consultative proceedings were held to deliberate on the issue of land, including the question of gender equality in obtaining and securing land rights during the National Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question (1991), the Consultative Conference on Customary Law (1993) and the People's Land Conference (1994). In addition to the many outcomes of the consultative meetings, the Communal Land Act No. 5 of 2002 codified the law that stipulated the protection of women. The Act ensures that women have rights and access to land, including widows who under customary law were chased off the land or had to pay in order to keep land that their husband had 'owned'.<sup>73</sup> Although it is noted that in many cases women, widows especially, are no longer evicted from the land by the relatives of the deceased husband, property grabbing becomes another challenge to the survival of women, which in some traditions is justified by the matrilineal inheritance system. In other traditions household assets are not tied to the land, which means that a woman may not get evicted from the land but still will be left without a plough or draught animals to plough with.<sup>74</sup> Many traditional leaders face the challenge of striking the balance between customary laws, common law and the constitution of the country. The Traditional Authorities Act No. 25 of 2000 stipulates that the traditional authorities and their members are responsible for the administration and execution of the tradition of their communities by upholding, promoting, protecting and preserving the culture, language, tradition and traditional values.<sup>75</sup> They are, however, required to promote affirmative action and gender equality. One critic observed that women need more than just access to land to ease their poverty; a wide range of reforms is necessary to improve the situation of women.<sup>76</sup>

## Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) has escalated in the Namibian society. Since independence, the cases of gender-based violence have been on the increase. This does not necessarily

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New Namibia books, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Werner, W. *Protection for women in Namibia's Communal Land Reform Act: Is it working?* Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), March 2008. p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp. 9–12; 23–25.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

mean that the practice of violence was low during the war. The fact that people can now report the cases to the police and something can be done about it, might explain why the number of reported cases has risen. Reports of gruesome gender-based violence fill the news and newspapers on a daily basis. During 2007 alone 12,500 cases of gender-based violence were reported. 86% of the victims were female and 98% of the perpetrators were male.<sup>77</sup>

The causes of gender-based violence have been debated in the National Assembly, on talk shows, in the media and at conferences. The reasons given have ranged from the contract labour system that deprived women of men's love and the violence of apartheid, to social, cultural and economic reasons.<sup>78</sup> Cases ranged from men murdering wives and girlfriends, the raping of strangers and family members to physical, psychological and economic abuse. Opening a workshop on violence against women in Windhoek, the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) remarked that gender-based violence in Namibia remained a 'painful story' to tell.<sup>79</sup> The Government embarked upon a number of programmes to address the issue of GBV. A Women and Child Protection Unit was established in 1993 to provide medical support, counselling services and police assistance to abused women and children. A national database on GBV was established to strengthen the efforts of MGECW with data that would help with the planning and designing of focused intervention in terms of laws, policies, financial and human resources. The MGECW embarked on a 16 day intensive campaign to highlight different forms of GBV, '16 Days of Activism', each year before Human Rights Day on 10 December. MGECW and various stakeholders set up a GBV Committee to discuss and plan how to combat abuse. It made recommendations to various stakeholders on steps to be taken to combat GBV. The Therapeutic Groupwork Programme was aimed at providing practical information to GBV perpetrators on how to change abusive behaviours by exploring non-controlling and non-violent options.<sup>80</sup>

### **"You are your own liberators"<sup>81</sup>**

This was the message of President Sam Nujoma to women during an address at the International Women's Day rally in 8 March 1991 in Windhoek. Nujoma urged women

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<sup>77</sup> "Meeting to thrash out violence" *New Era*, 12/02/2007; Sibeene, P. GBV remains a major concern. *New Era*, 23/09/2009.

<sup>78</sup> Weidlich, B. Gender violence linked to apartheid. *The Namibian* 10/07/2009; Frank, L. & Amicky, E. Namibia's first national conference on gender-based violence. *Sister Namibia*, 1/07/2007; Shejavali, N. Strategy to combat gender violence in works. *The Namibian*, 22/09/2009; Nakale, A. MPs brainstorm on gender violence. *New Era*, 16/06/2009.

<sup>79</sup> Sibeene, P. GBV remains a major concern. *New Era*, 23/09/2009.

<sup>80</sup> Available at [www.mgecw.gov.na/GBV-bronchure07-05-07.pdf](http://www.mgecw.gov.na/GBV-bronchure07-05-07.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Women say constitution is not enough. *Namibia Brief* (Fortnightly news service for Namibia Support Committee) April 1991.

to bury the political, racial and other divides of the past and put their demands to the government. "You are your own liberators; you have to pull your acts together, come up with concrete and practical suggestions."<sup>82</sup> During this rally there were 12 women's organizations who for a year tried to overcome their political differences to form a common front, but only "little overall unity has been achieved" among the organizations.<sup>83</sup>

Geisler in her study of women and politics in Southern Africa found that male domination in the party structures is only one reason for women's under representation. The other issue is that of women themselves as they obstruct and do not support other women. The women are "their own worst enemy, they obviously do not vote for each other if they can help it."<sup>84</sup> According to Geisler, women politicians and activists, identify the lack of support among women as the greatest obstacle. The rift among women seems to be deep and manifold. Women politicians do not support each other, politicians do not support women in civil society, educated women do not support the less fortunate.<sup>85</sup> In Namibia accusations and counter-accusations of lack of support have been flung amongst women. Before the Namibia Women's Manifesto (NWM)<sup>86</sup> was printed and launched, the SWAPO Party Women's Council (SPWC) issued a press conference denouncing it and warning its supporters, members and sympathizers to remain focused and to distance themselves from NWM. SPWC referred to NWM as "some elements that would like to use gender equality as a stepping ladder to reach their own goals that have no relevance to gender ... the so called Women's manifesto has no other intention but to confuse the Namibian women and divert them from the core concept of gender equality. Homosexuality should not be linked to the struggle for gender equality as gender deals with the relationship between women and men."<sup>87</sup> Reacting to the outcome of the 2007 SWAPO party congress that failed to reach the target of 50% representation by women, a woman gender activist blamed the low representation of women on women themselves. "Women fail to support each other; women leadership in Namibia is lacking. We have individuals and not a cohesive women's movement."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Geisler, G. Troubled sisterhood: Women and Politics in Southern Africa: Case studies from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. *African Studies*, Vol. 94, No. 377 (October, 1995), pp. 545-578, p.570.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Sister Namibia was given the mandate by political parties, NGOs and government to take a lead in advocating for a gender balance 'zebra-style' party list for the 1999 National Assembly. Namibia Women's Manifesto was the pressure group led by Sister Namibia. Sister Namibia openly advocated for homosexual rights, among other issues. Frank, L. Moving. Towards gender balance in elected positions of government in Namibia. Available at [www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs](http://www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs).

<sup>87</sup> Frank, L. Moving towards gender balance in elected positions of government in Namibia. Available at [www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs](http://www.quotaproject.org/cs/cs).

<sup>88</sup> Activists challenge SWAPO on women representation. Available at [www.peacewomen.org/news/](http://www.peacewomen.org/news/)

When the SWAPO party list for the National Assembly election in 2009 did not reach the 50/50 representation, commentators blamed the Secretary-General (Petrina Haingura) of the SPWC. However, she responded that she had been out to the regions to lobby for women's support and women had come to the Electoral College. "I did my job; you can take the horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink,"<sup>89</sup> Haingura argued. Accusations referring to some women as sell-outs, queen bees and elitists circulated. The division among women might support Geisler's observation, that politicians who go to parliament on the party's tickets are bound to observe party policy; being in the government comes with restrictions, as women might not be too willing to publicly challenge the party and the government in a male dominated environment.<sup>90</sup> Advocating more jobs for women might be seen as an attack on the male comrades currently occupying posts.

## Summary

This chapter examined the situation and position of women in independent Namibia. It analyzed the government's formal efforts to reform the laws to make sure that women are not discriminated against, by putting in place institutions and policies to improve their situation. It is clear that Namibia has made a public commitment to eliminate gender discrimination by signing international conventions. Civil society and women themselves advocate and demand gender equality and women's empowerment. However, despite the policies and efforts to promote gender equality, there is no guarantee of gender equality as women are under represented in the power-sharing and decision-making areas at government, employment and household level. The unequal relations between men and women are closely related to the social, economic and political structures that have not yet been sufficiently transformed to effect changes in the situation of women. The issue of women's under representation in politics and the policy formulation process is common in post-war states and not unique to Namibia. In Africa and elsewhere it has been noted that there has been no equal representation of women and in some cases representation has even decreased.<sup>91</sup> After the struggle for liberation during which women helped to put men in power came to an end, the promises and pronouncements of emancipation, the total liberation of women and equality between men and women were forgotten.<sup>92</sup> Gender is not the only area where

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<sup>89</sup> Maletsky, C. and Mongudhi, T. Haingura blamed for poor showing of women. *The Namibian*, 07/09/09.

<sup>90</sup> Geisler, *Troubled sisterhood*, 1995, p. 574.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> cf. Meintjes, S. Et al (Eds). *The aftermath: Women in the post-conflict transformation*. London:

former liberation movements have structurally failed to transform goals and objectives formulated during the struggle for liberation into a 'new society' without social imbalances and injustices. Other areas of social transformation are compromised and, at times, abandoned as liberation movements have failed to carry their militant agenda into government after they have transformed into political parties.<sup>93</sup> It has also been established that the blame for the lack of equal representation of women in key decision-making positions in society should not be entirely placed on men, as women themselves do not support each other.

The policies in independent Namibia appear attractive on paper, but they have not successfully addressed the agenda for liberating women. During the exile years, SWAPO openly indicated that it "will accord full and equal rights to women in all aspects."<sup>94</sup> I share Dobell's conclusion that SWAPO publications and speeches produced in exile were pronounced and spread socialist rhetoric primarily to appeal to specific audiences in the context of the Cold War and to underline SWAPO's efforts to secure support.<sup>95</sup> The aftermath of the war has revealed that the pretentious pronouncements of gender equality have not been translated into the effective implementation of radical measures to effect gender equality and equity.

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Zed Books, 2001; Urdang, S. *And still they dance: Women, war, and the struggle for change in Mozambique*. London: Earthscan, 1989; Nhongo-Simbanegavi, J. *For better or worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's liberation war*. Harare: Weaver Press, 2000; Mugambe, B. *Women's roles in armed struggle and their marginalisation in the governance in the post-conflict society: The case of "Luwero Triangle", Uganda*. Addis Ababa: OSSREA, 2000.

<sup>93</sup> cf. Melber, H. (Ed). *Re-examining liberation in Namibia: Political culture since independence*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003; Melber, H. (Ed). *Limits to liberation in Southern Africa: The unfinished business of democratic consolidation*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2003; Melber, H. (Ed). *Transitions in Namibia: Which changes for whom?* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007.

<sup>94</sup> SWAPO election manifesto. *Towards an independent and democratic Namibia: SWAPO's policy and positions*.

<sup>95</sup> Dobell, L. *Swapo's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000.

## Epilogue

This book has explored the issues surrounding the dynamics of the roles, experiences and representation of women during and after the struggle for liberation, focusing closely on the questions of power, gender, sexuality, equality and emancipation. It showed that women actively participated in the liberation struggle. They fed, clothed, and nursed the PLAN soldiers, mobilized, raised funds, lobbied for support and became soldiers; they did, however, not participate in PLAN guerilla units to the same extent as men. Whether their roles were given the same value as those that men performed during the war remains an open question.

There was an element of women's dual representation. Women were heroically and rhetorically represented as active and tough participants, whom apartheid and the war found hard to crack. They were represented as equal and firm partners and it was claimed that the struggle would be futile without their active participation. Women were glorified and represented in speeches and images as fighting two wars simultaneously, namely the apartheid system and patriarchy. Besides the tough and formidable representation of women, the nation was also feminized to symbolize and underline the need for men to protect, fight and even die for it, whilst women were presented as victims of the war. Images and narratives of women as victims were used to highlight and expose the evil of apartheid. When humanitarian assistance was needed, 'women and children' were presented as the vulnerable group.

Women underwent different personal experiences in the SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia. The anxiety of imminent enemy attack, homesickness and the lack of basic necessities including food, are some of the strongest themes that emerge from the interviews with women who lived in the camps. Some women felt that the comradeship helped them through many difficulties, as they were bound together by a common cause, which was to liberate the country. Nevertheless, this was contradicted by allegations of sexual abuse and the control of female sexuality levelled against some male occupants. In addition, it was established that because the administration of the camps was under male leadership, women's complaints about sexual abuse were not swiftly dealt with. This raises questions concerning the rhetoric of gender equality and the emancipation of women. Questions such as who decided the parameters of the emancipation of women and whether women were included in the administrative and political structures of the party depended on someone's patronage.

SWAPO took a serious stance on education by providing education to its cadres who were in exile. With the help of the international community, SWAPO succeeded in providing education from Early Childhood Development to university level to the people under its care. While evidence shows that there was no discrimination in providing education to men and women, women largely took courses that were perceived to lead to 'feminine' careers.

A significantly reduced number of women took post-diploma courses; as women and mothers they preferred to remain in the camps and care for their children. A veiled and gendered discrimination came to light in the sense that women who fell pregnant while studying abroad were called back to the camps, but not the men who were responsible for the pregnancies. In addition, the pre-primary schools that were established in the camps to free women from the obligation of looking after the young ironically became the responsibility of women, instead of both men and women in order to show the men's commitment to promoting and achieving gender equality. While there is no doubt that during the liberation struggle SWAPO educated more men and women compared to the number of black people educated by the colonial states (Germany and South Africa) in Namibia, it was established that access to education did not necessarily translate into equal access to power-sharing and decision-making. It was anticipated that education would put women in better positions to partake in decision making processes, but women still had to challenge the 'glass ceiling' of sexism that kept them in lower level positions of authority.

It emerged in this study that more or less the same trends experienced in exile are being replicated in independent Namibia. Female learners are being forced to stay at home for a year after delivering, women take what society perceives as 'feminine' jobs, which translates into women not accessing high paying and decision-making positions. The 'privatization' of pre-primary education can be perceived as the most serious set-back for women; crèches became expensive, parents were forced to withdraw their children from the crèche and caring for children thus remains a time and career-consuming responsibility for women. The SWC campaigned to make sure that there were pre-schools to free women to do salaried jobs or study. However, the situation has gone backwards to what it was during the apartheid era.

Immediately after independence, women were keen to experience the promises of gender equality and their emancipation turned into tangible results. They tried to organize themselves beyond political, racial and religious affiliations and to come together as a united force. They demanded that institutions represent them and be held accountable to them. In addition, there seemed to be an institutional will and support from the side of the government as it recognized that women were discriminated against. Progressively, legislation was passed, laws reformed, policies adopted and programmes implemented to ensure the advancement of women. However, party loyalty and hierarchy made it difficult to sustain a powerful, independent women's movement.

As indicated, Namibia does not by any means lack policies on gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the existing gender legislation has failed to adequately improve the lives of women. Whilst legal backing and programmes to support women have been put in place, women's progress seems to slow down or even regress. The challenge has been identified as the lack of strategies to implement the policies and turn them into

working programmes. The failure to address gender politics at the household level negates the concept of 'the personal is the political' by drawing a binary distinction between the private and the public. This might lead to the society not working on the necessary structural changes to transform perceptions about men and women and their roles in society. The lack of strategies and a reluctance to change traditional attitudes about men and women seems not to be the only impediment to the achievement of gender equality and the fair representation of women in various institutions. Women themselves are identified as 'their own worst enemies' as they do not support each other.

Compared to the apartheid era, women's situation in independent Namibia has improved. However, should women and the nation as a whole be content with what women's present position in the country they equally fought to free? If there is anything Namibians should be proud of it is the fact that they stood up against a common enemy to liberate themselves. After independence, praise songs like the following were sung:

*Namibia a lishe (osho shili) o la mangukuka*  
*Okuza koCaprivi nokefuta laMbaye*  
*Oyo ombili yetu/ Oly' enyanyu kutse (tse eguerilla/tse aalumenhu)*  
*Twa nyanyukwa ngele tu limo (mo Namibia)*  
*Ts' otwa gwana, twa pwa<sup>1</sup>...*  
 [Namibia as a whole (it's true) is free  
 From Caprivi up to the Walvis Bay Ocean  
 That's our peace  
 That's our harmony (we guerrillas, we men)  
 We are happy when we are (in Namibia)  
 We are fully complete and content ...]

The song obviously endorsed and reinforced the idea that the guerrillas, being 'men', won the war and that they are 'complete and content', but the same cannot be said about women. Perhaps women should remind SWAPO to remember them. A song like the following would be an appropriate reminder for recognition in an independent Namibia:

Don't forget me SWAPO, don't forget me  
 ...SWAPO ondjino tuakarapamue mokutingaango  
 ondjizembi, arikana ondjizembi<sup>2</sup>...  
 Don't forget me SWAPO, don't forget me  
 ...the SWAPO that we have been together as refugees in the exiled countries (land)  
 Don't forget me please, don't forget me ...

<sup>1</sup> This is a song of Ndilimani Cultural Troupe, the official band for the SWAPO party.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, The narrator in the original song is an ex-combatant. This song originated during the widespread 1998 demonstrations staged by former ex-combatants demanding job opportunities and recognition in the independent Namibia.



After the praise song has been sung, the act of reminding should continue. The crucial point should be that Namibia should stop hiding behind the deceit that 'we are fully complete and content' as that is not inclusive of the whole nation. They should consolidate the hard-earned independence by incorporating women, with all their knowledge and experience, fairly within all spheres of the nation.

## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BAB	Basler Afrika Bibliographien
CC	Central Committee
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CoD	Congress of Democrats
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
Frelimo	Frente de Liberacao de Mocambique
FTP	Fellowship and Training Programme
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IPPA	International Parenthood Organization
LAC	Legal Assistance Centre
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MK	Unkhonto we Sizwe
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MGECW	Ministry for Gender Equality and Child Welfare
MP	Member of Parliament
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola
NA	National Assembly
NC	National Council
NANAWO	Namibia National Women's Organization
NANSO	Namibian National Students Organization
NDP	National Development Plan
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEU	Namibia Extension Unit
NSC	Namibia Support Committee
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organization
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
OPO	Ovamboland People's Organization
PAC	Pan African Congress
PAIGC	Partido Africano da Independencia da Guine e Cabo Verde
PAWO	Pan-African Women's Organization
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
SADC	South African Development Community

SADF	South African Defence Force
SEC	SWAPO Elders' Council
SPARC	SWAPO Party Archives and Resource Centre
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWC	SWAPO Women's Council
SYL	SWAPO Youth League
UN	United Nations
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIN	United Nations Institute for Namibia
UNITA	Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola
UNOCN	United Nations Organization Council for Namibia
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WAD	Women's Action for Development
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

## List of Illustrations and Map

Efforts were made to trace the copyright holders of illustrations and maps used in this publication. We apologize for any incomplete or incorrect acknowledgements.

- Fig. 1 Sticker “Free Ida Jimmy Campaign”. Published in *The Combatant* 4, 11, 1983.
- Fig. 2 Kakurukaze Mungunda. Published in: Namhila, E. “We are not going to prosecute you”, 2003.
- Fig. 3 Poster “‘Meekulu’ Putuse Appolus”. Poster-Collection Basler Afrika Bibliographien, X 1484.
- Fig. 4 Dr Libertina Inaviposa Amathila. Published in *Namibia News*, 5, 8, 1972.
- Fig. 5 Pendukeni Kaulinge. Published in *Namibia Today*, 5, 2, 1981.
- Fig. 6 Penny Hilite Hashoongo. Published in *Namibia Today* 1, 3, 1977.
- Fig. 7 Angela Davis. Published in *Namibian Youth*, 1, 1, 1974.
- Fig. 8 SWAPO guerilla forces. Published in IDAF: This is Namibia. A pictorial introduction. London, 1984.
- Fig. 9 Women as mothers. Published in *Namibia Today*, 6, 1982.
- Fig. 10 SWAPO women attending nutrition class. Published in *The Namibian Woman*, 4, 1988.
- Fig. 11 Knitting, weaving and tailoring. Published in SWAPO Women’s Council: Viva! Namibian Women in the struggle. Windhoek, 1994.
- Fig. 12 Poster: A woman slinging a baby and a gun. Poster-Collection Basler Afrika Bibliographien, X 1105.
- Fig. 13 Epokolo. Published in *Namibia News*, June/July 1974.
- Fig. 14 A victim’s flogged buttocks. Published in *Namibia News*, June/July 1974.
- Fig. 15 A mass grave. Published in *The Namibian Woman*, July 1985.
- Fig. 16. Press release, SWAPO, Luanda 1982. BAB SWAPO Archives, AA.3.
- Fig. 17 Rauna Nambinga. Published on [www.historicalvoices.org](http://www.historicalvoices.org)
- Fig. 18 Lucia Hamutenya. Published in *Namibia Today*, 4, 2, 1980.
- Fig. 19. Ida Jimmy. Published in *Action on Namibia*, Winter 1988.
- Fig. 20. PLAN soldiers. Published in SWAPO Women’s Council: Viva! Namibian women in the struggle. Windhoek, 1994.

- Fig. 21. Women soldiers in a ready to attack pose. Published in *The Namibian Woman*, 2, 1988.
- Fig. 22 SWAPO women mechanics. Published in SWAPO Women's Council: Viva! Namibian women in the struggle. Windhoek, 1994.
- Fig. 23 Poster "Combatting the double oppression". Poster-Collection Basler Afrika Bibliographien, X 1479.
- Fig. 24 The Unknown Soldier. Photographer: Jeremy Silvester.
- Fig. 25 & 26 The Eenhana shrine. Published in the booklet for the inauguration of the shrine 26 August 2007.
- Map SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia. Adapted from Lydia Shaketange: *Walking the Boeing 707*. Windhoek (ACCRLS, Footprints 1), 2008, p. 8.

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Item number 02005457: Branch General meeting for SWC in Luanda, 13/03/1982

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Item number 02005452: A circular announcing the peaceful march to commemorate the ANC women's day, 6/08/1983

Item number 02005449: Announcement of the women's branch meeting to take place in Luanda transit camp, 19 July 1984

Item number 02005178: A note to the transport co-coordinator to organize transport for women to attend SWC meeting in Luanda, 08/11/1985

Item number 02005448: A circular announcing the newly elected SWC leaders for Luanda for 1984, 1984

Item number 02000695: Minutes for the meeting devoted to the 10 December, 08/12/1988

Item number: 02004003: A letter to the SWC listing items those were low in the stock. The SWC was to campaign to solidarity moments, 26/03/1987

Item number 02004579: A letter directed to director of NTC to avail a female comrade to assist in daily preparation of food for Comrade Eliaser T. Kahumba, 02/05/1988

Item number 02001290: A letter to from the information office in Luanda listing the names of women who slept out of the camp with permission from the base authority, 25/01/1982

Item number 02008407-002: A letter to Mr. Wim Minaard, Inter-Coordination Church committee for development projects, Africa and Middle East projects, Holland from the SWC, Pendukeni Kaulinge giving information regarding the education facilities in Nyango, 04/05/1985

Item number 02007629: A cover letter from C. Roeper of Holland Committee of Southern Africa to S. Ipangelwa regarding the catalogue for sewing machines that were requested by SWC, 25/07/1987

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