Heroes, Martyrs, Comrades

The Aesthetics and Politics of Liberation Memory in Namibia

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement 3

List of abbreviations..4

Introduction..5

Subject Matter and Research Questions 6

Memory, Nation, Commemoration 8

Media and Practices of National Commemoration 23

Conceptual Outline and Methodology..32

Limitations and Scholarly Contribution..39

Chapter Overview 42

1. Liberation Memory in Namibia: Concepts and Categories..45

Liberation Memory in the Land of the Brave 46

The Commemorative Calendar of Political National Holidays in Namibia 54

The Polysemy of Liberation Memory..61

The Aesthetics and Politics of Memorialisation: Museums, Monuments, Memorial Sites 66

History and Liberation Memory in Namibia 73

2. National Unity in Diversity: Celebrating Independence Day..76

Independence Day, 21 March 1990: The Model of a National Day..78

Independence Day, 1991–1992: Continuity of the Model 87

Independence Day, 1990–2015: A Typology of Namibia’s National Day..89

The Aesthetics and Politics of Independence Day 101

3. “Are you also a survior?” The Mnemonic Communitas of Cassinga Day 116

The Attack on Cassinga and its Aftermath 118

A Concise History of Cassinga Day Commemoration..120

Ethnography of Cassinga Day Commemoration 124

4. The Aim was Independence: 26 August and the Politics of Hero Commemoration 141

26 August 1966, Ongulumbashe 142

Commemorating 26 August: Namibia Day, pre-1990 146

Commemorating Heroes’ Day since 1990..152

5. Entangled Bones, Unsettled History: Liberation Memory and the Politics of the Dead in Southern Namibia 172

Commemorative Liminality: Liberation Memory and the Politics of the Dead 172

Bones of Contention, Part 1: Heroes’ Day in Lüderitz 175
Bones of Contention, Part 2: Heroes’ Day in Bethanie 195
6. The Postcolonial Transformation of Memorial Landscapes 203
Contested Grounds, Layers of History: The Equestrian Monument in Windhoek 210
Namibia and North Korea: Solidarity in the Post-Socialist Memory-Scape 216
The Military Museum in Okahandja 218
The Emerging Memorial Landscape at Ongulumbashe 222
7. Heroes’ Acre and Independence Memorial Museum: The Central Sites of State-Sponsored Liberation Memory in Postcolonial Namibia 228
Namibia’s National Pantheon: The Heroes’ Acre 229
Planning the Independence Memorial Museum 248
8. Heroes, Martyrs, Comrades: Curating the Independence Memorial Museum 267
The Authoritative Account: The Permanent Display 270
Curating the Independence Memorial Museum 279
The Independence Memorial Museum in Perspective 304
Making Sense of the Independence Memorial Museum 315
Conclusion 318
Bibliography 323

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List of abbreviations

AACRLS	Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
AU	African Union
CANU	Caprivi African National Union
CoD	Congress of Democrats
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
FAPLA	Forças Armadas de Libertação de Angola
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IMM	Independence Memorial Museum
MAN	Museums Association of Namibia
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture
NAN	National Archives of Namibia
NANSO	Namibia National Students Organisation
NBC	Namibian Broadcasting Corporation
NDF	Namibian Defence Force
NHC	National Heritage Council
NMC	National Monuments Council
NMN	National Museum of Namibia
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
RDP	Rally for Democracy and Progress
SADF	South African Defence Force
SPARC	Swapo Party Archive and Research Centre
SPYL	Swapo Party Youth League
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWATF	South West Africa Territorial Force
UN	United Nations
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
UNIN	United Nations Institute for Namibia

Introduction

The first weekend of May 2012 turned out to be a rather busy time for doing research on national commemoration in Namibia. In the morning of 4 May, I attended the official Cassinga Day ceremony, which as usual took place at UN Plaza in Windhoek's former township Katutura. As one of the country's twelve public holidays, Cassinga Day commemorates a South African airborne attack on two exile camps of Namibia's erstwhile armed liberation movement SWAPO[1] in southern Angola in 1978. The attack killed close to 1,000 people, mostly civilians who had fled the war-zone in northern Namibia. The event at UN Plaza was characterised by solemn ceremonies of remembrance, including candle-light vigils, choir songs and testimonies of survivors, in the presence of Namibia's President Hifikepunye Pohamba. The memory of Cassinga is a central pillar of the Swapo government's memory politics and also features prominently in the North Korean-built Independence Memorial Museum (IMM) in Windhoek, which was inaugurated in 2014.

After noon, when the official protocol had dissolved into a more festive mood with popular music and dance, I headed towards Rhino Park bus station and boarded a southbound mini bus. Four hundred kilometres later and just after nightfall, the driver dropped me near the small village of Tses, where I stayed at a friend's place. The next day, we attended the annual Heroes' Day at Vaalgras, a small hamlet in the Kalahari Desert some sixty kilometres southeast of Tses. The event was organised by the traditional authority to commemorate the community's liberation struggle history. In particular, the death of anti-colonial resistance leader and revered national hero Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi was remembered, who was killed by German colonial troops near Vaalgras in 1905. The site of his death is marked by a small community-built monument, which was visited by the entire commemorative community during the ceremony.

Early the next morning, I managed to hitch a ride back north with a newspaper delivery van. The driver took me all the way back to Rehoboth, the traditional home of the Baster community,[2] seventy kilometres south of Windhoek. At this place, while looking for another ride back to the capital, I incidentally stumbled into a festive crowd of people observing a parade. Some twenty to thirty men on horseback were riding along the main road, all wearing white shirts with the number "97" printed on. As it turned out, my stint to Rehoboth coincided with the annual commemoration of the battle of Sam Khubis, a skirmish between fighters of the Rehoboth community and German colonial troops, which took place in the nearby mountains in May 1915, 97 years ago.

While I was waiting for my mini bus to leave, I joined a group of men sitting on the curbstone, including the driver, who were discussing the parade and local history. Their

[1] The South West Africa People's Organisation was established in 1960. In order to differentiate between the anticolonial national liberation movement, SWAPO, and the post-independence Swapo Party, I will use the respective acronyms accordingly.

[2] Baster is the most common ethnonym of the population of Rehoboth. It is also used as a self-designation, albeit not uncontested due to its obvious ambivalent meaning (Bedorf 2007; Kjæret /Stokke 2003).

conversation soon turned vociferous. Talking about Sam Khubis, the most vocal among the men got increasingly riled up. The event, he said, was a commemoration “about nothing”; it was “just a scam”. He pointed to the man on his right: “that guy is a ‘Nama’!”, he said. A long time ago, he lectured us; the “Nama” had been “Bushmen”, who started mixing with the “Whites”. He himself was a South African citizen, a “Coloured” of “Malayan and Indian” descent, a product of the mixing of “Whites” and their “Asian” slaves. The man on his left, however, – he pointed at the bus driver – that man was a “Baster”. And the “Basters”, well, they were just “full of shit”. They had mixed with the “Whites” as well, but why on earth did they stick to that derogatory name the “Boers” had given them: “Bastards”. If someone would call him a “Bastard”, he would bring that person to court! He continued with his rant, now dwelling on the German descent of many Basters and their alleged disposition to alcoholism. At some point the bus driver, who was seemingly unnerved, got up and entered his vehicle. He advised me, not to listen to “such nonsense”. Soon we were on the road back to Windhoek and my early May memory marathon came to an end.

Based on this highly condensed summary of three days in May, one can conclude that a significant part of the Namibian population is routinely engaged in commemorating various histories of anticolonial resistance. It is this salience of the past in narrative and performance, commemoration and memorialisation, and the way it is interwoven with the politics of liberation in a post-apartheid society, which forms the subject of this study.

Subject Matter and Research Questions

I experienced this sequence of events quite early during my main fieldwork of 2012/2013 and it continues to captivate me for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it is the rich texture of meaning embedded in these phenomena, which offers a broad range of vantage points to approach the relationship of memory, nation, and commemoration in independent Namibia. Remarkable is the complexity of historical references, ranging from SWAPO’s armed liberation struggle against apartheid South Africa (1966–1989) and the war of resistance of several Nama communities in southern Namibia against their German colonial oppressors (1903–1908) to a skirmish of the Rehoboth Basters with the German Schutztruppe during World War 1 in 1915. Furthermore, it illustrates a remarkable plurality of formats and practices of liberation struggle commemoration.

Based on the three examples above, commemorative events can already be differentiated according to their organisational background, as being organised by state bureaucrats, local communities, traditional authorities, clans or families; spatial aspects, whether they take place in the capital, in regions, villages, and peripheries of the nation-state, in stadiums, public spaces, streets or community halls; and temporal aspects, whether they refer to different eras of anticolonial resistance or different events within one specific era of the liberation struggle. At the same time, commemoration also includes memorialisation in the form of monuments, statues, and museums,

reflecting the very same degree of differentiation. Events as well as memorialisation are characterised by specific aesthetics and commemorative formats, which can already be discerned in reading the short vignettes cited above. At a closer look, even more subtleties become apparent.

Cassinga Day is an official national holiday, yet closely aligned with the history of the former liberation movement, which is Namibia's uncontested ruling party since independence in 1990.[3] This raises the question of who the people are who constitute the commemorative community, which publicly mourns Cassinga. It further highlights the politics of belonging, tied to national commemoration, as well as the transnational dimension of Namibian liberation memory. At the same time, it puts a spotlight on the significance of Cassinga Day as a central part of the commemorative calendar of national holidays in Namibia. The example of Vaalgras draws attention to the ubiquitousness of communal liberation memory in Namibia. It is in Namibia's economically marginalised southern peripheries, in places like Vaalgras, Hoachanas or Bethanie, where the complex entanglements of liberation struggle history are particularly tangible. This brings categories like nation, state, centre, periphery, clan and family into the spotlight, as it challenges the categorical and ideological distinction between different phases of resistance. It further underlines the close connection between commemorative practice and memorial culture, which also manifests itself on the communal level. The example of Rehoboth, finally, adds a point to the long durée of apartheid and the way it continues to shape identities and categories of belonging in independent Namibia. It highlights prevalent traditions of politicised ethnicity as well as the unsettling presence of racialised categorisation, not only between black and white Namibians, but also among the non-white majority population. For this, the punch line that a South African Coloured was mocking a Namibian Baster for the alleged phoniness of "his" traditions is a case in point.

Entering its fourth decade of national independence, postcolonial Namibia reveals itself as a former settler colony in transition, grappling with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, and more than a century of violence and anticolonial resistance (Kössler 2015: 13–48; Silvester 2015; Melber 2014: 8–20; du Pisani /Kössler /Lindeke 2010). This manifests itself in a high degree of social, political, economic, and regional fragmentation, which posits serious challenges to nation-building (Kößler 2007, 2003). In addition, the differing trajectories of German (1884–1915) and South African (1915–1990/1994[4]) colonial rule have also resulted in a 'fragmented past' (Kössler 2015: 13–48, 2007), which has a profound effect on liberation struggle commemoration by heterogeneous mnemonic communities. As social practice, commemoration is therefore interwoven with the broad range of contested issues of postcolonial nation-building and a dynamic arena for the negotiation of belonging in Namibia.

My analysis is built around the following set of conceptual questions: who are the actors, as individuals, collectives and organisations, who are involved in commemorating liberation struggles

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[3] Swapo has won all national elections since independence with either two-thirds or three-quarter majorities.

[4] Despite Namibia's independence on 21 March 1990, South Africa maintained control over the deep-sea harbour of Walvis Bay until 1 March 1994.

in Namibia? Through which formats, media, and practices is this past commemorated? What do the aesthetics and politics of commemoration reveal about the process of negotiating categories of belonging in independent Namibia, of including or excluding people based on their individual or collective contribution to independence? What is the relationship between local and national frames of belonging and identification in regards to memory; what, after all, means 'national' in the context of Namibia's markedly transnational history of liberation?

In approaching these questions, it is the notion of 'liberation' that has become a focal point of my analysis. Multiple layers of meaning, temporally and spatially situated, converge in relation to the frame of reference, which Namibians understand as 'liberation struggle'. As a passionately contested Namibian grand narrative, it is oscillating between memory and history, challenging both. In order to understand this dynamic relationship, I analyse commemorative practice in the postcolonial Namibian context as liberation memory. For this, I am drawing on a metaphor used by Namibian historian Memory Biwa (2012) to conceptualise liberation memory as a patchwork of innumerable 'threads of memory', interwoven with the fabric of Namibia's rich history of anticolonial resistance and national independence.

Memory, Nation, Commemoration

The subject of my dissertation is the commemoration of the Namibian struggle for liberation and national independence. Inevitably, nation and independence are important points of reference for the people and institutions who are engaged in such acts of remembrance. At the same time, what is considered national and worthy of commemoration in the Namibian context is inseparably intertwined with both sub- and transnational frames of belonging. The first relates particularly to the complex and multi-layered history of anticolonial liberation in Namibia, which saw a variegated array of liberation movements, rebellions, armed and peaceful forms of resistance throughout the whole duration of formal colonial rule 1884–1990. The second refers to the fact that Namibian liberation struggles were markedly transnational, with large segments of the population forced into exile, not only during SWAPO's armed struggle, but also in the wake of the German genocide against the Ovaherero people, who partly escaped to British-ruled Bechuanaland. In conceptualising national commemoration in the Namibian context, it is therefore of paramount importance to acknowledge the complex entanglements, which tie Namibians to transnational exiles, diasporas, and mnemonic communities. As I will demonstrate throughout my thesis, this transnational dimension is a significant and still largely overlooked feature of Namibian liberation memory.

My study is inspired by the rich body of critical scholarship on nation, memory, and commemoration in Southern Africa, which has emerged in the wake of the political transformation of the region since the end of white minority-rule. In particular, Ranger's (2004) notion of 'patriotic history' and Werbner's call "for a theoretically informed anthropology of memory and the making

of political subjectivities" (Werbner 1998a: 2) in postcolonial Africa have been guiding both my interest in the subject and my analysis. This thesis benefits greatly from the work of scholars who have been investigating the emergence of heroic nationalist narratives and their re-enactment by means of commemoration in countries like Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, ruled by former liberation movements in power.[5] My aim is to build on this work with the theoretical foundation called for by Werbner, while at the same time moving beyond the limitations of the ideology critique that informs much of this scholarship.

In order to provide a framework for an analysis of national commemoration and liberation memory in Namibia, I will draw on theories of memory and nation. Both concepts have an important intersection in commemoration as social practice and both are strongly shaped by transnational and postcolonial frameworks. In the following, I will explore these different angles and layers: first by providing a theoretical basis, then by outlining my conceptual focus on specific media and practices of commemoration. The theory laid out in this introduction serves as groundwork for analysis. Depending on the requirements of particular case studies, I will take the liberty of applying more specialised theoretical approaches at various sections of my thesis, e.g. regarding the construction of mnemonic *communitas*, the identity politics of settler colonialism, or the process of cultural translation within institutions.

Memory: The Conceptual Groundwork

Since the 1980s, memory studies have become an established and highly interdisciplinary theoretical field within the social sciences and humanities (Berliner 2005: 199; Erll 2005: 3–4; Nora 2005, 1989; Huyssen 1995: 1–9). Historicising accounts often credit Maurice Halbwachs for introducing memory to the social sciences (Assmann 2007: 36–47; Erll 2005: 13–18; Assmann 2003: 131). As one of the first scholars who established a coherent theory of memory (Erll 2005: 13; Olick /Robbins 1998: 106), his concept of *collective memory* developed "a theoretical weight previously unknown" (Olick /Vinitzky-Seroussi /Levy 2011: 16). Still, it is important to remind that Halbwachs did not 'invent' memory studies, but rather built on a pre-existing range of heterogeneous scholarship, which also puts the notion of a 'memory boom' into perspective (Olick /Vinitzky-Seroussi /Levy 2011: 5–29; Olick /Robbins 1998: 106–109).

In Halbwachs' concept, memory is social in the sense that it is constituted by the interplay of individuals and collectives within social frameworks (Halbwachs 1991: 1–32, 1966). These *cadres sociaux* provide a specific 'horizon' (Erll 2005: 15), which affects our understanding of reality and our relationship to past. For Halbwachs, frameworks are not synonymous with a particular society. Instead, it is specific social milieus which enable certain groups to produce specific collective memories, like school classes, families and generations (Halbwachs 1991: 5–7, 18–50), but also the nation (Halbwachs 1991: 64–65). Here, Halbwachs distinguishes frameworks which are more

[5] I will engage with this literature throughout my thesis, especially in the first thematic chapter.

(family) and less (nation) close-knit, emphasising that individuals are always participating in multiple communities and frameworks of memory (Halbwachs 1991: 64). Even though Halbwachs' theory of memory has obvious functionalist and collectivistic limitations (Assmann 2007: 42–47; Erll 2005: 18; Assmann 2003: 131), it certainly was progressive in the context of his time (Olick /Vinitzky-Seroussi /Levy 2011: 20) and had a lasting effect on memory studies. Halbwachs has analysed memory as something that is socially mediated, connected to group formation and interwoven with the normative orders of societies (Halbwachs 1991: 1–76, 1966: 361–390). At the same time, he has introduced temporality, by highlighting how memory is constituted as reconstruction in the present within social frameworks (Halbwachs 1991: 55–58). This is done by collectives who endow themselves with identity and coherence (Halbwachs 1966: 381).

For his concept of cultural memory, Jan Assmann (2007: 36–42) has built extensively on Halbwachs. In Assmann's model, memory is differentiated into a communicative and cultural memory. The communicative memory is alive, dynamic, and depending on the face-to-face interaction of a mnemonic community; cultural memory, on the other hand, is the sphere where communicative memory becomes conserved and institutionalised as myth and tradition (Assmann 2007: 50–55). Both are separated by a versatile contact zone, the 'floating gap'; a concept, which Assmann derived from Jan Vansina (Assmann 2007: 48–50). In this model, past is mediated through ritual processes, which allow for a reproduction of culture. For Assmann, it is especially the religious or mythological festival that reinforces past as a cultural tradition (Assmann 2007: 53–57).

Jan Assmann's model, too, is burdened by a static functionalism, with its binary opposition of religious and secular life worlds (*Fest* vs. *Alltag*) and his reification of a rather one-dimensional version of the culture concept. Clearly, his focus is on a particular form of society ("*Hochkulturen*"), i.e. ancient Israel and Egypt, and the continuity of culture. His model has obvious limitations where societies were/are predominately oral, while even regardless of the literality of a given society his distinction between communicative and cultural memory turned out to be much less clear-cut. Rather, both should be seen as closely linked and interdependent; to a degree, which suggests considering communicative memory as an inseparable and even determinant aspect of what Assmann defined as cultural memory. Likewise, the floating gap of memory is not situated between communicative and cultural memory, but rather permeates and interlinks both as a sphere of social practice.

Aleida Assmann has provided an important differentiation of her husband's concept of cultural memory, by introducing the two modalities of functional memory ("*Funktionsgedächtnis*") and storage memory ("*Speichergedächtnis*"). The first is social in the sense that it is tied to actual mnemonic communities. The second is institutional and a repository for memory, which transcends the temporal situatedness of the respective communities whose memory is stored (Assmann 2003: 130–145). Storage memory serves as a resource for functional memory (Assmann 2003: 134), e.g. by means of knowledge production. In this sense it can also be used to lend credibility and legitimacy to political actors or movements, who are engaged in mediating functional memory, even

though storage memory does not produce meaning out of itself. To do that or foster identification, it needs the agency of memory agents and mnemonic communities who make use of it (Assmann 2003: 137).

Compared to Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, Aleida Assmann's model has three main advantages: first, it makes the differentiation into communicative and cultural memory more flexible and dynamic, breaking down the strict binary opposition implied in it. Instead, even though she introduces another binary structure, her model is characterised by interdependency and the agency of actors engaged in practicing memory. This leads to a second innovation, namely the introduction of power and politics as factors which influence the storage and mediation of memory. In her theory, she is conscious of power as a determining factor in constituting memory, of resistance in the form of counter-memory, and of trauma and repression. Third, she applied her model of memory to complex and stratified modern societies, focussing especially on the configuration of national memory. In the context of Germany, this has contributed a lot to developing an understanding for the ambivalence of Shoah memory in a postnazistic society, which is struggling to develop a culture of remembrance to commemorate a past that cannot be settled (Adorno 1971). Still, Aleida Assmann, too, maintained the bias on high culture by focussing on arts and especially literature. At the same time, she privileged the commemorative aesthetics and practices of the nation-state; and while she contributed to deconstructing the national ideologies engrained in state-sponsored memory, she rather ignored memory practices below, above, or beyond the framework of the nation. Only in recent years, she has extended her concept to include transnational perspectives on memory (Assmann 2017, 2014), building on earlier reflections on the internationalisation of Shoah memory (Assmann 2010).

Another important and already canonised theory of memory is Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, which reinvigorated scholarship on memory at the end of the 1980s (Erll 2005: 23). His approach is based on a diagnosis of rupture between traditional, authentic, and socially integrated milieus of memory and a disintegrated (post-)modern present, which can only get hold of the past by means of fragmentary reconstruction (Nora 2005, 1989). This erosion of memory is a result of the acceleration of history (Nora 1989: 7–9), which profoundly transforms western societies and fuels the emergence of history, heritage, and commemoration as dominant modes of capturing past (Nora 1989: 11–12, 2005). For Nora, this phenomenon has found its most tangible manifestation in the emergence of the so called *lieux de mémoire*.

In a famous definition, he has figuratively described them as "moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (Nora 1989: 12). In another, extended version of his text he added the following description, which neatly complements the previous definition:

> We feel a visceral attachment to that which made us what we are, yet at the same time we feel historically estranged from this legacy, which we must now coolly assess. These *lieux* have

> washed up from a sea of memory in which we no longer dwell: they are partly official and institutional, party affective and sentimental. […] Totemic history has become critical history: it is the age of *lieux de mémoire*. We no longer celebrate the nation, but we study the nation's celebrations (Nora 1997: 7).

In his words, cultural pessimism and nostalgia for an idealised past reverberate strongly. It is a different narrative about the historic processes affecting our conceptions of past, presents, and future in the context of national frameworks than the ones provided by, for instance, Hobsbawm (2004) and Anderson (1991) with their emphasis on the constructedness and contingency of authentic traditions. Like Jan and Aleida Assmann, Nora, too, introduced a binary differentiation, juxtaposing authentic memory with history; conceptualised, however, as an experience of loss and characterised by a profoundly negative outlook on late modernity. Seen from this angle, *lieux de mémoire* are a phenomenon of crisis of cultural and national identity and of the erosion of social milieus in the twentieth century (Erll 2005: 23).

Despite its shortcomings, which reveal quite a bit about Nora's ideological standpoint on contemporary debates on theory within his discipline, the *lieux de mémoire* have developed a remarkable career and remain an inspiring concept for scholarship on memory.[6] The main reason for this is the concept's inherent flexibility to integrate multiple dimensions of cultural phenomena, like materiality, functionality, and symbolism and to contextualise these with memory practices (Erll 2005: 24–25). Even though the concept of the *lieux de mémoire* has been developed against the background of the French memory-nation and is thus burdened by methodological nationalism and an ignorance of French imperialism (Rothberg 2013: 363), it is flexible enough to be adapted to other contexts where comparable preconditions are given.

As Nora emphasised, the heuristic function of his concept is to render *lieu* (site, *Ort*) as an 'immaterial and symbolic parameter' to analyse and explain the 'profound contradiction between remembering of the national kind and the sort of remembering, which is based on a recourse on heritage – and more general, the chasm between national history and national memory, as it was used to be called henceforth' (Nora 2005: 569–570).[7] Consequently, *lieu* does not refer to a physical site per se, even though it clearly has a spatial dimension. More precisely, it designates the location of a historical reference point in time and space, which is embedded in a social context connected to specific memory practices. *Lieux de mémoire* can be places, but also historical or mythological persons and events, even works of art and material and immaterial representations of culture. The concept thus allows to connect heterogeneous and even seemingly disparate phenomena and to

[6] See de Cesari /Rigney 2014: 2; Zimmerer 2013; Erll /Rigney 2012: 1–2; Förster 2010; Francois /Schulze 2009; Erll 2005: 23–25; Francois 2005; Nora 2005: 543–544, 2001; Rigney 2005: 18–19; and Assmann 1999.

[7] My own translation from German: "eine immaterielle und symbolische Größe" (Nora 2005: 569) and "den grundsätzlichen Gegensatz zwischen dem Erinnern der nationalen Art und dem Erinnern, das in der Rückbesinnung auf das Erbe besteht – und allgemeiner, die Kluft zwischen der Nationalgeschichte und dem 'nationalen Gedächtnis', wie man es fortan nannte" (Nora 2005: 570).

contextualise these with the frameworks of particular collectives who constitute themselves through practice as mnemonic communities (Francois /Schulze 2009: 18; Nora 2005: 575; Rigney 2005: 18).

If *lieux de mémoire* exist “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 1989: 7), this makes them a privileged object of research to investigate how and by whom, memory is construed and transmitted. In their capacity to condense “a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs” (Nora 1989: 19), *lieux de mémoire* possess a unique value as indicators for the salience of past within a particular social collective. As Rigney argues, *lieux de mémoire* “elicit intense attention on the part of those doing the remembering and thereby become a self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment” (Rigney 2005: 18). Here, memory is saturated with social meaning, identification, and ideology. It becomes an arena for conflicts and debates over history and identity, as it unfolds the dialectics of inclusion/exclusion and remembering/forgetting. This allows studying memory as social practice from a multitude of different angles, such as the contestation and negotiation of liberation struggle past in a complex and mnemonically fragmented postcolonial society like Namibia.

Ultimately, Halbwachs, J. Assmann and Nora provided powerful models of memory as social and cultural systems, which play a fundamental role in constituting and reproducing societies as mnemonic communities. However, they all fell short of including practice as a category of analysis which moves beyond the level of abstraction. All three theoreticians highlighted the social institutions and agencies involved in memory-making, e.g. school-classes and families (Halbwachs), rituals and festivals (Assmann), historians and commemorative crowds (Nora), yet no one explained memory as something that is done by actors within the social framework of a particular mnemonic community. Aleida Assmann has offered a more nuanced approach in emphasising aspects of power, rule, and political contestation, while also largely remaining at the surface of cultural abstractions. Likewise, none of the canonical scholars paid much attention to the relationship of national memory and colonialism. However, in their wake a rich and variegated scholarly engagement with memory has emerged, which recognised the social, transnational, and postcolonial dimension of memory, but also warrants a more rigorous elaboration of concepts and categories.

Memory as Social Practice

With the emergence of memory studies as an established scholarly field, authors have cautioned against a tendency to use rather broad and imprecise definitions of memory. Gillis has pointed out how memory and identity have become “free floating phenomena” (Gillis 1994: 3), which lose their respective analytical value, and called for conceptual precision. He further cautioned to be aware of how both categories are connected to societal relations of power and utilised as a resource of political mobilisation: “identities and memories are highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular interests and ideological positions. Just as memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries, and, of course, power” (Gillis 1994: 4).

In another take on conceptual differentiation, Berliner has highlighted the blurring of boundaries between memory and the culture concept: “My impression here is that, by a dangerous act of expansion, memory gradually becomes everything which is transmitted across generations, everything stored in culture” (Berliner 2005: 203). In his commentary, in which he particularly criticised Connerton’s *How Societies Remember*, he called on anthropologists to be more rigorous in their use of the concept of memory to understand “the way people remember and forget their past” (Berliner 2005: 206). In the same vein, Kansteiner lamented the ubiquity of psychological and psychoanalytical concepts like trauma or repression in memory studies, which according to him are frequently applied in an inadequate way, i.e. as metaphors for social behaviour even though they originate from individual therapeutic contexts (Kansteiner 2002: 179–180). According to him, this increases the likelihood of categorical mistakes especially when the boundaries between individual and collective frames of reference are blurred (Kansteiner 2002: 185–188). Instead, to avoid essentialising and over-determination, he advocated for a refocusing on the importance of mediation of memory and an empirical investigation of reception: “We have to further collective memory studies by focusing on the communications among memory makers, memory users, and the visual and discursive objects and traditions of representations” (Kansteiner 2002: 197).[8]

Rigney, in yet another call for conceptual clarity, has shifted her analytical focus on the media of memory and subsequent practices of mediation, which are necessary to enable the experience of shared memories for a particular community (Rigney 2005: 15–16). For her, “shared memories of the past are the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2005: 14; see also Erll /Rigney 2012) in the present. Therefore, she advocates “a social-constructivist model that takes as its starting point the idea that memories of a shared past are collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past” (Rigney 2005: 14). Through selection, convergence, recursivity, modelling, translocation and transfer, memory is constituted as a dynamic social process (Rigney 2005: 17–24). This process is not limited to one distinctive mnemonic community, but rather interlinks individuals with multiple communities who themselves are entangled in complex and quite often transnational networks of memory (Rigney 2005: 26; see also de Cesari /Rigney 2014).

A central concept in this context is re-/mediation. As Erll and Rigney (2012) underline, if remembering is understood as social practice and performance, which depends on particular media, it is necessary to analyse the “medial frameworks” (Erll /Rigney 2012: 2) that transmit memory into the public sphere. Drawing on insights of media studies, both conceptualise media “as complex and dynamic systems rather than as a line-up of discrete and stable technologies” (Erll /Rigney 2012: 3). Applied to memory, this implies that every reference to past is already mediated by default, while the construction and stabilisation of *lieux de mémoire* is depending on remediation (Erll /Rigney 2012: 5). Analysing remediation and its particular medialities thus allows to shift the focus on the

[8] It is therefore ironic that Kansteiner maintains the notion of ‘collective memory’ and also uses the concept of ‘historical consciousness’, thus somehow destabilising his own argument.

social actors and agencies that are responsible for that which is or isn't remembered and the form it takes (Erll /Rigney 2012: 9). Like Kansteiner, who also advocates to consider insights of media studies for analysing 'memory users', Neiger, Meyer and Zandberg (2011: 14–15), too, suggest to pay more attention to 'memory agents' like journalists, who act as mediators, as well as to audiences who are recipients of memory. As memory agents and brokers, one might add historians, museum and heritage experts, memory activists, politicians, state bureaucrats, war veterans, and traditional authorities, while audiences of course include both those who are physically present at a particular event and elsewhere in front of television or digital screens (Lentz 2019: 21). This, finally, highlights the *social* in memory.

Halbwachs, Jan and Aleida Assmann, and Nora all referred to collectives, without offering insights on how to operationalise the study of memory in societies, which are constituted of disparate and heterogeneous agencies, milieus, and interest groups when it comes to memory. So neither the notions of 'collective' nor 'cultural' with their essentialist grounding will help to provide the necessary analytical distinction.[9] Like Olick and Robbins, I therefore prefer to speak of social memory,

> as a general rubric for inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged. We refer to distinct sets of mnemonic practices in various social sites, rather than to collective memory as a thing. This approach, we argue, enables us to identify ways in which past and present are intertwined without reifying a mystical group mind (Olick /Robbins 1998: 112).

Such an approach allows to focus on the formats by which re-/mediation is done and to investigate it as a manifestation of social practice.

An early and influential contribution on social memory was Connerton's *How Societies Remember* of 1989. He also took his lead from Halbwachs in emphasising the importance of social frameworks for remembering, while highlighting that the missing link between individual and collective in Halbwachs' theory was communication and transfer (Connerton 2009: 37–39). His approach was innovative in combining a more canonical focus on commemoration with sociological insights on habit memory, performance, and embodiment. For this, he made an important differentiation of bodily practices into 'ceremonies of the body', referring to the ceremonial embodiment of social status; 'proprieties of the body', like certain gestures imbued with social meaning; and 'techniques of the body', which are specific embodied skills reflecting moral values

[9] For useful critiques of 'collective' and 'cultural' memory; see Berliner 2005; Olick 2003; Kansteiner 2002; Werbner 1998a; and Burke 1989. Jan Assmann himself critiqued the concept of 'collective memory' for ignoring individual agency and hypostasising a collective psyche. He advocated his concept of 'cultural memory' (Assmann 1999: 16) instead. The culture concept, however, is equally burdened by an ambivalent track-record of conceptual fuzziness and incoherence when it comes to explaining social phenomena, which makes it difficult to operationalise for analytical use (Lentz 2016a, 2009).

(Connerton 2009: 79–88). This allows to conceptualise, for instance, national commemoration as an embodied practice of social memory that is performed through the bodies of participants such as audiences, politicians, artists, soldiers, and guests of honour, as well as their dress codes, patterns of behaviour, and bodily practices (Connerton 2009: 4–5). His emphasis on embodiment was important to bridge the gap between memory and performance and to open memory studies to sociological inquiry. However, precisely in this regard he, too, remained largely on the level of abstraction. Surprisingly much of his data is derived from literature, ancient mythology, and philosophy – especially in his analysis of commemoration.

Another sociological perspective on the intersubjective dimension of memory has been provided by Zerubavel. He has emphasised the role of "mnemonic socialization" (Zerubavel 1996: 286), which ties individuals to mnemonic communities. It takes place on the level of families, associations, or nations and involves a broad range of practices and media of memory (Zerubavel 1996: 289–293). This experience is a collective one in the sense that it represents the sum of shared memories within a particular community, rather than the sum of individual memories of its members. Accordingly, what is considered as "a single common past that all members of a particular community come to remember collectively" (Zerubavel 1996: 294) is the result of a process of negotiation and consolidation within a mnemonic community. In this context, Zerubavel especially highlights the importance of commemorative events for synchronising the memories of group members into conceptions of a shared past (Zerubavel 1996: 294, 2003, 1981).

While this interrelation of memory and group formation arguably is a constitutive feature of all social collectives which have a concept of shared past, it is of particular relevance in the context of the nation. As one of the most powerful historical and current categories of human differentiation and resources of collective identification, nationality has a significant impact on group formation both on the subnational and transnational level. Throughout my thesis, I will explore this multifaceted and dynamic relation with regard to memory as a social catalyst, which becomes even more complex in a postcolonial setting. In order to provide the conceptual foundation for this analysis, it is important to consider the relationship of memory and nation.

Theorising the Nation

Following Verdery, I conceptualise 'nation' as

> a basic operator in a widespread system of social classification […] an aspect of the political and symbolical /ideological order and also of the world of social interaction and feeling […] an ideological construct essential to assigning subject positions in the modern state, as well as in the international order (Verdery 1993: 37–38).

This definition is useful because it integrates a broad range of theories of nation and nationalism, while also transcending some of their shortcomings. This includes the theories of the constructivist

school of the 1980s with their emphasis on “imagined community” (Anderson 1991), “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm 1983), and nation-building as an act of collective will (Gellner 1983). It also covers the material reality of the nation as a linguistic community (Deutsch 1985), its claims to territoriality (Smith 1991: 14), the belief in shared histories and cultural attributes (Barrington 1997: 713), as well as its ambivalent ability to evoke powerful emotions and mobilise masses for purposes both emancipatory and destructive (Jansen /Borggräfe 2007: 7–9). For as Brubaker (2007: 22) cautions, even if we understand the nation to be a construct based on imagination and ideology it nevertheless has tangible consequences. These may be democratic, by granting citizenship rights; emancipatory, like anticolonial resistance and national liberation struggles; security-related, like border and immigration regimes; or totalitarian, like ideologies of ethno-nationalism, which in their most drastic form can amount to genocide.

Verdery critiques the tendency of many theorists to homogenise the nation by downplaying the agency of people in producing and reproducing the nation (Verdery 1993: 39–41). To her, the nation is a symbol and a resource, which is contested and fought for by some people in active political struggles, while others have a more passive and indifferent stance (Verdery 1993: 41). Both ‘groups’ are important to consider in making qualified statements about people’s relation to nation. Assessing the second group, the ‘silent majority’, however, is a very particular methodological challenge (Verdery 1993: 41). Finally, she also highlights the fact that nation-building quite often is characterised by politics of exclusion and homogenisation, especially given the agency of the state (Verdery 1993: 42–43).

More recent analyses of the nation have taken this emphasis on imagining as social practice more thoroughly into consideration. Based on a study of state-organised cultural performances in postcolonial Tanzania, Askew has proposed to conceptualise the day-to-day negotiation of national belonging as “national imaginaries” (Askew 2002: 273). She demonstrates how nation-building is mediated by performances of music and dance, thus adding nuances to Anderson’s emphasis on mass media while also highlighting that this is not an exclusively top-down process. Rather, nation-building involves all people, both in their everyday routines and as performers and audiences of official events of the state – “even if their engagement takes the form of outright rejection or dismissive disregard” (Askew 2002: 12). For Askew, ‘the people’ consequently are not mere recipients of propaganda of the nation-state, but inseparably involved in producing and imaging the nation, which they either affirm, reject, or ignore: “No amount of rhetoric can construct a nation if it fails to find resonance with the state citizenry” (Askew 2002: 12).

From a similar angle, Roy has analysed the relationship between nation, state, and population as inherently dynamic, exemplified by national ceremonies which she conceptualised as ‘co-productions’ between a multitude of actors, including official state representatives, audiences, and civil society (Roy 2006: 209–210). This observation is important, because it helps to shift the focus of studies of nation and nationalism away from the elite bias of ideology critique, which guides much of the canonical theories (Wimmer 2005: 107–108; Askew 2002: 8–10) and towards an

understanding of nation as social practice (Olick 2003). For this it is of greater analytical value to observe who is engaged in 'doing' the nation, rather than to simply assume its existence.

Functional elites of the nation-state play an important role in nation-building, as politicians, members of government, bureaucrats in the culture and education sector, or museum and heritage practitioners. So do actors and institutions, which have a stake in national affairs like political parties, labour unions, traditional authorities, churches, artists, human rights organisations, veterans' associations, dissidents, and scholars. Finally, the 'normal' citizenry of a nation-state is relevant as a demographic group involved in nation-building, which however is methodologically more challenging to observe and investigate. In the interplay of these different agencies, nation is produced as a collaborative process; as "practices that occur, institutional arrangements that are continually enacted and reenacted" (Olick 2003: 5). These practices are affected by relations of power and rule, both on the level of the nation-state and in the arena of international politics. They can be conflictive, but equally based on coexistence and compromise.

As with memory, it is important to differentiate concepts in approaching the nation analytically. For Barrington, nationalism is "the pursuit – through argument or other activity – of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty" (Barrington 1997: 714). His definition is a political one and puts a strong emphasis on boundary work, tied to territoriality and group formation. Both have to be discernible in order to avoid a 'loose use' of concepts. Barrington's definition is useful in analysing political struggles of collectives for national recognition, but it fails to offer nuanced perspectives on, for instance, competing nationalisms within a territorially bounded nation-state. Here, Verdery provides a more suitable approach. She defines nationalism as "the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use […] a quintessentially homogenizing, differentiating, or classifying discourse" (Verdery 1993: 38). As she underlines, nationalism is not an actor in its own right, but something people do: a social practice within a complex field of agencies, engaged in competition over the nation as a symbol.

Another important differentiation regards the formal and informal relationships that people have with (a) particular nation(s). If we reject the notion of national identity for its problematic tendency to essentialise and collectivise (Gillis 1994; Handler 1994: 29; Verdery 1993: 39–40), it is preferable to use concepts in analysing national subjectivities, which relate as closely as possible to a given phenomenon. Verdery favours 'nationness' in contradistinction to nationalism, where more mundane forms of affirming national belonging are meant (Verdery 1993: 41). Jansen and Borggräfe (2007: 16) speak of 'nationalities' in the plural to designate collectives that are either living within a state or pursue a political project to establish a nation-state.

Finally, it is equally important to differentiate between the nation and the state. As Barrington highlights, "[a] state […] is the principal political unit in the international political system

corresponding to a territory, a relatively permanent population, and a set of ruling institutions" (Barrington 1997: 713). From this emphasis on territoriality follows that nationalist movements usually strive to acquire the control of a particular land on which to establish a nation-state, to take control of an existing state within a particular territory, to add more land to an already existing nation-state, or to secede a particular territory from an existing state in order to establish a sovereign nation-state. While it is important to analytically separate nation and state, Becker and Lentz have underlined the fundamental connection of both. In providing a material infrastructure like schools and bureaucracies, and a symbolic dimension like national symbols and rituals, the state is acting as the most important nation-builder (Becker /Lentz 2013: 2–3; see also McCrone 2000: 85–101). As Roy (2006: 206) has pointed out with regard to the postcolonial nation-state, state-building and nation-building are two distinct phenomena, which, however, are inseparably intertwined. This is especially relevant where the state is providing the publicness that is necessary for mediating national symbolism and, by means of commemoration, memory (Roy 2006: 208–209).

Memory, Nation, History

In a poignant aphorism, Olick described how "[m]emory as has long been the handmaiden of nationalist zeal, history its high counsel" (Olick 2003: 1). The triadic relationship between memory, nation, and history constitutes one of the major angles, by which the dialectical process of remembering and forgetting within nation-building has been analysed since the constructivist turn.[10] The malleability of the past is one precondition for this process in order to construct suitable images of history that provide resources of political legitimacy and identification for those who engage in doing nation. In this context, memory has proven to be a particularly powerful agent of turning unmarked past into marked national history, while the role of historians in this has equally been emphasised (N'Guessan 2020: 84–113; Assmann 2006: 37–51, 2003: 78; Nora 2005; Hobsbawm 2004: 11–12; Burke 1989).

However, it is misleading to characterise memory as something that is synonymous with history. Both are obviously related and depend on each other (Assmann 2006: 51), but they are not the same. Rather, they should be seen as two modalities of framing and conceptualising past for particular purposes (Erll 2005: 44–45). In this interdependency, the relationship of history and memory is inherently productive. Burke (1989) has emphasised the importance of deconstructing the discipline's claim to objectivity and to understand history's agency in re-/producing national mythologies. Still, he does not advocate for an equation of history and memory, but rather sees the first as a regulating corrective for the latter: "I prefer to see historians as the guardians of awkward facts, the skeletons in the cupboard of social memory" (Burke 1989: 110). While the rise of public history and memory activism has proven that social memory can also be an instance of questioning

[10] See Connerton 2009: 16, 51–52; Assmann 2006: 12–47, 2003: 77–83, 139; Turner 2006; Francois /Schulze 2005; Nora 2005, 1989; Hobsbawm 2004; Hodgkin /Radstone 2003; Olick 2003; Zerubavel 2003; McCrone 2000: 44–63; Gillis 1994; Koselleck 1994; and Anderson 1991: 187–206.

history's blank spots and 'skeletons' (Rothberg 2013), the relationship of historians to memory is one of particular importance for my analysis. When it comes to national memory, historians are in a position as actors and brokers for the mediation of particular memories. Not only by means of their texts, which can assume canonical status and challenge, subvert, or legitimise particular narratives. They are also active as professionals and practitioners in fields adjacent to academic history, like the museum and heritage sector or cultural policy, just like they are archivists or politicians. It is especially in this field, where the contact zone between history and memory becomes particularly blurred and dynamic.

My study took place within the larger framework of a comparative project at JGU Mainz on the "Poetics and Politics of National Commemoration in Africa" on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of independence from colonial foreign rule.[11] One striking result of the various projects, despite their highly different case studies, was the importance and resilience of the nation as a source of identification and point of reference in many African states. However much the object of passionate debate and contestation, the nation nevertheless was something that affected people to position themselves vis-à-vis other categories of belonging, like ethnicity, religion, political orientation, and historical legacies (Gabriel /Lentz /N'Guessan 2016; Lentz 2013a, 2013b, 2011; Lentz /Kornes 2011). These findings correspond with Brubaker's assessment that the nation-state has not only maintained, but eventually extended its importance as "locus of belonging" (Brubaker 2015: 133). In Namibia, despite its more recent national independence, this turned out to be not very much different. As I will explore in the following chapter more thoroughly, concepts and practices of the nation in Namibia represent universal trends and traditions, just like they reflect the very particular and unique history of Namibia's long struggle for national independence. This struggle was as much a manifestation of domestic nationalism, as it was embedded in the dynamics of international diplomacy and transnational, Panafrican, and socialist solidarity.

Against this background, any analytical approach which focuses on memory as a resource of group formation necessarily has to be cognisant of the pitfalls of methodological nationalism (de Cesari /Rigney 2014; Arndt /Häberlen /Reinecke 2011). Since memory is inherently social and political, this encompasses small-scale collectives like families, associations, or traditional communities, as well as transnational frames of belonging, e.g. within groups bound together through diasporic, religious, or political commonalities. Concepts like entangled history (Randeria /Römhild 2013; Randeria 1999) or global history (Conrad 2013) have proven useful in opening up analytical spaces to trace and connect the heterogeneous nodes of different temporal, spatial, and social orders in the globalised world.

[11] Inspired by the pomp and pageantry of Ghana's fifth anniversary of independence in 2007, the project sought to investigate the independence jubilees and cinquantenaires that swept the African continent in 2010 on broad comparative basis; see Lentz /Kornes 2011; Lentz 2011; as well as contributions in *Nations and Nationalism* Vol.19 Nr.2 (2013) and *Anthropology Southern Africa* Vol.36 Nr.1&2 (2013).

For Randeria, entangled history allows to deconstruct dichotomies like western/non-western or modern/traditional (Randeria 1999: 91–92) and to render palpable 'multilateral historic configurations' (Randeria 1999: 93). This is of particular importance in the context of postcolonial states and especially erstwhile settler colonies, where such configurations do not only characterise the relationship with former colonial powers, but also the complex and often contentious internal composition of society (Elkins /Pedersen 2005: 16–18; Mamdami 2001). As Conrad and Randeria (2002: 40) maintain, the concept of entanglement can help to transcend Eurocentric perspectives and methodological nationalism, without abandoning national history as a point of reference. It makes possible to move beyond national and cultural boundaries and to analyse the exchange, flow, and translation of ideas, practices, models, and institutions (Behrends /Park /Rottenburg 2014; Rottenburg 2002: 14–18). While entangled history has proven immensely helpful and inspiring for postcolonial memory studies, it is also important to reflect on its methodological applicability to avoid categorical mistakes and skewed comparisons (Arndt /Häberlen /Reinecke 2011: 12–16).

In order to fuse transnational entanglement and memory as concepts, it makes sense to reconsider Appadurai's (1991) model of 'scapes' within globalisation and to conceptualise the existence of global memory-scapes. In this, my understanding of memory-scape differs from the one proposed by Endensor (1997), who analysed memorial culture in Stirling in the context of Scottish nationalism, as well as Hanu's (2015) analysis of urban spaces in post-socialist Romania. Both analyse memory-scapes as tangible material landscapes of memory within more or less delimited areas. For this, I prefer to speak of *memorial landscapes*, in the sense laid out by Savage (2009: 1–22). I use the term memory-scape to describe a historically evolved, transnationally configured experiential and communicative social context within which heterogeneous mnemonic communities engage in the mediation of memory. In my case, as I will explain in the next chapter in more detail, this refers in particular to the existence of a (post-)socialist memory-scape within a global South-South context.

Regardless of whether mnemonic communities constitute themselves sub- or transnationally, in their existence they thus challenge purely national frameworks of conceptualising memory. The seemingly banal fact that memory is always plural and entangled, tying most people to multiple mnemonic communities at the same time (Gillis 1994: 15), can become a source of contestation over representation within a nation-state. At the same time, this plurality seldom coincides with the borders of a nation-state, thus challenging its authority over representation of a particular history. Since past is a resource, and a 'scarce' one at that (Appadurai 1981; see also Röschenthaler 2005: 147), it is inevitably the object of contestation (Hodgkin /Radstone 2003; Olick /Robbins 1998: 122–129; Zerubavel 1996: 295–297; Gillis 1994). From a perspective of political anthropology, studying memory thus allows to gain privileged insights on processes of group formation, identity politics, and struggles over recognition. This is of particular salience in the context of national and postcolonial settings, where struggles over 'useable pasts' are often tied to questions of political representation and unequal power relations. While this will be one important focus of my study, it is

important to underline that memory should also not be conceptualised exclusively in terms of conflict and antagonism.

For this purpose, Rothberg (2014, 2013, and 2009) has provided an important contribution with his concept of multidirectional memory. As his starting point, Rothberg describes a debate in the USA in which the commemoration of slavery and of the Shoah appeared as incommensurate, antagonising African-American and Jewish claims to recognition of historical injustices (Rothberg 2009: 1–3). For Rothberg, this competitiveness over memory is characterised by "logic of scarcity" (Rothberg 2009: 2), which is a prevalent feature of diverse societies who are made up of a plurality of mnemonic communities striving for acknowledgement. He critiques this focus on contestation that dominates much of public and academic discourse on memory. Instead, he proposes to "consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (Rothberg 2009: 3). Elsewhere, he added that

> multidirectionality is meant to capture the non-zero-sum dynamics of remembrance in a culturally heterogeneous, multipolar world. That is, I suggest that all acts of memory that enter public space necessarily enter simultaneously into dialogue with practices and traditions of memory that seem at first distant from them; this dialogue is above all *productive*, even if it is also at times filled with tension and even violence (Rothberg 2014: 654; his emphasis).

This implies a repudiation of the equation of memory and identity, which often tends to inform debates over memory, turning them into political contests over recognition. Drawing on Radstone's understanding of memory as "located" and "specific to its site of production and practice" (Radstone 2011: 114), Rothberg applies his model more specifically to transnational contexts. He proposes to analyse multidirectional memory as a phenomenon that "overflows the boundaries of given identities, including nations, memory groups, and other communities" (Rothberg 2014: 654).

Rothberg's approach is useful in shifting our analytical perspective away from the binary oppositions and foci on counter-memories, which so strongly influences the study of memory, as well as its frequent methodological nationalism. Instead, his concept allows to consider solidarity and coexistence as equivalent to conflict, contestation, and trauma, while being open to the "processual and relational dimensions of remembrance, to the fact that remembrance always performs and evokes more than appears on the surface" (Rothberg 2014: 654). Rothberg's concept is applicable to processes and practices of memory within a national framework, as well as to such which are below or beyond the level of the nation-state. Especially when it comes to memory which is connected to diasporic communities and transnational solidarity, this is an important and insightful contribution of great relevance to my case studies. The challenge will be to balance the different agencies involved with the dominance, which the nation wields as a concept and its normative, ideological, and institutional manifestation in the form of the nation-state.

Media and Practices of National Commemoration

Commemoration is one of the most tangible intersections of memory and nation, which has inspied a rich body of scholarship on commemoration in the framework of the nation, with its focus mostly on ceremonies and political rituals of the nation-state.[12] A useful definition has been provided by Charles Turner who has conceptionalised commemoration as

> all those devices through which a nation recalls, marks, embodies, discusses or argues about its past, and to all those devices which are intended to create or sustain a sense of belonging or 'we feeling' in the individuals who belong to it. [... Commemoration] includes public rituals of remembrance and individual acts of recollection, the building of monuments and dedication of places of memory, the construction of museums and the naming of streets, the visiting of such places, public debates over the meaning and significance of historical events, and the unspoken or gestural ways through which nationality is not so much represented as incorporated in the practices of everyday life (Turner 2006: 206).

Turner's definition encompasses a broad range of heterogeneous medialities as well as the social dimension of collective remembering and it frames commemoration as a national affair. It is important, however, to emphasise that commemoration also affects other dimensions of social life that extend Turner's definition: as bodily practice (Connerton 2009: 72), as communal memory events (Kössler 2015: 171–219, 2010a), as international travelling models (Williams /Holland /Barringer 2010; Williams 2007), or among transnational mnemonic communities (de Cesari /Rigney 2014; Leggewie 2011: 15–45). Turner himself concedes to this in his call for "a critical hermeneutics of commemoration as part of a broader ethnography of nationhood" (Turner 2006: 212). According to him, "[s]uch a hermeneutics would accord due weight to the aesthetics of public commemoration, an aesthetics in which embodied and habitual memory was given its place alongside that of representational memory" (Turner 2006: 212).

Turner's plea for an emphasis on aesthetics is echoed by Savage's critical assessment that scholarship on commemoration still falls short of explaining "the actual impact of all these practices" on "individuals, families, and communities across long spans of time (Savage 2006: n.p.). In taking both Turner and Savage seriously, I aim at focussing on the aesthetics as well as on the social dimension of commemoration. Only in this duality does it make sense to conceptualise commemoration as a social practice for mediating memory in the framework of the nation. For this,

[12] The amount of studies and conceptual overviews is exhausting. Very useful for this thesis proved Lentz /Lowe 2018; Becker /Lentz 2013; Erll /Rigney 2012; Olick /Vinitzky-Seroussi /Levy 2011: 13–15; Connerton 2009: 41–71; Savage 2009; Assmann 2007: 61–65, 1999; Elgenius 2007, 2005; Williams 2007; Assmann 2006, 2005, 2003, 1999; Roy 2006; Turner 2006; Nora 2005; Rigney 2005; Knauer /Walkowitz 2004; Olick 2003; Zerubavel 2003, 1996, 1981: 70–100; Borsdorf /Grütter 1999; Werbner 1998a, 1998b; Witz 2003; Gillis 1994; Koselleck 1994; and Ozouf 1975.

it is of central importance to consider the specific mediality of the formats and practices, which are necessary in order for commemoration to be effective.

Media of memory can be conceptualised in a narrow, media studies-oriented sense as media which contain and convey mediatised representations, like newspapers, paintings, films, photographs, or books, involved in establishing and stabilising frameworks of social remembrance (Erll /Rigney 2012: 1; Zerubavel 1996: 289–293). As Halbwachs (1991: 51) already noted in 1939, media of memory are effective if, and because, they are 'with us' and part of our daily lives. In our time, digital social networks are an important and ever-expanding media for the remediation of memory (Neiger /Meyers /Zandberg 2011), with still insufficiently analysed impact on social memory. Kansteiner has noted the fruitfulness of applying insights of media studies for an analysis of memory. He conceptualises media of memory as "multimedia collages" (Kansteiner 2002: 190), which have a discursive, visual, and spatial dimension and encompass media as different as literature, pop culture, etymology, infrastructure, and monuments. He cautions not to over-determine either human nor media agency in the process of reconstructing past, but to focus on the recipients of mediated memory – and to rely on sound empirical data (Kansteiner 2002: 192–195). In a broader sense, already suggested by Kansteiner and explained by Turner in the context of national commemoration, media of memory can also be conceptualised as all 'devices', formats, practices, or institutions which play a role in mediating (national) memory: museums and monuments, statues and commemorative plaques, exhibitions, heritage sites, oral tradition, archives, architecture, ruins, graves and cemeteries, performances, music, crafts and arts, commemorative and entertainment events.[13]

In this study, I analyse 'classic' media of national commemoration like the commemorative calendar of public national holidays, memory events, museums and monument sites. In doing this, I will build upon the well-established body of scholarship and knowledge that has highlighted the importance of these media for the materialisation and reproduction of national imaginaries. As I will demonstrate, these 'classic' formats are of great relevance in Namibia, where the 'old nation' of European provenience is the guiding model for the ruling party's nation-building policy (du Pisani 2010a: 9–10), albeit within the context of a specific Southern African postcolonial context. State-sponsored museum and memorial projects, public commemoration of the liberation struggle, the veneration of war veterans, decolonisation of public spaces, programmes to educate the youth about national history and foster patriotism: all these are distinctive features of political culture in independent Namibia, passionately supported, contested, or met with indifference by different segments of society. Looking at media of national commemoration as social practice will thus allow analysing the polysemy and intersections of memory in a complex postcolonial society as Namibia. At the same time, I will follow the suggestion of the media studies approach to consider these media not as passive, but active "memory agents" (Neiger /Meyers /Zandberg 2011: 2; see also Erll

[13] For this, I mainly refer to Erll /Rigney 2012: 9; Assmann 2007, 2003: 15; Nora 2005: 544–553; Knauer /Walkowitz 2004: 9; Borsdorf /Grütter 1999: 4–6; Zerubavel 1996: 291–293; and Burke 1989: 100–102.

/Rigney 2012: 3). Commemorative events of the nation-state, national days, museums and monuments are sets of social, institutional, aesthetic, and discursive practices; their mediality and materiality matters. I will treat them as process, rather than fixed entities embodying ideology, while cognisant of the power relations they reflect.

Each case-study will focus on a particular medium of memory and its specific significance, yet all will be assembled into a grand tableau of the media and practices of national commemoration in postcolonial Namibia. One important section of media is official national holidays, which commemorate significant episodes of Namibia's liberation struggle history. Another is a prestigious museum and memorial complex, dedicated as well to the struggle for liberation and national independence. Regional commemoration and ceremonial hero veneration are other media which play a role. All these do not exist separately of each other, but are interconnected, intertwined, and interdependent on many levels. It is this interwoven nature of commemorative media and practices, which is of particular interest for my analysis. Still, in order to conceptualise my theoretical approach more succinctly, some explanations are needed regarding the categorical differentiation of media of memory.

Time and the Nation: Commemorative Days as Monuments in Time

In his study on 'imagined communities', Anderson emphasised the importance of shifting apprehensions of time for the genesis of the modern nation. As an underlying effect of modernity and accompanying the consolidation of modern nation-states, the shift from circular to linear conceptions of time allowed for new forms of social synchrony and group formation, measured by clock and calendar (Anderson 1991: 22–36). Anderson's observations on the temporality of the nation have an important precursor in Walter Benjamin's musings on the memory politics of the French Revolution. He perceptively noted the utopian character of the revolutionaries' commemorative calendar, which assembled days as "monuments of a historical consciousness" (Benjamin 2007: 261–262). Building on this observation, Zerubavel describes the French revolutionary calendar as "undoubtedly the most radical attempt in modern history to have challenged the standard temporal reference framework that prevails in the world today" (Zerubavel 1981: xiv). It served as a mnemonic structuring device to mark the new temporal order of the revolution and unmark the established religious time frame of the old order, by not only introducing new, secular holidays, but also a completely new way of measuring time, weeks and months, including a novel new year (Zerubavel 1981: 82–96; Ozouf 1975).[14]

[14] According to Zerubavel, the calendar's explicit antichristian stance was the reason that it ultimately failed to be adopted by the French population. Furthermore, the calendar was introduced in an age already characterised by increasing global entanglement and temporal synchronisation, precipitating globalisation, and as such rather isolated France internationally (Zerubavel 1981: 87–88; 95–100). Another comparably radical calendrical reform was established in North Korea in 1997, when Kim Il-sung's year of birth 1912 was designated to mark year one in the history of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Kornes 2019a: 146–147).

With his ‘sociology of time’, Zerubavel has carved out the importance of calendars for “solidifying in-group sentiments as well as establishing intergroup boundaries to separate group members from ‘outsiders’” (Zerubavel 1981: xiii). Calendars imbue time with meaning and play a role in the formation of mnemonic communities, by means of constructing collective pasts in carefully selected episodes, often after the change of political regimes: revolution in France, reunification in Germany, independence in Namibia. With regard to the nation, commemorative days thus serve as ‘monuments in time’ (Assmann 2005: 313) to capture and frame national mythologies as official national pasts through the sequencing and marking of a national time (McCrone /McPherson 2009; Etzioni 2004; Zerubavel 2003). As such, commemorative calendars are a case in point for “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm 2004) in the emergence of modern nation-states, even though the process of imagining collective past via temporal synchronisation constitutes a general feature of social group formation (Zerubavel 1981: 1–30).

Mnemonic communities consolidate and structure memory selectively; in temporal intervals with dense signification (marked) and such with little signification (unmarked). This allows to de-/emphasise events according to their significance and to ignore others which are either considered uneventful or undesirable to remember. As social indicators, national commemorative calendars thus provide insights not only on that which is remembered in an official and institutionalised form, but also what is not remembered (Zerubavel 2003: 315–316). Through the sequencing of temporal fragments into an authoritative account and “mnemonic synchronization” (Zerubavel 2003: 317) by means of regular repetition, the commemorative calendar establishes, solidifies, and reproduces “a dramatic narrative that encodes temporality, and therefore, history” (Handelman 1998: 191). Here, it is of particular importance which dates are chosen to represent the individual chapters that constitute the authoritative account. Usually, one day is of outstanding significance, symbolically tied to the founding of the nation-state. For a majority of African states, including Namibia, this is the day of formal independence from colonial rule. Other holidays may refer to noteworthy events from the era of a recent national liberation struggle, or even mythologised events in deep history (Witz 2003: 1–29; Zerubavel 2003: 322).

Next to providing insights about the construction of national time and history, commemorative calendars and the public holidays they are made of are also occasions to analyse “nation building in the making” (Kornes 2015a: 29). As the project on Independence Day jubilee celebrations in Africa at JGU Mainz has shown in great comparative detail, national days are complex events composed of a multitude of individual elements. This includes political ceremonies of the nation-state like speeches, swearing-in’s, parades, or the bestowal of decorations, which affirm state, nation, and civic values (Gabriel /Lentz /N’Guessan 2020; Becker /Lentz 2013; Lentz 2013a, 2013b), cultural performances (Akuupa /Kornes 2013), administrative and organisational routines (Mauer /Gabriel /Liebisch 2011), representations of history (N’Guessan 2013; Kornes 2011: 218–221), seating orders (Gabriel /Lentz /N’Guessan 2016), or sports and music concerts (Kornes 2015a: 42–43).

It is of course possible to consider national day celebrations in their totality as political rituals: on the one hand, because of their repetitive and structuring character (Turner 2006: 210), on the other, because they serve to legitimise power and political orders (Boholm 1996: 4). However, it is equally important to acknowledge the inherent and eclectic structural diversity of the event and to disentangle it into sub-units, more suitable for an analytical approach. Furthermore, even the solemnest of commemorations usually includes some elements of popular entertainment, which blurs strict categorical distinctions between commemoration and celebration, feast and festival, or – as Etzioni (2004: 11) proposed – 'recommitment' and 'tension management' holidays. The celebration of national days and the commemoration of significant events of the dramatic narrative of the nation should therefore be conceptualised as "total events, comprised of a multitude of heterogeneous elements, all engaged in one grand orchestration to ceremonially re/imagine, re/enact and re/affirm the nation" (Kornes 2015a: 31).

As such, national days embody the "Mythomotorik" (Assmann 2007: 76–80) of a particular national narrative, which is ascribed to them both by organisers and audiences. They further represent the evolving script and the practice of an institutional agency in enacting and reproducing said narrative. Seen from the perspective of actors and institutions, national days thus function as media for the transmission and remediation of memory, which can be analysed in the context of, for instance, the enactment of a dramatic narrative (Handelman 1998), the 'co-production' of a national public (Roy 2006), or the politics of remembering independence (Lentz /Lowe 2018). As an analytical category, national days or political national holidays more generally also offer insights about the position of the event in relation to structural aspects of the temporal sequence of particular days (Kornes 2019b; Zerubavel 2003: 318, 1981: 1–19). This can refer to that which is stable, fixed, and established, like certain elements of state protocol. It can also highlight shifts of procedural routines or symbolism, which may characterise new political orders and regimes or, less incisive, the nuanced politics of a new administration.

This is of heightened significance in the context of independence anniversaries. The African independence jubilees in 2010 were "condensed moments of nation-building and state-making that enhanced citizens' emotional attachment to their country" (Lentz 2013a: 218). This entailed critique as much as a sense of bonding over shared hardships and a collective reflection on the past, present, and future of the nation. The analytical value of these events therefore lies in the insights they provide about the self-representation of the state and the way, its political and functional elites want the populace to perceive the nation-state (Lentz 2013a: 218–219; Elgenius 2005: 363–365). At the same time, as Roy has emphasised, national days are also characterised by "extraordinariness" and "ordinariness" (Roy 2006: 208); a dynamic interrelation, which facilities the event's capability to generate a particular public. Therefore, it is important to consider who attends and who avoids a particular event. How are audiences composed, how do they interact, participate, what kind of clothes do they wear; what are people actually doing at an event? Likewise, people may have good reason to 'shun' national events, as I will discuss in the subsequent chapters.

Just as much, however, one should be careful with simplistic explanations and avoid to read participation and absence as political statements per se. While for some people a national day ceremony may be a national event, for other people it can be related to government policy or an affair of the state. Identification with these different instances can be congruous or conflictive, and even irrelevant, when people attend for the sole purpose of being entertained.[15] Interpreting audience behaviour therefore turns out to be a methodological challenge, with obvious pitfalls. For this reason, the perspective of audiences both present and absent will play an important role in my case studies on commemorative events.

The Aesthetics and Politics of Memorialisation: Museums, Monuments, and Memorial Sites

Next to national days and commemorative events, another classic set in the "repertoire of memorial devices" (Turner 2006: 209) of national commemoration are museums, monuments, and memorial sites. For Borsdorf and Grütter, these sites constitute 'forms of hypostasised memory' and 'instances for the interpretation of past', which are interwoven with the onset of European nationalism.[16] The authors employ a gradual differentiation between statues/monuments, memorial sites and museums, where they describe the first as a specifically emotional and aesthetic form of memorialisation, while the second allows for a more reflexive approach without abandoning the authority of 'authentic' space. Museums, finally, are conceptualised as 'sites of latency', which leave space for diverse interpretation (Borsdorf /Grütter 1999: 6). Their approach to consider museums, monuments, and memorial sites as one group of media of memory is useful in order to conceptualise its interrelatedness in the context of commemoration. And while of course it makes sense to develop a heuristic model to work out the respective differentials of these media, I propose to see the strength of an inclusive approach precisely in the categorical fuzziness that comes with it. For, as my case studies will show, boundaries are often vague, forcing us to reconsider ideal-types and Eurocentric models and definitions.

For instance, in the case of the Independence Memorial Museum in Windhoek, the institution carries its hybrid nature already in name. As Williams (2007) has analysed in a seminal study, memorial museums are a fairly recent and globally proliferating model for commemorating atrocities, characterised precisely by its blurring of categories. Drawing on James Young, he argues that

> monuments are best seen as a subset of memorials, characterized by their physical appearance. That is, a *monument* is a sculpture, structure or physical marker designed to memorialize. A *museum*, as we know, is an institution devoted to the acquisition, conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation of objects with scientific,

[15] On the importance of entertainment to attract specific audiences at Independence Day celebrations; see Kornes 2015: 42 and Späth 2013: 264–265 on Namibia and Madagascar, respectively.
[16] My own translation from German: "Formen der vergegenständlichten Erinnerung"; "Interpretationsinstanzen der Vergangenheit" (Borsdorf /Grütter 1999: 6).

> historical, or artistic value. I use the term *memorial museum* to identify a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind. A final term, the memorial *site*, is used to describe physical locations that serve a commemorative function, but are not necessarily dominated by a built structure (Williams 2007: 8; his emphases)

As I will demonstrate, this categorical indeterminacy is not merely an expression of the productive dual function of museums as "warehouses of the past and repositories of national narratives" (Knauer /Walkowitz 2004: 8; see also Assmann 2007). It also challenges the very notion of what constitutes museums and museum work. In the case of the IMM, this will allow for interesting observations when taking into account that the Namibian museum is based on a North Korean model, which has been undergoing a process of cultural translation to fit a Southern African context.

Likewise, in assessing the mnemonic 'imperative' (Borsdorf /Grütter 1999: 6) of statues or monuments, one needs to consider which target audience they have been built for. Do they mark urban, public space and as such impact on cityscapes, which are often constituted by complex and contested layers of memory, cast in concrete, bronze, and marble (Knauer /Walkowitz 2004: 8)? Are they located in peripheries of the nation-state and thus hardly accessible for ordinary citizens, catering for a small elite and/or exclusive mnemonic community (Werbner 1998a: 8)? Are they monuments built by dominant groups, classes, or parties, thus representing an authoritative memory, bent on prospectively remembering itself (Assmann 2003: 138; Alexander /McGregor /Ranger 2000: 254–256)? Or are they statues and monuments built by local communities, clans and families or minority groups to commemorate communal, marginalised, or dissident histories (Assmann 2003: 139; Hodgkin /Radstone 2003; Assmann 1999; Gillis 1994: 16)? Have statues lost their purpose and meaning in the era of decolonisation (Elago 2015); have they even lost their heads, as symbols for the vulnerability of memory (Lentz 2016b)? And what about monuments that are absent, either because they have been removed or never been built at all (Knauer /Walkowitz 2004: 14)?

These are pertinent questions which challenge clear-cut definitions and call for conceptual and analytical openness. This refers as much to the relation between museums, monuments, and memorial sites on the one hand, and between memorialisation and commemorative events on the other hand. As I will demonstrate throughout my thesis, as media of memory and commemoration these are interlinked and interwoven on many levels. Regarding museums, monuments, and memorial sites, I will consider them as media of memory within the framework of national commemoration in Namibia, focussing on their spatial locatedness, aesthetics, medialities, and histories. In doing so, I am interested as much in their material features as in their capacity to mediate memory, whether in discourse, popular-culture, or practices of appropriation; both affirmatively and in contestation.

My understanding of monuments and memorial sites has been shaped by Kirk Savage's scholarship on contested memorialisation in the USA (Savage 2009, 2006). His question, whether

monuments are still of relevance in our digital age and able to affect popular sentiment (Savage 2009: 1), was a rhetorical one already at the time of publishing *Monument Wars*. Since then, popular movements like Rhodes Must Fall or Black Lives Matter have been emerging on a global scale and politicising monuments, turning them into powerful foci of public awareness. It is in this context that I analyse museums, monuments, and memorial sites as media of memory that matter in Namibia's postcolonial and post-apartheid society, just like they do elsewhere.

While I will consider contestation where it is of relevance, it is important to highlight that media of memory are neither mere cultural or aesthetic artefacts nor perpetual objects of dispute. Instead, they are embedded in institutional practices, bureaucratic routines, and national policies; they are maintained and managed, visited and appropriated, cherished and neglected. It is this tension between their mundane presence and their political effervescence, which reveals these media as productive, dynamic, and interrelated sites for the mediation of memory. In this context, it is of central importance to also look at the actors, who are involved in this process. According to Förster, focussing on memory brokers provides a privileged perspective on the agencies who engage in 'co-fabricating', interpreting, and contesting memory; in remembering and forgetting. Furthermore, it allows analysing mnemonic communities as plural and internally diversified groups of actors (Förster 2010: 347). This is an important aspect to consider in particular when states, governments, or ruling parties are portrayed as quasi-actors, rather than complex and stratified agencies, involved in the mediation of memory.

An important focus will be on formats of memorialisation that serve to commemorate Namibians who died in the liberation struggles, alternatively as heroes, victims, martyrs, or enemies. Anderson (1991: 9–10) has early on highlighted the importance of dead people for nationalism to foster a religion-like culture of remembrance and national martyrdom. As Koselleck (1994: 9) maintains, this 'political cult of the dead' is not only an important feature of national commemoration, but rests at the very foundation of history. Monuments and memorials, dedicated to unknown soldiers, victims of war and war-crimes, including genocide, give meaning to violent death, demarcate collectives and political subjectivities, and assign guilt and responsibilities, all embedded in narratives of historical legitimacy. Death and suffering are valorised as a sacrifice for the (national) collective, so that commemoration acquires the status of a secular political cult of the dead, with monuments to the Unknown Soldiers as its central sites (Koselleck 1994: 14–15).

While Koselleck writes about national commemoration in the context of European modernity, Verdery (1999) has extended his approach to the political cult of the dead in (post-)socialist societies. In particular, she focused on reburials as a political practice which highlights the re-evaluation of certain eras or personalities after changed regimes and revolutions, and the way by which dead people are turned into political symbols (Verdery 1999: 1–3). She makes an important distinction in two categories of dead people, i.e. those who are named and famous, and those who are nameless and anonymous (Verdery 1999: 4). Those who are named and famous are remembered and sacralised as individuals by means of statues – which on occasion may be iconoclastically

overturned and desacralised. These dead are accorded reburials and the ceremonial repatriation of human remains, sometimes they are even put on display (Verdery 1999: 5–20). This is different, when it comes to the politics of the anonymous dead, especially those killed in acts of war and mass violence:

> Through them, not individual/national biographies but entire social categories (‘fascists’, a specific generation, ‘Serbs’, etc.) are repositioned or associated with different sets of values. Dead-body politics of this sort have the important effect of inserting such reevaluation directly into the lives of persons, families, and small groups, through visceral processes of reburial and grieving or even vengeance. The political consequences of such events depend on variations in the numbers and kinds of nameless dead and the causes of their deaths (Verdery 1999: 20)

This is of central importance for my analysis, on two levels. First, reburials – both of individuals and anonymous victims of war crimes and genocide – feature prominently in my research. This puts the agency of both the living and the dead into the spotlight, as well as the unsettling materiality of dead people and their unburied human remains (Fontein 2010, 2009: 21–22). Second, as a very specific category of commemoration, reburials intersect on many levels with all the various media of memory outlined above: reburials take place on significant political national holidays, they are ceremonies replete with political and cultural significance, they are accompanied by memorialisation, and they are material and symbolic arenas for the negotiation of national past. Ultimately, they are key sites for the mediation of liberation memory and powerful catalysts to unveil that which is agreed upon and contested when the living speak for the dead.

Summary

In conclusion, the focus of my study is on commemorative practices of different mnemonic communities, which are connected to different eras and events of the Namibian liberation struggle history. These practices include different media of memory, tied to various spatial and temporal frames of reference, which transcend a narrow understanding of the nation as a territorially, culturally, and historically bounded entity. In light of this diversity, it makes sense to consider the relevant actor groups as equally diverse and multifaceted, at times antagonising, cooperating, or coexisting. This also includes a dimension of power relations resulting from Namibia’s postcolonial situation with its complex interplay of categories of differentiation like race, class, and ethnicity.

Based on the preceding discussion of theory, I will apply a model of commemoration as social practice which is cognisant of this multi-layered arrangement. It considers memory along five interrelated dimensions as (1) socially mediated, (2) temporally and (3) spatially situated, (4) transnational and (5) embedded in a postcolonial framework. First, memory is always social and mediated by and between individuals and collectives. It is both cohesive and divisive and constitutes groups by demarcating insiders and outsiders. As a resource for group formation and identification,

it is cherished, cultivated, and contested. Second, memory structures time by connecting generations through communicative relations and commemorative devices, which interlink past and future in the present. Third, memory is essential in configuring space, either as abstract mythological landscapes, traumatic sites, or concrete material sites of symbolic significance. In all their heterogeneity, these sites can be conceptualised as *lieux de mémoire*, which productively intersect with the temporal dimension. Fourth, memory may be the 'handmaiden of nationalist zeal', but it clearly transcends the grasp of the nation-state. By interconnecting people across the temporal and spatial boundaries of nation-states, it creates transnational mnemonic communities and memory-scapes. Fifth and finally, memory has special significance in the context of postcolonial politics and decolonisation, both in the societies of erstwhile colonies and its former colonisers. Especially where national independence was achieved in the wake of armed anticolonial struggles like in Southern Africa, liberation memory has become a particular salient resource of collective identification, both within and beyond the framework of the nation.

Conceptual Outline and Methodology

My dissertation is based on twenty months of fieldwork conducted in Namibia between March 2010 and July 2013. It is a combination of three short-term research stays and a long phase of stationary fieldwork, the latter interspersed with several short field trips to various regions to attend commemorative events, conduct interviews with war veterans, or to visit monuments, museums, and heritage sites connected to the history of the liberation struggle.[17] When I began my dissertation and conducted my first exploratory fieldwork in March 2010, the focus of my research was on national days. It centred on the celebration of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence, as well as the debates and national introspection that accompanied the event – in a country, which had just seen its first generation of 'born frees', meaning Namibians born after independence, participating in national elections. The fieldwork was well prepared and built on a comparative theoretical and methodological research programme, which was tailor-made by the participants of the JGU Mainz-based project on national days in Africa. For a number of reasons, however, limitations of time were considerable and made me decide to discard the prospect of dedicating a whole dissertation to the independence jubilee. Instead, I re-shifted my focus more holistically on national commemoration and especially Namibia's political national holidays.

Therefore, I conducted another short explorative field study on the occasion of the celebration of Heroes' Day in the southern town of Lüderitz in August 2010, then still under the spell of the independence jubilee. This study on Heroes' Day also brought my attention to the dynamics of

[17] I already conducted four months of fieldwork in Namibia in 2008 for my master's thesis on Namibia's contested politics of national reconciliation (Kornes 2013, 2010a). This previous research experience was highly beneficial in terms of practicalities, contacts, and knowledge about the pitfalls of politically sensitive topics.

regional commemorative practices in southern Namibia. These, in contradistinction to the historical background of most political national holidays, are largely connected to local histories of resistance against German colonialism, especially the genocide. It was under this impression that I realised the importance of also including local/communal commemorative practices into my study.

In September 2011, I had the opportunity to attend the solemn restitution of human remains from the colonial era to a Namibian delegation at the Charité in Berlin; of twenty skulls that were taken to Germany for racist anthropological research in the wake of the genocide. Much like Heroes' Day in Lüderitz, this event unveiled complex entanglements and contestations regarding the colonial past, tied to national, regional, and ethnic identifications, as well as postcolonial liberation memory. At the time, rumours made the rounds in Namibia that these human remains, as well as others yet to be repatriated, were to be preserved or even put on display in a new museum, which was dedicated to the Namibian liberation struggle. The IMM was still under construction in late 2011, but had already become a bone of contention in Namibian public discourse, which made it a most interesting project to include in my study.

In November/December 2011, I visited Namibia again with the aim of establishing contacts and preparing my main field research for 2012. I used this occasion to visit the National Archives of Namibia (NAN), National Library of Namibia and the Peter Katjavivi Collection at the University of Namibia (UNAM), in order to conduct archival research about the history of Namibia's commemorative calendar. I also submitted a formal research application to the National Museum of Namibia. Since the National Museum was responsible for curating the IMM, I considered it promising to conduct research in the official role as an intern in a public institution of national significance. The fact that the creation of the IMM went along with much controversy and debate, not least for being constructed by a North Korean company, was another reason for me to choose the National Museum as a field site. I returned to Germany with a fairly clear understanding of what my dissertation was going to be all about: the media and practices of commemorating the liberation struggle and the negotiation of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia. In February 2012, my research application was granted and in April I returned to Namibia to commence my main fieldwork, which lasted until July 2013. For the most part of these 14 months, i.e. May 2012 to May 2013, I conducted participant observation as the assistant of the Curator of History of the National Museum of Namibia, who was tasked with curating the IMM.

In addition to this spatial and temporal diversity, my fieldwork was further characterised by its highly heterogeneous research topic. I conducted participant observation in one of Namibia's most prestigious postcolonial museum projects, affiliated to a state institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. Set and setting was thus shaped by the organisational framework of state bureaucracy and public service, including a 9–5 work routine, even where our tasks included field-trips for research purposes. On the other hand, I attended commemorative events, funeral services, academic conferences, museology and heritage workshops, annual general meetings, functions and museum inauguration ceremonies, visited monuments, former concentration camps, cemeteries and

mass graves, heritage sites, regional museums, and talked to war veterans, dissidents, torture victims, historians, politicians, clergy men, Namibians young and old in numerous offices, private homes, scorched soccer fields and shebeens[18] between Lüderitz and Ohalushu. My research process in Namibia therefore not only oscillated between multi-sited and stationary fieldwork, but also was a dynamic interplay of singular events, focussed routines, and phases of more and less intense participant observation.

When I attended the jubilee celebration in 2010, one methodological challenge was to conduct fieldwork during an event that was characterised by being singular in nature – as a jubilee – and also extremely dense and ephemeral. Dealing with this challenge as a methodological issue was one of the many fruitful aspects of a coordinated research project focussing on events. It provided the space to explore suitable methodologies and also assess and discuss their applicability in retrospect (Gabriel /Hohl /Lentz 2019). As Gabriel and Hohl underline, however, what may appear as a momentous and ephemeral event for a spectator, watching a military parade or cultural performance during a national day ceremony, is the result of months of arduous preparatory work by those involved in performing the act and organising the event (Gabriel /Hohl 2019: 2; Mauer /Gabriel /Liebisch 2011). Furthermore, this is usually done on a regular basis by bureaucrats and organising committees who through their work turn events into sequences, which form the necessary foundation for the temporal synchronisation of a commemorative calendar (Kornes 2019b).

I captured proceedings with film and photography, took notes, and primarily observed to get a good understanding of what was going on around me. Since my perception was limited and I wanted to add a more diversified range of perspectives, I employed four master students of history (UNAM) as field assistants for Independence Day in 2010.[19] Their task was to spend the celebration at different sites in and around the stadium, to take photographs, and to survey the audience with a standardised questionnaire. In addition, I extensively documented media coverage before and after the event, including the official television footage of the Namibian Broadcasting Company (NBC). Before the event, I conducted a series of qualitative interviews with people involved in the organising committee to learn about the organisational background of state-sponsored commemoration. Afterwards, I conducted follow-up interviews to survey assessments and constructive criticism. Together with the data of the standardised questionnaire, this produced a substantive body of data, enriched by diverse perspectives. I employed this strategy for most commemorative events, which I attended during my research, both on the level of political national holidays and communal commemorations. I preferred to attend events with friends, research assistants or colleagues, in order to multiply perspectives and stir debates on the event as it was taking place.

[18] The shebeen is a small township-bar; pivot of social life all over Namibia.

[19] I wish to thank Martha Johannes, Erna Mungunda, Nickey Nambase and Auguste Negongo for their invaluable contribution to my research.

My research at the National Museum of Namibia, on the other hand, was characterised by a long-lasting exposure to the practices, peculiarities, and inertia of a highly bureaucratised organisation which absorbed and acculturated me into its mode of operation. As an institution, the museum is based on administrative routines; educational mandates, curatorial practice, and, last but not least, the imponderables of civil service. It is this dimension of museum practice, of planning and curating the IMM prior to its inauguration in 2014, which forms an important setting for my research. Since I chose an internship at the National Museum as my way of establishing field access, I found myself in a very specific and privileged position.

Several authors have highlighted internships as a particularly effective and promising way of gaining access to fields, which are characterised by complex and stratified organisations. According to Wolff (2007: 346–347), the role as intern allows to constructively utilise field-specific differentiation, for instance by the strategic use of distancing. The status as 'learner' is a usually well-established social role in organisations, which allows blending in, getting sorted and categorised (Breidenstein /Hirschauer /Kalthoff /Nieswand 2013: 61). The role as an intern leaves enough space to make use of the dynamic interplay between learning and knowing, observing and doing, which also prevents an immersion into the field as a member of the organisation (Wolff 2007: 340) or 'total participant' (Gans 1994: 54). At the same time, it enables an identification of the researcher with the institution in the eyes of outsiders, which according to Girtler (2001: 117–120, 172) is a quality criterion for participant observation.

In my case, being an intern allowed me to acquire a formal and proper access to the public institution that was largely responsible for implementing the IMM. From the very first time I saw the construction site in 2010, I pondered the idea to include this particular museum project in my research design. A project, which was consistently contested and subjected to ridicule, rumour, and critique by the Namibian public. To me as well, the North Korean-built museum appeared as a state secret, protected by layers over layers of institutional secrecy and red-tape. This in mind, I expected to be rejected when I handed in my application for an internship. However, not only was it granted within reasonable time, I was also assigned to the director of the history department, who was responsible for curating the display centre. This formally correct and uncomplicated access was the first of many profound moments of learning in my personal confrontation with the IMM as an institution, mirroring Wolff's plea to constantly reflect upon and analyse field access as an open-ended process (Wolff 2007: 339). At the same time, in my role as an intern I entered a very particular mentor/protégé-relationship with the director, enabling a space for interaction both professional and critical, which was different from a 'normal' employment relation (Beek and Göpfert 2011: 200).

For one year and a month, I had my own office at the National Museum's history department at *Alte Feste*, under the watchful eyes of 'Founding President' Sam Nujoma, whose portrait hung on the wall behind my desk. Through participant observation, I explored and analysed the creation of the IMM as part of the curatorial team. In this capacity, I gained unique and privileged access to the

network of actors and stakeholders, who were involved in this process. This included representatives of government, Swapo Party, armed forces, war veterans, a broad range of museum practitioners and historians, journalists and history activists, and last but not least – staff of the North Korean contractor, Mansudae Overseas Project. Furthermore, it allowed access to the otherwise largely inaccessible Swapo Party Archive and Research Centre (SPARC).

My work included curatorial duties for the IMM, like archival research, drafting questionnaire outlines, and documenting oral history of liberation struggle veterans, as well as contributing to the general tasks of the museum's history department, including facilitating tours for students and attending to visitors with research inquiries. There were times of intense work, which allowed little room for elaborate note-taking and documentation, while other times left ample space for writing minutes, analysing and processing data, conducting interviews, reading articles, and evaluating my research design. I also used phases of low-intensity work to undertake short field trips to southern and northern Namibia, visit other museums and memorial sites, conduct interviews, and attend commemorative ceremonies and memory events.

Apart from that I found myself increasingly incorporated into the community of Namibian historians and museum practitioners, such as the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), whose events I attended. Quickly, my position acquired more and more complexity, when I started to establish trust relations and friendships with colleagues and also discovered that I actually took pleasure in practical museum work. This required a careful and continuous reflection of my various roles in the research process. Ultimately, I was also a scholar, a social anthropologist, an expert on the history of colonialism and Southern African liberation, a museum practitioner, a white male German national, an occasional representative of German memory politics, a confidant and companion in bureaucratic misfortune, a colleague, and a friend.

My role as learner was beneficial for yet another reason. At the time I began my internship, the curator of history had just been assigned the task to complete the museum project after replacing his predecessor, who had retired as director of history. The new director had not been involved in the activities of the technical committee, which was installed at the end of the 1990s to oversee the establishment of the Heroes' Acre, a pantheon-like national memorial site, and the museum. We therefore found ourselves in a fairly similar situation: eager to learn as much as possible about curating the IMM. My research thus had a tangible applicability, since I processed my data also to be of use for the curatorial work. This entailed especially the collecting, sorting, and evaluation of the official documentation of the technical committee. Consequently, a significant part of my data is based on documents, which makes some consideration necessary.

There is no bureaucracy without a paper-trail. Minutes, organigrams, and internal reports offer invaluable insights into the machinations of organisations, their composition, power relations, agenda setting, and long term developments within their terms of reference (Flick 2007: 321–322). Such documents can provide knowledge and understanding in tracing the processes of translation

that take place within organisations, whose work usually is concealed to the public – not because of bad faith, but due to the logics of institutional and bureaucratic work routines. I am aware, however, that relying on the committee's documentation for reconstructing the planning process is methodologically challenging. As everybody knows, who has some experience with committees and team meetings, minutes and reports are an utterly functional and consensus-driven document category. Quite often it is more revealing what is not written down or noted, than what is recorded – if that can be established at all in retrospect.

Consequently, it is important to reflect that data of this kind is not simply 'there', waiting to be picked up, but constitutes spatial and temporal artefacts assembled by the researcher in the process of data acquisition (Breidenstein /Hirschauer /Kalthoff /Nieswand 2013: 92–94). The evaluation of such data therefore makes it necessary to carefully consider and weigh up statements and activities: 'Considered as a source of information, documents are merely a kind of transparent film through which we can perceive social reality; considered as objects in their own right, however, they constitute an independent layer of social reality, which unfolds its own agency'.[20]

In the course of my research, this methodological caveat proved useful in more than one sense. Not only did the committee's documentation offer insights into a process which had taken place several years before and largely below the radar of public attention. Its reconstruction enabled me to develop research questions, identify possible interlocutors and experts for interviews, and analyse the long durée of conceptual planning and implementation also in light of existing scholarly literature. Reading and evaluating the files, as part of my daily routine in the museum, did also help to familiarise myself with the work of the curator and vice versa. In return for getting access to the data, I made my systematised summaries and comments available to the National Museum and especially the curator. Often, when we discussed issues related to the curatorial work, my 'fresh' knowledge of the project's history helped to put specific challenges into perspective, or to know where to look for a possible answer. This dual function as intern and researcher thus reflects the way, how I conducted my research: as participant observer, deeply involved in my field.

My research was characterised by a heterogeneous subject matter, a diverse spectrum of methodologies, and differing modalities of gaining and maintaining field access. In addition, my positionality as a white researcher from Germany doing research in a former German colony had an impact on the different social roles, which I was assigned in the field, with interesting intersections. For instance, when I attended commemorative ceremonies, I usually did so as a 'regular' visitor and in no official capacity, e.g. tied to my status as representative of the National Museum or as invited guest of an organising committee. While I tried to blend in with the commemorative crowds, there were obvious limitations.

[20] My own translation from German: "Als Informationsquelle betrachtet sind Dokumente nur eine transparente Folie, durch die hindurch wir soziale Realität wahrnehmen können; als Gegenstand ernst genommen handelt es sich dagegen um eine eigenständige Schicht sozialer Wirklichkeit, die ihre eigene Wirkung entfaltet" (Breidenstein /Hirschauer /Kalthoff /Nieswand 2013: 94).

White Namibians, I quickly learned, hardly ever attended the kind of events, I visited. At the same time, their absence was as duly noted as their, respectively my, presence. Since people identified me as white and consequently Namibian, I repeatedly found myself in a position where I seemingly represented white Namibians. At national events, my whiteness was a reoccuring source of irritation. Quite often, this was productive, e.g. when people approached me and inquired about my motives and background. At times, however, my presence was met with hostility, usually by representatives of state security, who questioned my credentials, checked my research permit, or even, in one case, threatened to arrest me if I didn't vacate the premises.[21] I experienced whiteness as an ambivalent embodied subject position in a former settler colony like Namibia, with its history of institutional racism and genocide. Since people tended to see me as a white Namibian, these experiences did much to shape my perception about the realities of racial categorisation in Namibia.

Significantly, this experience was different when I conducted my research in the organisational context of the National Museum. As in many public service institutions, white Namibians work in the National Museum, just like they fill positions in government and even cabinet. As a member of the National Museum, I represented the state, which on many occasions superseded race as a category, when my positionality was assessed. On field trips with museum staff, I visited and interviewed war veterans who had had been detained and tortured in apartheid's prisons and I was invited into homesteads, which had been raided and destroyed by South Africa's military. My presence in rural Owambo often caused considerable sensation for its sheer unlikely occurrence, but in most cases I was respected as a representative of the postcolonial state and my motives deemed trustworthy. Occasionally, I felt 'tested' for my credentials; to prove, whether I was indeed a 'comrade'.

While white minority rule clearly was the enemy of armed liberation movements in Southern Africa, there have always been white allies both in Namibia and internationally, which is acknowledged and recognised. My knowledge of Southern African liberation history and the numerous contacts I had among war veterans and anti-apartheid activists, amounted to a cultural and social capital which facilitated trust, opened doors, and initiated me to 'comradeship'. The fact that I was a German national inevitably made people request a positioning regarding settler colonialism and genocide, especially in communities which were heavily affected by German colonial rule. However, in my perception this was less of a hindrance than had I been a white German or Afrikaans-speaking Namibian. Remarkably, the kind of research I was conducting and my peculiar

[21] This happened during the reburial ceremony in Lüderitz on Heroes' Day 2010, which I describe in chapters four and five. Even though I was explicitely invited to attend the ceremony by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, members of the military police – and what appeared to be secret service – approached and harassed me, based on my being white. My presence, they said, was an insult to the people who had been killed in the liberation struggle and genocide. One officer shouted at me, that 'my people killed his people', threatening to destroy my camera and to arrest me. While this was an extreme case in an otherwise largely unproblematic research process, regarding threats and interactions with security personnel, and even though I understand the affective momentum of the ceremonies, this experience was highly disturbing.

interest in liberation memory led to more raised eyebrows among white German-speaking Namibians, than with any other group.

It was among white Namibians, especially in rural towns and on farms, where I often encountered the kind of blatant and common sense racism, which is so characteristic of settler colonialism and apartheid ideology. This omnipresence of racism was a constant and challenging backdrop to my fieldwork, difficult to process. Not only because of my own whiteness, which I carried with me as an embodied signifier and which influenced my social interactions in every instance on every day. My fieldwork took largely place in spaces that were predominately 'non-white', such as public service, traditional politics, rural communities, northern cities. As the *shilumbu/blanke*,[22] who did not act according to established role expectations, crossed boundaries, and constantly broke unwritten rules of race relations, I was an object of irritation and curiosity. I was perpetually othered and had to work hard to establish trust. At the same time, I also realised that indeed, I was – and remained – *other*.

The overwhelming reality of racism in Namibia was a profoundly disconcerting experience, which affected my fieldwork on many levels. So did the equally unsettling virulence of tribalist and ethnic resentment among Namibia's non-white majority population, as apartheid racism's mirror image. I encountered it in the prejudice against Northerners ('wamboes'), which is very prevalent in the South, or in the negative stereotyping of Namibia's Khoe-speaking minorities as 'kwanghalas'.[23] Both racism and tribalism had an impact on my emotive performance in the field, presenting challenges to unbiased representation as well as the ethical and methodological expectation to respect my field participants. At the same time, it provided a critical reflexive lens through which my analysis was rendered throughout my fieldwork and in the writing process – cognisant of the predicaments of writing about race and ethnicity without reproducing its categories, especially in a country like Namibia, so strongly shaped by the legacies of settler colonialism and apartheid.

Limitations and Scholarly Contribution

My fieldwork expanded along a trajectory, which was flexible enough to develop research questions and methods in interaction with emic categories and practices. Nevertheless, there are limitations of this study both regarding its methodology and its theoretical approach. In terms of methodology, I early on deviated from my initial prospect to study the celebration of national days as events and instead engaged in long-term participant observation within an institution. This made the conceptual

[22] These are the common terms for 'white person' in the Oshiwambo and Afrikaans languages, respectively.

[23] 'Kwanghala' is a derogatory expression for San people in the Oshiwambo and Otjiherero languages, implying servitude, poverty, landlessness, and ontological otherness (Widlok 2015: 90). In recent years, the slur has been extended to all Khoekhoegowab-speakers. A public debate ensued when Hage Geingob became Namibia's first Khoekhoegowab-speaking president. He was repeatedly labelled as a 'kwanghala', not least by representatives of his own party; see "Geingob rejects 'omkwankala' branding", *The Namibian*, 21 October 2013.

amalgamation of heterogeneous field sites and subject matters necessary, which brought along serious methodological challenges. In order to deal with these, I opted for a combination of different methods, like event research, participant observation, archival research, discourse analysis, qualitative and quantitative methods, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead of seeing this as a weakness and in light of the complexity and ambivalence of social phenomena, I consider 'field-specific opportunism' as particularly fruitful for research based on participant observation (Breidenstein /Hirschauer /Kalthoff /Nieswand 2013: 8–9, 33–35). This implies that the informative value of different categories of data is dependent on, and has to be understood and analysed in the context of, the limitations of respective methods. It is my aim to present an analytically and theoretically coherent study, based on the fusion of the heterogeneous methodologies of 'traditional' participant observation and the research on events, without obfuscating the limits of analysis.

With data comes another limitation, resulting from the abundance of information produced during long-term fieldwork. I attended and visited far more commemorative events, museums and memorial sites, than possible to adequately consider for my study. Several substantial sections of my fieldwork data have therefore been left out of my analysis for reasons of manageability and coherence. This includes, most prominently, my attendance of the annual hero commemoration in Hoachanas in 2011 and 2012, my stay at the Outapi War Museum, and the interviews with Robben Island veterans, which I conducted for the National Museum. I refer to all of these episodes repeatedly in my study, in the case of the interviews also in some detail, but they are not analysed extensively in their own right.

Regarding my theoretical approach, the biggest challenge is the integration of highly variegated media of memory as subject matters into one framework of analysis. With the focus on models, structures, and connections comes an inevitable reductionism regarding individual case studies and particular media of memory. As I outlined above, the subject matter of this study is the result of a considerate yet flexible approach to field site-specific perspectives on commemoration. This study is neither about national holidays, nor museums and monuments exclusively, but media and practices of national commemoration. Accordingly, I focus my analysis on specific categories deduced from the data according to my analytical framework, at the expense of a more thorough investigation of individual case studies. For instance, more research is needed on the micro-level of the organisational routines behind national holiday celebration in Namibia. Here, my analysis is limited to interviews and official press releases. As Mauer, Gabriel and Liebisch (2011) have shown, studying the perspective of the organising committees through participant observation is a particularly fruitful approach.

Another limitation is the fact that the time-frame of my study ends with the inauguration of the IMM. It would have been rewarding and beneficial for the overall assessment of the museum project, to also survey public reception of the exhibition. Even though I specifically attended a

museological training seminar for visitor survey techniques,[24] which I also included in my research design, I was not able to conduct this method due to the repeated delays of the official inauguration of the IMM. Hence, the empirical part my study only covers the curatorial process; a shortcoming, I have tried to ameliorate by evaluating media reports and social media statements after the inauguration. Future studies should therefore consider the demography of audiences and in particular the affective responses of visitors, vis-à-vis the exhibition. Finally, an aspect my study could only allude to in passing is the connection between different public and private institutions like the National Museum, the National Heritage Council, or the Museums Association of Namibia that are involved in museum and heritage work and play an important role in mediating liberation memory. As my research has shown, these agencies intersect on many levels, regarding their institutional histories and organisational practices, just like there are conflicts considering their mandates and rationales. It would be worthwhile to explore this in more detail, which, unfortunately, was not possible within the framework of my study.

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to scholarly debate on three levels: First, regarding the theory of nation, nationalism, and memory. Drawing on the comparative research agenda of the JGU project on national days and memory politics in Africa, my study investigates complex processes of producing and negotiating history, memory, and national belonging. In particular, the productive interaction of different media of memory offers new insights on commemoration as social practice. This relates in particular to the heterogeneous set of actors who are involved in mediating memory, including, not exhaustively, cabinet ministers, historians, curators, poets, musicians, public officials, war veterans, students, jubilant crowds, unruly crowds, absent crowds, equestrian monuments, and dead people. An important focus will be on the dynamic interrelations of state structures, government, traditional authorities, and diverse actor groups and audiences, in order to conceptualise national commemoration as a coproduction of heterogeneous agencies. To do justice to this complexity and to provide substantial assessments, I have analysed social phenomena over a long time by means of participant observation. It is in particular the specifically Southern African brand of heroic anticolonial national commemoration, converging as liberation memory, which I want to highlight with my study.

This relates to the second aspect: regarding Namibian Studies, I want to challenge two dominant tropes, which I will explore in more detail in the following chapter. One is the tendency to view the history of colonialism and anticolonial liberation struggles as a sequence of separate colonialisms and events, rather than focussing on the continuities of resistance and settler-colonial rule. This goes along with another tendency to write histories of resistance in terms of ethnicity, both in Namibian nationalist narratives and in scholarship which often reproduces emic categories of practice. As my introductory vignette has highlighted, ethnicity is both a powerful force of the present and a spectre of the past, and as such should be analysed with care. By conducting research

[24] "Der gefragte Gast: Publikumsforschung als Grundlage einer besucher/innenorientierten Museumsarbeit", organised by the Museumsakademie Joanneum, Basel, 1–2 March 2012.

in different regions and on different eras of resistance, as well as participating in an institution mandated with curating national history, I aim to overcome these challenges. Instead, I want to put the spotlight on interrelations, entanglements, and memory-scapes within and beyond the framework of the nation.

Finally, when it comes to social anthropology, my study offers new perspectives on the combination of long-term and multi-sited fieldwork, which is useful for approaching highly heterogeneous and stratified fields. My research took place in the national capital and in small villages, in the National Museum and during museological conferences, at funerals and pop concerts, in churches in Berlin and night clubs in Ondangwa, on Facebook and traditional council meetings. Likewise, I conducted research as a scholar, lecturer, colleague, and intern, in close cooperation with local experts, as assistant of North Korean museum practitioners, representative of the government, foreigner, German, *blanke*, comrade, ally, and partner in crime. In view of this multitude of different roles and positionalities, which affected my fieldwork as well as the field-specific opportunism of my methodology, I consider my study a contribution to the call for "an anthropology of the present" which "[multiplies] intersecting shifts in perspectives" (Bierschenk /Krings /Lentz 2015: 17). Furthermore, I will add insights on the potential of internships as a privileged and rewarding way of gaining field access in an institutional context, which is characterised by a high degree of bureaucratic opacity. Lastly, in conducting research physically between Germany and Namibia, and epistemologically between Northern Europe, Southern Africa, Cuba, and North Korea, my study aims to take the notion of entanglement seriously. If there is a place in history to search for the origin of Namibian nationness, it is in this sphere of transnational relations between people, organisations, and ideas.

Chapter Overview

The structure of this thesis is based on the logic of its conceptual arrangement: after an introductory chapter on liberation memory in Namibia, seven chapters follow; each dedicated to a case study, which represents a particular medium of memory. Two areas are central, according to the theoretical model described above: commemorative events, and museums and memorial sites. All case studies have certain similar traits in their representation, such as a historical assessment, ethnographic description, and analysis. Each case study, however, also has individual traits carved out of ethnographic data and analysed in light of their significance for liberation memory.

In chapter one, I present a concise introduction to liberation memory in Namibia, its history and mediality. I introduce the commemorative calendar of political national holidays and outline the slow transformation of memorial culture since independence. In addition, I explain the significance of polysemy in Namibian liberation memory and the important, yet contested role of history and historians for its remediation.

In chapter two, I analyse the aesthetics and politics of Independence Day. Based on a reconstruction of the original independence celebration in 1990, I outline the establishment of a model, which I discuss in light of its transformation into a sequence, followed by a typology of Independence Day celebration. For this, I draw both on the work routines of organising committees, as well as on the event's performative dimension. A focus is on the twentieth independence anniversary in 2010, which allows for additional observations on the characteristics of jubilees. I conclude with a discussion of the aesthetics and politics of Independence Day, in particular in regard to party politics, the representation of liberation memory, and the role of youth as a target audience.

Chapter three has a focus on Cassinga Day and the mnemonic community of Cassinga survivors. I describe how ceremonies of collective mourning and testimony contribute to the contruction of a commemorative communitas, which connects people on the basis of their biographical experience of exile. Due to the dramatic history of the day and the ritualised character of its commemoration, Cassinga Day is particularly effective in unveiling and reinforcing categorical differentiation. I analyse and discuss this with a focus on the category of the 'survivor' and the debate over inclusivity of Cassinga Day.

In chapter four, I analyse the mytho-genesis of 26 August as one of the most important *lieux de mémoire* in Swapo's heroic narrative of the nation. For this, I first provide a reconstruction of the events of 26 August 1966, followed by a concise history of the day before independence and a discussion of Heroes' Day commemoration since 1990. As I demonstrate, commemoration is inseparably tied to the experience of exile and the communicative memory of veterans. For this, I provide an analysis of the first Heroes' Day in Ongulumbashe in 1990, which ceremoniously reinforced the bond between Sam Nujoma, Swapo, the Ongulumbashe veterans, and the Namibian nation. In later years, Heroes' Day became a platform for strong political statements, the authoritarian turn of Swapo, and also signs of increasing accommodation of other traditions of anticolonial resistance.

Regional commemoration and the politics of the dead in southern Namibia is the subject of chapter five, which again centres on Heroes' Day, albeit from a very different perspective. By focussing on reburials of human remains from the era of the genocide, I analyse the complexities of liberation struggle commemoration in the light of Namibia's 'fragmented' past. By contrasting reburial practices of the government with those of the !Aman traditional authority, I highlight existing fault-lines of postcolonial liberation memory.

In chapter six, I describe the postcolonial transformation of memorial landscapes in Namibia. Starting with observations about the infamous equestrian monument in Windhoek, I then provide examples for the shift towards memorialisation and the emergence of nationalist memorial culture in independent Namibia. As I explain, this phenomenon is closely tied to historical relations between Namibia and North Korea and transnational memory-scapes. I use the case studies of the Okahandja

Military Museum and the Ongulumbashe memorial landscape to introduce the aesthetics and politics, which are connected with these sites.

Chapter seven builds on these previous observations, with my portrayal of the Heroes' Acre and the IMM as central sites of Swapo's nationalist liberation memory. I provide a detailed description of their planning process, based on the documentation of the technical committee. In order to make sense of this process, I analyse it as a result of cultural translation between North Korea and Southern Africa/Namibia. In the case of the Heroes' Acre, I add perspectives regarding its use both as a heritage site and a national pantheon.

Chapter eight, finally, includes an analysis of the curation of the IMM, based on my own participant observation in the curatorial team. In line with the conceptual framework of chapter seven, I provide an analytical summary of the permanent display and describe the process of cultural translation in light of selected elements and artworks of the exhibition. It is especially the topoi of heroism, martyrdom, and comradeship, which I am focussing on. Lastly, I discuss the IMM regarding its significance for liberation memory in Namibia.

1. Liberation Memory in Namibia: Concepts and Categories

When freedom comes home to our country
ending the long exploitative night of slavery
when bodies were washed in our people's blood
when bodies were rinsed in our people's tears
we'll proudly erect the finest monument in memory
of the selfless combatant – our unsung revolutionary
(Mvula ya Nangolo)[25]

Otjomuise
before the arrival of the whites
when the rocks were wet
the hot springs flowed
then they dried up
after independence
the hot springs are still yet to flow
ǀAeǁgams
(Kavevangua Kahengua)[26]

As one of Africa's last colonies, Namibia acquired national independence in 1990 after more than a century of foreign rule, settler colonialism, and apartheid by the German Empire (1884–1915) and white-ruled South Africa (1915–1990).[27] During this time, the people of Namibia engaged continuously and in many different ways in acts of resistance against colonial rule. This included the political negotiation of coexistence, protection treaties, armed rebellions, petitioning at the United Nations (UN), the formation of parties and national liberation movements, labour, church and student activism, strikes and civil disobedience, international diplomacy, and finally, a fully-fledged armed liberation war.

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[25] Excerpt of Mvula ya Nangolo's poem "Home in Freedom", published in *Thoughts from Exile* (1991, Windhoek: Longman).

[26] Excerpt of Kavevangua Kahengua's poem "Otjomuise", published in *Dreams* (2002, Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan). Otjomuise und ǀAeǁgams are designations for Windhoek in the Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab languages, respectively. The Khoekhoegowab language has four different clicks, which I will mark by the following signs: !, ǀ, ǁ, and ǂ.

[27] As a British dominion, South Africa fought on the side of the Allied Forces against the German Empire in the First World War and conquered the colony in 1915. The South African military ruled under martial law until 1921, when South Africa was formally mandated by the League of Nations to govern the colony. It did so, in contravention of the mandate, by reinforcing settler colonialism, introducing apartheid law, and de facto administrating South West Africa as a part of its own territory (Wallace 2011: 205–271).

Liberation Memory in the Land of the Brave

Throughout Namibia, different communities engage in the commemoration of this long and multifaceted history of anticolonial resistance by means of ceremonies and memorialisation. As I highlighted in the introduction, this omnipresence of commemorative practices and multi-layered liberation memory is a characteristic element of Namibia's postcolonial society. Despite this mnemonic plurality, however, some eras of liberation struggle past are marked more poignantly than others when it comes to commemoration. This is the case with the anticolonial war of resistance against German rule and the corresponding genocide, and with SWAPO's armed liberation struggle between the 1960s and 1989.

I concur with Namibian historian Memory Biwa (2012: 10) in her assessment that it makes sense to see the rebellion of the Bondelswarts community (!Gami╪nûn) in southern Namibia in 1903 as the prelude to the genocidal war of 1903–1908. When the Bondelswarts rose in arms against German authorities, other communities soon followed suit throughout southern and central Namibia in the subsequent years (Emmett 1999: 109–122). A complex war situation evolved, which was advanced by now-famous resistance leaders like Samuel Maharero, Jacob Marengo and Hendrik Witbooi. The German colonial army reacted with a combination of open warfare, counter-insurgency strategies, and the establishment of a system of concentration camps.[28] The battle of Ohamakari (Waterberg) in 1904 has become a symbol for the escalation of violence into genocide (Wallace 2011: 155–182; Zimmerer 2008, 2005).

Tens of thousands of Namibians died in the war, while thousands were enslaved and endured forced labour in the camps, with very high mortality rates. Communities that had joined the resistance were disenfranchised, stripped of their land, and forcefully resettled to native reserves (Zimmerer 2022: 70–83; Kössler 2006). The long-term consequences of this policy affect descendants until today; socio-economically, through structurally inherited social marginalisation, but also politically (Kössler 2015: 13–48). On the one hand, this regards the arduous campaign of affected communities for a formal recognition of the genocide, restitution, and apology by the German government (Kornes 2015b; Kössler 2015: 233–315). On the other, it relates to conflicts with Namibia's postcolonial government over the political representation of the regions and communities, which were most affected by the genocide (Kössler 2015: 221–229). Contested issues are the haphazard national land reform, which fails to remedy the effects of historic dispossession (Melber 2014: 89–106; Kaapama 2010), as well as government's priorities when it comes to state-sponsored commemoration and memorialisation (Kössler 2015: 26–39; Becker 2011: 523–532; Melber 2003d). This last aspect refers to the second and most dominant chapter of liberation memory, i.e. SWAPO's armed liberation struggle.

[28] I use the term 'concentration camp' as a contemporary designation, fully aware of its ambivalent connotation with the German discourse on *Konzentrationslager*/*Vernichtungslager* and the related debate on historical, structural, and discoursive parallels between German colonialism and National Socialism (Klävers 2019; Kössler 2015: 79–97, 2005; Zollmann 2007; Kundrus 2006, 2005; Kundrus /Strotbeck 2006).

Even though SWAPO was neither the only nor the first national liberation movement, it emerged as the dominant force out of the political mobilisation of Namibia's contract labourers in the late 1950s. Resistance against South Africa's implementation of apartheid policy in South West Africa after the Second World War had become increasingly organised (Wallace 2011: 243–259; Dobell 1998: 28–67). In 1959, protests against the forceful resettlement of Windhoek's 'black' and 'coloured' population from the so called 'Old Location' to group-based townships turned violent, close to a dozen people were killed. What has since become another important *lieu de mémoire* of liberation memory, known as the 'Old Location Massacre', became a catalyst for a shift towards militant resistance by the liberation movement (Melber 2016; Wallace 2011: 254). Several of the nationalist activists left for exile, where they founded SWAPO in 1960.

This was the beginning of a long and arduous campaign for national independence, spear-headed by SWAPO, which considered itself, in the ideological current of its time, as a revolutionary "vanguard party" (Katjavivi, in: SWAPO 1987: ii) for the national liberation of the Namibian people. As an organisation, SWAPO was divided into an external wing, engaged in international diplomacy, socialist solidarity, armed resistance, and the administration of a rapidly growing exile community (Williams 2011; Dobell 1998: 37–38; Saul /Leys 1995), and its internal wing (Dobell 1998: 20, 42; Leys /Saul 1995; Vigne 1987). The latter was active as a political party, mobilising resistance against the South African administration among workers, students, churches, and traditional authorities. Even though the South African authorities unleashed a decade-long campaign of violence, torture, and mass murder when SWAPO began its armed struggle in the mid-1960s, the party was never formally banned in Namibia.

Both the colonial war of 1903–1908 and SWAPO's armed liberation struggle are powerful *lieux de mémoire* in Namibia – historical points of reference, which have an impact on group formation, postcolonial politics, and the mediation of liberation memory. It is this triadic relation, informed by an understanding of memory as a social and political process, which guides my analysis. In this context, I'm especially interested in the way different actors, as individuals or mnemonic communities, relate to different historical eras in their construction of liberation memory. Even though these two liberation memory meta-narratives are central to my analysis, it is of course misleading to reduce Namibia's century of anticolonial resistance to the genocide and SWAPO's armed struggle. As Kössler rightfully maintains, a multitude of periods and events in Namibia's history of anticolonial resistance are tied to commemorative practice, for instance the era of consolidation of German rule 1884–1894, which included armed clashes as well and which is commemorated by the ǀKhowese traditional authority (Kössler 2007: 368–369). The communal commemoration in Vaalgras and Rehoboth, mentioned in the introduction, are other examples.

Still, the genocide and SWAPO's armed struggle are clearly the two historical reference points with the strongest impact as *lieux de mémoire* of national liberation. Both are historical processes, which extend the time-span usually attributed to them: the war of 1903–1908 had preceding episodes of violence in the 1880s and 1890s (Wallace 2011: 121–136), just like the

genocide was not over when the concentration camps were closed in 1908 (Kössler 2006: 26–49; Erichsen 2005: 156). Likewise, SWAPO's liberation war had a prehistory of escalating militancy, as the example of the Old Location demonstrates, just like armed clashes with Angola's UNITA continued after independence (Kornes 2013: 7–8). Furthermore, a lot of different actors were engaged in resistance as well, which demonstrates the plurality of anticolonial activism through time and space. This includes traditional authorities, churches, Garveyism, ethnic organisations like the Herero Chief's Council, and other national or regional liberation movements like the South West African National Union (SWANU) or the Caprivi African National Union (CANU) (Kangumu 2015; Williams 2011: 77–79; Emmett 1999: 109–168, 283–314; Dobell 1998: 28, 32–34). As individuals, Namibians engaged in anticolonial resistance in a variety of capacities, by taking part in political activism and strikes, supporting combatants with supplies and information, or simply objecting to the everyday oppression of basic rights (Henrichsen 2015; Hayes 2010b: 113–117; Liebenberg /Hayes 2010; Becker 2008b).

The different eras of resistance are interlinked through long-standing traditions of anticolonial activism, both by communities and individuals. A famous example for this is the Witbooi family. Not only does it count one of the most important resistance leaders against the German Empire among its ancestors, but it also played an important role in consolidating support for SWAPO among the traditional authorities in southern Namibia in the 1970s (Kössler 2006: 177–254, 2001; Hillebrecht 2004). Another prominent example is Ovaherero Chief Hosea Kutako, who survived the genocide, attended Chief Samuel Maharero's funeral, and became Namibia's most important early nationalist (Henrichsen 2015: 136). Finally, the political, social, and economic framework of German settler colonialism, which made the genocide possible, was the same foundation on which South Africa built its racist apartheid society (du Pisani 2010b: 52–61; Kössler 2006: 26–34; Silvester 2005: 273–274). From this follows that even though people in Namibia experienced colonial rule differently at different times and different places, they nevertheless lived in a continuous state of colonial disenfranchisement. This fact has various, at times contradictory consequences.

One result of apartheid rule is the social and mnemonic fragmentation of liberation memory in Namibia's postcolonial society, which Kössler (2015: 13–48, 2010a, 2007, 2004, 2003) has analysed in great detail. Seen from this perspective, memory disintegrates into a plurality of memories of different and at times antagonising communities, in mimicry of the politicised ethnicity of the apartheid-era. In this context, commemoration and memory events of traditional and rural communities are important venues to solidify in-group cohesion, to negotiate intergroup relations and conflicts, and to articulate political demands vis-à-vis the governments of Namibia and Germany (Kössler 2015: 171–245). Contestation over political recognition is one important aspect of the empirical reality of this particular field, which I will investigate throughout my thesis from various angles.

However, considering Rothberg's (2014: 654–655, 2009: 1–32) approach of multidirectionality, it is important to move beyond an understanding of memory as mere contestation and to understand it as a productive resource for negotiating belonging in a complex postcolonial society. From this angle, liberation memory in Namibia appears as an arena for different actors and communities to make specific claims to history. While this can happen in the form of cooperation, coexistence or contestation, it is of special significance what kind of connections these interactions produce. In this sense, I will look at commemoration by means of events, monuments, or museums, as social processes which are constituted by a diverse range of actors engaged in mediating liberation memory.

In doing so, it is important to make the necessary distinctions between categories of practice and analysis, when it comes to the conceptual employment of liberation struggle past. For SWAPO, the history of anticolonial resistance has been a powerful resource for political mobilisation during the liberation struggle. Traditional leaders like Witbooi, Maharero and Kutako were transformed into icons of resistance, which SWAPO used extensively in its political propaganda, not only to garner support among other population groups, but also to legitimise itself as a truly national movement. In line with the nationalist historiography of African liberation politics at the time, the resistance of these forebears was conceptualised as 'early' or 'primary' resistance (Ranger 1968a, 1968b). As such, it was seen as an inspiration and acknowledged as 'national' in its intention to fight for liberation, even though ultimately it failed in overcoming colonial rule due to its particularism (SWAPO 1981: 13, 157–161). Instead, a genuine 'national liberation struggle' waged by SWAPO was necessary to achieve national independence (SWAPO 1981: 176). In light of the complex, dynamic and interwoven history of resistance outlined above, such a teleological reading of history and clear-cut division of historical phases is analytically obstructive and outdated.

As I will analyse and discuss throughout my thesis, however, as a category of practice this division in 'early resistance' and a 'modern' or 'national' liberation struggle reverberates strongly in my field. Actors and institutions of the state, which have a close biographical connection to SWAPO's liberation struggle and consider themselves as agents of its history, play an important role in this. Through their influence on the aesthetics and politics of national commemoration in Namibia, they convey the lasting effect of nationalist historiography and its more radical variation, "patriotic history" (Ranger 2004), as a powerful image of history. At its centre is the heroic narrative of armed liberation waged by SWAPO, which carried the torch of resistance to its logical conclusion, national independence. Swapo's 'master narrative' of liberation and national independence has been analysed and deconstructed extensively (Melber 2014: 23–36, 2003d; Zuern 2012: 496; du Pisani 2010a; Kössler 2007: 372; Metsola 2007: 134). Becker has provided a concise summary, describing it as

> the dominant narrative of the liberation war in post-colonial Namibia, which prioritizes the armed struggle from exile. This master narrative of national liberation, having become the

> foundation myth of post-colonial Namibia, legitimates and authorizes the power of the post-colonial elite as the sole, heroic liberators from apartheid and colonialism (Becker 2011: 520)

As du Pisani (2010a: 1–9) has convincingly argued, this master narrative not only functions as a resource of political legitimation for the Swapo Party, but is popularised by the Swapo government as a resource of national identification for all Namibians. This takes place in the arena of political discourse (du Pisani 2010a; Melber 2007, 2003d), culture and heritage policy (Akuupa /Kornes 2013; Becker 2015, 2011; Akuupa 2015, 2010) and especially national commemoration (Becker 2018, 2011; Kornes 2015a, 2011; Becker /Lentz 2013: 7).

In my thesis, I analyse this image of history as it is mediated both by the state and non-state actors via commemorative practice and memorial culture. SWAPO's armed struggle is at the centre of my investigation of liberation memory, due to the dominance of the former liberation movement in institutions of the nation-state. At the same time, my analysis extends to the commemoration of other eras of liberation struggle history as well, especially in light of the question of how such memory practices converge, diverge, or collide with state-sponsored liberation memory. In order to provide a nuanced description of this relationship and to avoid falling into the pitfalls of reproducing Swapo's party-political ideology, it is important to make further categorical distinctions. This relates on the one hand to the concept of the party, and on the other to that of the nation.

Two of SWAPO's most prominent slogans during the struggle were: "One Namibia, one nation" and "SWAPO is the nation and the nation is SWAPO". Since SWAPO has left the trenches and became Namibia's perpetual ruling party, a lot of studies have focused on the conflation of party, liberation movement, people, nation, and state, which is expressed by such statements.[29] While this critique is illuminating and an important foundation for my study, at times it runs the risks of reifying the ideology, which it wishes to deconstruct. This is especially true where a particular event or institution, e.g. an Independence Day celebration or the IMM, is seen as a mere expression of Swapo and its ideology, rather than a complex process involving heterogeneous actors and agencies, who are engaged in negotiating liberation memory. This may seem like a moot point or worse, an attempt of downplaying Swapo's institutional power in Namibia's post-colonial state-apparatus. Nothing could be farther from my mind. Instead, my ambition is to apply an analytical perspective that deconstructs the totalising hegemony, which the party ascribes to itself. Such a perspective will take into account the differences between ideology and practice, history and presence, liberation movement, political party, and government; not to mention a broad range of other possible categories of differentiation within that container, 'Swapo'.

For instance, the so called 'remainees' (in northern parlance: *ovakalimo*), who stayed inside the country and fought for liberation on the 'home front', obviously made different historical experiences than those who left for exile (Becker 2008b: 290). In a political system, which values

[29] See especially Melber 2014: 23–36, 2011, 2007, 2003a–d; du Pisani 2010a, 2003; Miescher /Henrichsen 2009, 2001; Hunter 2008; and Saunders 2003.

and officially acknowledges individual contributions to liberation, this puts them in a more difficult position to have their acts of resistance recognised. 'Exiles', on the other hand, must be differentiated according to the time they left the country. It matters, for instance, whether they left in the 1960s as part of the first generation, today's 'old guard' (Williams 2011); or in the 1970s as part of a younger and politically radicalised generation (Nathanael 2002; Dobell 1998: 47–54; Leys /Saul 1994). Of equal importance is their individual status in exile: were they among the first consignment of trained guerrilla fighters of the 1960s, who have since become legends and national heroes (Shityuwete 1990)? Or were they rank-and-file combatants, when the conflict turned into a more conventional war in the 1980s, often struggling to find their place in independent Namibia (Ekandjo 2011)? Did they spend their time in one of the many prisons, which emerged throughout Southern Africa during the conflict to incarcerate, torture, and quite often 'disappear' activists (Wallace 2011: 269–270; Shityuwete 1990: 128–247; ya Otto 1982: 87–105; IDAF 1981); prisons, which were operated not only by South Africa but also its opposing liberation movements to take 'care' of dissidents (Williams 2009: 119–156; Kornes 2013, 2010a; Hunter 2010, 2008; Lamb 2006; Leys /Saul 2003, 1994; Nathanael 2002)? Were they no combatants at all but functionaries of the liberation movement, diplomats, teachers, and nurses, did they receive scholarships to study abroad in order to become the future elites in independent Namibia (Kambombo 2014; Amathila 2012; Shaketange 2008; Namhila 1997; Shivute 1997)? What, after all, entails the category 'combatant' in the Namibian context, if SWAPO fought its liberation struggle on 'diplomatic, political and military fronts' (Dobell 1998: 18)?

Next to that, a whole generation of Namibians was born in exile as so called 'struggle children', who experienced exile as their home and who in 1990 returned to a foreign country. Their biographies are a most vivid embodiment of SWAPO's transnational entanglements. For, 'home' in their case meant an assortment of camps and schools in Angola, Zambia, Cuba, West Africa or Eastern Europe, between which they were being sent back and forth, including the alienation, culture shocks, and threats of military attacks that came with it (Nghiwete 2010). Namibians born since 1990 are yet another category of citizens who relate differently to independence and the liberation struggle. Known as the 'born free', three decades after independence they have their own priorities and concerns about Namibia's past, future, and present, mirroring their experience of growing up in a competitive, capitalist, and highly unequal society (Becker 2016). Their ideas about independence not necessarily reflect the experiences of the struggle generation, which on their part puts a lot of effort in conveying its particular form of liberation memory to the younger generation (Kornes 2011: 224–227, 2010b).

The categories of 'exiles' and 'struggle children' highlight a central aspect of the complex relationship between people and nation, which is the transnational dimension of SWAPO's liberation struggle. When Namibia finally got its independence on 21 March 1990, it was the result of the concerted effort of the Namibian people, who resisted colonialism and apartheid by peaceful and militant means; of the liberation movement, with its combination of political mobilisation,

international diplomacy, and armed struggle; the UN and a broad range of actors from the international anti-apartheid movement; and the fact that Namibia's struggle for independence was inextricably interwoven with a global conflict. Namibia's independence was one of the many effects of the 'Wind of Change', which swept through the world as of 1989: it mirrored the fall of the Berlin Wall and foreshadowed the end of white-minority rule in South Africa in 1994.

For that reason it is not possible to write about Namibia's national liberation struggle without taking into account the transnational setting in which it took place. Accordingly, my ethnography of liberation memory in Namibia is both concerned with the temporality of the liberation struggle, its long and multifaceted history, and its specific spatiality. For not only was SWAPO supported by socialist countries all over the world, but so were Namibians scattered as a global diaspora. A lot of the people, who appear as historic protagonists of the liberation struggle in my thesis and who are engaged in commemorating it, have made this experience. Their biographies reflect this entangled history, which brought them to states like Angola, Cuba, East Germany, Finland, North Korea, Poland or Tanzania. As a diaspora of exiled Namibians, they established relations with people of their host countries, with other liberation movements and their global networks of solidarity.

It is in this context that a particular (post-)socialist memory-scape has been established and maintained, which connects former 'comrades in arms' with a shared experience of anticolonial and anti-imperialist liberation struggles. In the case of North Korea, as I will analyse later on, this relationship also translates into shared patterns of memorialisation. Next to fostering the emergence of transnational liberation memory, exile also had a profound effect on Namibian national imaginaries. Because, as Williams (2016, 2015, 2011, 2010a, 2010b) has analysed in meticulous detail, it was especially its exile camps in Angola and Zambia, where SWAPO managed and moulded a population as a nascent nation-to-be. This experience of exile is central to the configuration of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia, where the influence of the returned exiles in the government, state apparatus, and civil service is strong, albeit not uncontested.

Of course, a lot of people do not support the ruling party, either because they subscribe to the political opposition, turned dissidents, or harbour no particular interest in politics. Their perspectives play an important role in my study, too. However, throughout my fieldwork I was confronted with people who identified in one way or the other with Swapo. As described above, I learned from these encounters that this identification is tied to a diverse and often contradictory spectrum of historical and biographical references. These, in turn, have an important influence on people's affiliation to the party and their subject position within the postcolonial state. If 'the people are Swapo', this by no means implies that they are all the same. On the contrary: as regards people's relation to Swapo, one of the most fervently contested issues with a strong impact on liberation memory is the official recognition of individual contributions to national liberation, in the form of so called 'struggle credentials'.

As social practice, memory is inextricably linked to belonging and group formation. In the context of Namibia, this translates into categories such as 'hero', 'veteran', or 'survivor', which have their negative in the 'traitors' or 'sell-outs' of the liberation struggle (Kornes 2010a: 85–88, 100–106). It is through the recognition of struggle credentials as individual or collective contribution to liberation that Namibians can acquire a particular social status within the postcolonial state, which entails both material and immaterial benefits. In regard to war veterans, Metsola (2010: 590) has emphasised the fundamental importance of personal experiences when it comes to politics of recognition in Namibia. Building on that, I advocate a reading of this relationship to the past, which treats struggle credentials as a form of symbolic capital. It is a currency, highly esteemed and much sought after in societies that are characterised by former liberation movements-turned-governments, which have established "economies of entitlement" (Bayer /Pabst 2017; see also Melber 2011; Metsola 2010, 2007).

In line with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (2010: 273), struggle credentials in Namibia are convertible to material resources and economic capital. This entails public service jobs, veteran's pensions, lump-sum pay-outs, grants and stipends, but also forms of symbolic recognition like monuments, the awarding of national honours, and heroes' funerals. The precondition for that is the official validation of struggle credentials, which is done through a bureaucratic process including review boards and legislation. Its result is the production of official categories like 'national hero' and 'war veteran', which are tied to material privileges. At the same time, these categories also bring with them an immaterial social status that commands respect and authority. At times, this status can be used against the agency that was responsible for its creation in the first place, e.g. when war veterans challenge the government on the basis of their recognised contribution (Metsola 2007). The politics of recognition of struggle credentials is a reoccurring theme in most of my case studies, involving both the living and the dead.

The contestation over formal recognition of struggle credentials is an important field to analyse the politics of liberation in Namibia and how subjectivities in the postcolonial state are produced. The categorical differentiation of Namibians, who have contributed to the liberation struggle in different ways and capacities, is important to understand the social dimension of liberation memory. A broad range of actors and memory brokers is involved in its mediation. This includes state bureaucrats, politicians, museum and heritage practitioners, historians, artists, members of traditional authorities, war veterans, dissidents, random people at different times and places, as well as audiences both in their co-presence and absence. Equally important, however, is the differentiation of the various formats of commemoration, these actors employ. This includes political national holidays, commemorative events, reburials, museum and memorial projects, oral history documentation, or the ceremonial veneration of national heroes. All of these are commemorative practices, which merge specific aesthetics and medialities with a set of actors and institutional frameworks. In the following, I will outline four main areas in which my investigation took place. Two refer to media of memory: the commemorative calendar of political national

holidays, and memorial culture; the other two are conceptual frameworks referring to the polysemy of liberation memory, and the role of history in Namibia.

The Commemorative Calendar of Political National Holidays in Namibia

> There are some compatriots who choose to spend these days having *braaivleis*, fishing and all these – these are days for remembrance and not for enjoyment.[30]

As usual, in his dual capacity as Minister of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development and Swapo Party Secretary for Information and Publicity, Jerry Ekandjo did not mince his words. His tongue-lashing addressed the nation ahead of two important dates of Namibia's commemorative calendar in 2009: international Workers' Day (1 May) and Cassinga Day (4 May). Ekandjo, well known as a political firebrand, earned his struggle credentials in the early 1970s as a labour activist and political campaigner for SWAPO.[31] He was convicted for his political activism in 1973 and spent seven years in South Africa's notorious Robben Island prison with the likes of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Namibian political prisoners such as Andimba Toivo ya Toivo or Helao Shityuwete. As a stalwart and hardliner of the party, Ekandjo represents the rejuvenation and radicalisation of SWAPO in the 1970s, which was embodied by the rise of the SWAPO Party Youth League (SPYL), in whose creation Ekandjo played a pivotal role. In 2012, he was one of the contenders for the vice-presidency of Swapo; a position, which goes along with being Swapo's presidential candidate for the national elections. Even though he eventually came second to Hage Geingob, who is a representative of exile-SWAPO's old guard, Ekandjo's campaign reflected the aspirations of a younger generation in the party to finally take the reins.

Ekandjo's lamentation over a lack of patriotism during national holidays is significant in various regards. First, it emphasises the importance of political holidays as a medium of national commemoration for the government. Second, in its emphatic commitment to commemorate events tied to SWAPO's liberation struggle history it is an example for the blurring of boundaries between party and government. Third, it highlights a discrepancy between an ideological conception of the nation as a commemorative community and the reality that the populace, supposed to constitute that very nation, likes to spend a national holiday in a different way. For after all, 'the nation' may indeed prefer *braaing*[32] and fishing to attending official public events, maybe following proceedings on radio or television, or even consciously avoiding all forms of commemoration by non-participating. A significant part of the population may even be completely ignorant of the occasion, simply enjoying a welcome day off from work to clean the house or visit the family in the village.

[30] "Public Holidays not for enjoyment", *New Era,* 30 April, 2009.

[31] This and the following is based on Hopwood (2008: 130–131) and an interview with Jerry Ekandjo, Windhoek, 26 October, 2012.

[32] The *braai* is the Namibian and South African version of the barbecue. It is a profoundly social event, which par excellence reflects Nugent's (2010) insightful observations on the culinary aspects of national identification.

All of these examples indicate different ways in which people make use of public holidays, and they all present specific challenges for an analytical understanding of the social dimension of commemorative events of the nation-state.

For the Namibian state, the commemorative calendar of political national holidays is the most important device to structure the dramatic narrative of liberation and national independence. As such, it is closely interwoven with the history of the ruling party Swapo. In Namibia's history textbook for Grade 10 (du Preez 2007), at least at the time of my fieldwork, central events of liberation struggle history like Old Location, Ongulumbashe and Cassinga were always contextualised with the respective commemorative days. The compelling structure of Namibia's commemorative calendar has prompted Zerubavel (2003) to include it in his important comparative analysis of national calendars. However, few scholarly contributions have explicitly focused on political national holidays in Namibia as an arena for the mediation of liberation memory.

In his study of veterans' politics, Metsola briefly refers to the reproduction of Swapo's heroic narrative in political statements during official commemorative events (Metsola 2007: 134). In more detail, Melber underlines the importance of political holidays in independent Namibia as one important platform, among others, for Swapo to convey its liberation narrative. He characterises state events as "one-sided celebrations" (Melber 2003d: 318), monopolised by the ruling party, and criticises "the display of party emblems by the head of state during official ceremonies" (Melber 2003d: 318). In his extensive discussion of Swapo as a former liberation movement in power, he revalidates his assessment of political national holidays as 'markers of heroic narratives' (Melber 2014: 28–29) and an expression of Swapo's authoritarian political culture (Melber 2014: 36). Hunter, in her analysis of Swapo's policy of national reconciliation, describes political national holidays in Namibia as exemplary for the highly selective memory-politics of the ruling party (Hunter 2008: 161–164). All three, subsequently, see commemorative national events primarily as a platform for Swapo to convey its ideological master narrative. One should add that most of these studies have been conducted either during or with a focus on the tenure of Namibia's first President Sam Nujoma 1990–2005, who displayed an increasingly authoritarian style of governance in his three terms of office (Melber 2015: 53–55, 2014: 23–36; Kornes 2010a: 58–67).

More recent scholarship has contributed perspectives which are less focused on ideology critique. For instance, by accentuating the potential of national holidays in Namibia to stir debates on the status quo of liberation (Kornes 2011), to illustrate the performativity and localisation of memory (Becker 2012), to negotiate regional and national frameworks of belonging (Akuupa 2006), or to illustrate the transformation of national imaginaries since independence (Becker 2015; Akuupa /Kornes 2013). In summary and with a focus on Independence Day celebrations, a "tentative repositioning of liberation war memory […and] modification of post-colonial Namibia's prevalent ideational foundations" (Becker /Lentz 2013: 7) can be discerned. Against this background, an analysis of Namibia's commemorative calendar has the potential to offer profound insights into the construction and mediation of liberation memory in one of Africa's youngest nation-states.

Of the twelve public holidays, which were officially gazetted in December 1990, six have a background tied to the liberation struggle: Independence Day (21 March), Workers' Day (1 May), Cassinga Day (4 May), Africa Day (25 May), Heroes' Day (26 August), Day of the Namibian Women and International Human Rights Day (10 December).[33] While all political holidays are discussed briefly, three of them – Independence Day, Cassinga Day, and Heroes' Day – will be explored in-depth in the following chapters. Within Namibia's commemorative calendar, these three days have a position as the central pillars of Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation (Becker 2012: 1). For this, I will diachronically and synchronically outline historic origins, regional variations, and shifting formats and practices of commemoration. It will, amongst other things, be interesting to note that the commemoration of selected historical events as proto-national holidays has been an established genre of nationalist mobilisation before independence, prefiguring the dramatic narrative of the postcolonial commemorative calendar.

Independence Day is celebrated annually on 21 March with varying degrees of magnitude since 1990. The date for Namibia's independence was chosen by the members of the Constituent Assembly to make a strong statement against apartheid and to commemorate the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa in 1960.[34] The motion to choose the 21st as Independence Day was tabled by SWAPO's Theo-Ben Gurirab and unanimously adopted on New Year's Eve 1989; the date was publicly announced on 29 January 1990.[35] Independence Day usually consists of a regionally rotating main event, paralleled by celebrations on regional, district, and constituency level, with a strong focus on celebratory formats emphasising civic virtues and national unity.

Cassinga Day commemorates airborne attacks by the South African Defence Force (SADF) on two exile camps of SWAPO in Angola on 4 May 1978. The simultaneous raid on Cassinga transit camp and Chetequera base left approximately 1,000 people dead, most of them women and children. Ever since 1978, the attack has been commemorated by SWAPO within Namibia and among the Namibian exile community, symbolising the willingness of Namibians to sacrifice their lives for independence. Accordingly, Cassinga Day is the national holiday related most closely to the history of the liberation movement, annually stirring debates on whether Cassinga Day is a day of inclusive national commemoration or a day to commemorate SWAPO's liberation struggle. Cassinga Day is commemorated officially in all regions and constituencies, albeit with a focus on the northern parts of the country, while the main event takes place in Windhoek. It is characterised by solemn ceremonies of mourning and testimonials of survivors.

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[33] Public Holidays Act, 20 December 1990, Act No.26 of 1990 of the National Assembly. The act was amended in 2004 to rename *International Human Rights Day* to *Day of the Namibian Women and International Human Rights Day*; see Public Holidays Amendment Bill No.12, 2004. According to the act, if a public holiday falls on a Sunday "the following Monday shall also be a public holiday, unless the Monday is already a public holiday."

[34] The massacre, following mass protests against apartheid pass laws, became a catalyst for the emergence of armed resistance in South Africa. Sixty-nine people were killed and approx. 180 wounded. In the wake of the uprising, the African National Congress was banned.

[35] Debates of the Constituent Assembly, 21 November 1989 – 31 January 1990, pp. 161, 326–329.

May Day, apart from being an international holiday (*Workers' Day*), has been a focal point of political mass mobilisation in Namibia during the liberation struggle, given the close connection between SWAPO and Namibia's labour movement. Workers' Day rallies were occasions to protest the contract labour system, exploitative working conditions, segregation, and to rally for the implementation of the UN's plan for Namibian independence. Especially during the 1980s, Workers' Day rallies in Windhoek often turned violent, with South African police forces clamping down on participants, as has been documented in vivid detail by the dissident reporting of *The Namibian* and the photography of John Liebenberg (Liebenberg /Hayes 2010).[36] Despite the close bonds between SWAPO and the labour movement, frictions existed, especially regarding the relationship of internal and external SWAPO. With independence, Namibian labour activism lost momentum and exaltation about majority rule in part gave way to disillusionment over the slow pace of social and economic transformation. Workers' Day activities also significantly changed in scope and impact. Tapscott (1993: 38) early noted a decline of mobilisation for Workers' Day, while Lush (1993: 304–305) pointed out the growing estrangement of workers with the ruling party. Workers' Day is still celebrated annually, usually organised by the National Union of Namibian Workers and graced by the attendance of the president or members of cabinet as keynote speakers. However, the day seems to have lost its importance as a catalyst for social change and a platform to commemorate the contribution of workers for independence. Many Namibians probably share the sentiment voiced by the "Rambler", *The Namibian's* notorious no-nonsense columnist in his 2013 rant on political holidays: "Workers' Day: We have no jobs, no unions and no reason to celebrate. Let's just retrench this day like a Namibian mine worker".[37]

Africa Day commemorates the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, renamed African Union (AU) in 2002, and serves as a token of appreciation for the organisation's support for Namibia's liberation struggle. This finds a symbolic expression in the protocol of all national political holiday celebrations, down to communal level, where the hymn of the AU is played and its flag hoisted in addition to Namibia's national symbols. Before independence, the 25th had already been observed as African Liberation Day with speeches and parades in SWAPO's exile camps.[38] In independent Namibia, Africa Day is foremost an opportunity for the government to invoke the notion of African solidarity, primarily addressing the youth. Even though Africa Day is embedded in the broader narrative of African liberation, the focus of themes and speeches tends to lie on civic values, democracy, and development: the future, rather than the past. In 2012, for instance, the theme of the celebration was "Boosting Inter-African Trade". The event, which took place at Sam Nujoma Stadium in Katutura, included a speech of Minister of Foreign Affairs Uutoni

[36] John Liebenberg worked as a photographer for *The Namibian* during the 1980s. His photography, documenting life under apartheid and the violence of South Africa's military occupation, has created iconic imagery of popular resistance and the liberation struggle in northern Namibia.

[37] "Scrap public holidays", *The Namibian*, 10 May 2013.

[38] The commemoration of 1981 included speeches of representatives of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SPYL, SWAPO Women's Council and SWAPO Elders Council; see "PLAN celebrated African Liberation Day", *The Combatant* 2 (10), 1981.

Nujoma, who addressed issues of African unity and paid homage to African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba, including his father, Sam Nujoma.[39] Commemoration also involves public events, which, however, lack the attendance, media coverage, and public attention of other national holidays.

May is particularly densely marked in terms of liberation memory, something which the editor of the *Windhoek Observer* also highlighted in 2013: "These great events in history and religion make the month of May a great month. Even though it is a cold month, it is a month which makes our hearts very warm inside when we remember the gallantry of our people".[40] Before independence and especially during the 1980s, May was a time of intense political mobilisation, which brought thousands to the streets to protest South African rule. An interesting, yet largely forgotten footnote about proto-national political holidays before 1990 is the fact that there was another commemorative day in May, which did not become a national holiday after independence. 18 May was commemorated as Heroes' Day, marking the day when Tobias Hainyeko, the first commander of SWAPO's armed wing in exile PLAN, died in combat against South African troops on the Zambezi River in 1967. His death was remembered especially among PLAN combatants in exile and formed part of the sequence of commemorative days in May.[41]

Heroes' Day commemorates the first military confrontation between SWAPO guerrillas and South African troops near Ongulumbashe in north-western Namibia on 26 August 1966. Even though there had been armed clashes before and the military impact of the encounter was rather small, SWAPO actively construed Ongulumbashe as a symbol of the liberation movement's bravery and endurance in its struggle for independence. This was supported by the United Nations, which officially recognised 26 August as *Namibia Day* in 1973 and declared SWAPO the legitimate representative of the Namibian people.[42] Namibia Day was observed by the UN and celebrated among the Namibian exile community in the frontline states, as well as in Europe, often coupled with events of the anti-apartheid movement. Inside Namibia, Namibia Day was yet another highly politicised occasion for fervent protest against South Africa, which often provoked violent interventions by the police.

Since independence, Namibia Day is commemorated as Heroes' Day and serves to remember Namibia's long history of anticolonial resistance. SWAPO's liberation struggle usually is the focus of attention, for example when the main event takes place at the original Ongulumbashe site and veterans of the battle are invited as honorary guests. However, in what has become a canonised liturgy of national heroism, proponents of anticolonial resistance from other times are also routinely

[39] "Make Africa the tree of life", *Namibian Sun*, 28 May 2012; "Africa Day is historic, Nujoma", *New Era*, 28 May 2012.
[40] "The mighty month of May", *Windhoek Observer*, 3 May 2013.
[41] See "Two Commemorations in May", *The Combatant* 3 (10&11), 1982; and Krause (2009: 372–373) for a list of commemorative days of SWAPO in exile, including some that were only marked, but not observed.
[42] UN Declaration 3111 of 1973. The same declaration, amended in 1976, declared SWAPO to be the "sole and authentic representation of the Namibian people".

remembered and acknowledged. Due to the overlap with the historic date of the reburial of anticolonial resistance leader Chief Samuel Maharero in Okahandja in August 1923, which is also commemorated annually, Heroes' Day is characterised by a significant polysemy of memory. As such it is both an expression of the plurality of liberation memory in Namibia, as it is a source of contestation over questions of political representation. Heroes' Day events are characterised by the performative veneration of heroism, with a strong focus on armed liberation, through military parades, the bestowal of decorations on war veterans and people with avowed struggle credentials, and the discursive invocation of the pantheon of national heroes in speeches. Among the days of Namibia's commemorative calendar, Heroes' Day most poignantly subscribes to a narrative of national liberation 'through the barrel of the gun' (Becker 2011: 520; Kössler 2007: 370–372), which reflects an important aspect of Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation.

Another political holiday that also underwent a change of name and incorporates multiple layers of meaning is *Day of the Namibian Women and International Human Rights Day* on 10 December. This holiday was first introduced as International Human Rights Day in 1990 to commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN in 1948. In 2004, the day was officially renamed Day of the Namibian Women and International Human Rights Day, introduced by then Prime Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab as a "recognition of the heroism of Namibian women [and their] determination to end apartheid brutalities and colonial domination in Namibia".[43] In this way, the day actually came closer to its origin, because already in exile, 10 December was celebrated as Day of the Namibian Women.[44] While the appraisal of women's contribution to independence implicitly acknowledges the high number of female fighters and activists who took part in the liberation struggle, the day explicitly commemorates the central role women played during the Old Location rebellion in 1959.

Apart from women's resistance to apartheid, Day of the Namibian Women and International Human Rights Day also recognises the contribution of civilians who bore the brunt of colonial oppression inside Namibia. In aiding the guerrilla fighters with information or supplies, organising communal protests, or simply enduring oppression, many people and especially women in townships and in the rural areas of northern Namibia contributed to the liberation struggle, always risking retribution by South Africa's security forces. Official recognition for this kind of mundane, everyday resistance has been scarce throughout the first decade of Swapo's rule, with its focus on armed liberation, epitomised by Heroes' Day. The decision to erect a monument on the site of the Old Location cemetery on 10 December in 2011, "as a symbol of gallantry and heroism", can thus be seen as an acknowledgement of this civilian contribution. As the inscription further reads, "[t]he Old Location uprising of 1959 is a rallying cry for Namibian independence never to be forgotten".

[43] See "Rights day to be renamed", *The Namibian*, 30 September 2004.
[44] For example, by re-enacting the Old Location rebellion; see "Women's Day", *The Namibian*, 13 December 1985. In SWAPO's exile camps, the day was celebrated by parades of female fighters; see "22nd anniversary of Namibia Women's Day", *The Combatant* 3 (5), 1981.

Next to the monument on the adjacent cemetery a memorial tomb stone has been erected, which commemorates those killed as "heroes and heroines" and "martyrs of the Namibian revolution".

Fig. 1: Old Location monument, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2011).

Fig. 2: Old Location monument, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2011).

This makes the *1959 Heroes and Heroines Memorial Grave*, as it is officially called, one of the very few monuments in Namibia dedicated explicitly to the contribution of the civilian

population.[45] During the time of my fieldwork, a group of museum practitioners, historians, and history students were busy gathering oral history of the Old Location for an exhibition at the Windhoek City Museum, curated by Aaron Nambadi.[46] Despite these efforts, however, the government is still confronted with criticism for neglecting the social history of the Old Location in favour of the heroic aspects of the rebellion (Melber 2016).[47]

In this cursory overview, six aspects are particularly noteworthy in the context of my study. First, the strikingly structured nature of Namibia's national commemorative calendar is captivating. Throughout the year, albeit in counter-clockwise rotation, it narrates the dramatic narrative of the nation in carefully selected episodes. Second, a strong focus on militancy, war, and armed liberation is evident, with a particular emphasis on heroism, martyrdom, and solidarity as national ideals. Third, it illustrates the proto-national character of commemoration in exile, where an important part of the national imaginary was crafted, which informs the politics of Namibia's ruling party. Already in exile, SWAPO boldly spoke of these events as "national days".[48] Fourth, with its rootedness in exile, Panafricanism, and socialist solidarity, Namibia's postcolonial commemorative calendar also highlights the transnational history of the liberation struggle. Fifth, as especially the last example of 10 December indicates, the commemoration of selected episodes of the liberation struggle by means of holidays is in many cases connected to memorial culture. Whether it is the memory of independence, Cassinga, Ongulumbashe, or the Old Location: monuments and museums have been established as well to commemorate the events, places, and narratives tied to the dramatic narrative of the nation. Finally, a marked polysemy of memory is inscribed into many of the recognised holidays. This is most obvious in the case of Heroes' Day, which invokes the memory of the genocide and also a different history of exile; that of Ovaherero who fled the German troops into British-ruled Bechuanaland, where many of their descendants live until today.

The Polysemy of Liberation Memory

As outlined in the introduction, my analysis of liberation memory is informed by an understanding of memory as contested *and* productive. In most of my case studies, this happens to be a dynamic and relational interplay, rather than a binary opposition of antagonising memories. In some cases, commemorative practice can of course constitute an explicit or implicit critique of the government's

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[45] Another monument, which recognises civilian contribution to liberation is the Eenhana Shrine; see Becker (2011) and below. Henrichsen has noted that timely after the events at Old Location, a memorial stone was erected to commemorate the residents who were killed, bearing the inscription, "Their blood will sink in, not in vain, and will inspire others". Soon after, however, it was wilfully destroyed (Henrichsen 2015: 130).

[46] Informal conversation with Aaron Nambadi at the Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association of Namibia, Windhoek, 18 May 2012. At this event, he also gave a presentation of the exhibition project's progress. The museum opened in 2020. On the oral history project; see "Old Location remembered", *Namibian Sun*, 27 March 2012 and "The living past", *Insight Namibia*, May 2012.

[47] "A travesty of Namibian history", *New Era*, 12 December 2014.

[48] "22nd anniversary of Namibia Women's Day", *The Combatant* 3 (5), 1981.

memory politics, as in the case of the counter-memory of dissidents and former political prisoners of SWAPO (Kornes 2013, 2010a) or the Namibian veterans of South African security forces, as I will analyse in the chapter on Cassinga Day. Still, in both cases people relate to and identify with their participation in the liberation struggle, albeit from different angles. In other instances, commemoration is rather an effort to integrate a particular, local, or communal tradition of resistance into the dominant narrative, which is managed and mediated by the nation-state who also has the means and resources at its disposal to validate struggle credentials. The example of commemoration in Bethanie, explored in chapter five, is an insightful example for this.

In its capacity as a national political holiday, Heroes' Day is a particularly vivid example for the polysemy of liberation memory in Namibia. As briefly outlined above, 26 August not only commemorates the beginning of SWAPO's armed liberation war, but is also connected to the history of the colonial war of 1903–1908 and the genocide. The date refers to the repatriation of the mortal remains of Chief Samuel Maharero from exile in British-ruled Bechuanaland and his reburial in Okahandja on 26 August 1923. Maharero was one of the most prominent resistance leaders during the war. Together with other survivors, he had managed to escape the German genocide campaign in the wake of the battle of Ohamakari in 1904. The majority of his people, however, either perished in battle in the waterless Omaheke desert or in German prison camps (Wallace 2011: 155–165, 177–178; Zimmerer 2008).

The importance of the burial for the fragmented post-genocide Ovaherero society, both as a catalyst for social reconstruction and political mobilisation, cannot be overstated. Through its institutionalisation in form of the annual Maharero Day, also known as *otjiserandu* or Red Flag Day, the commemoration of Chief Maharero's burial has become a distinctive feature and medium of Ovaherero social memory.[49] It is the most important day for Otjiherero-speaking Namibians to commemorate the genocide, their history of anticolonial resistance against both German and South African rule, and their significant contribution to national liberation. During *otjiserandu* this finds an expression in the reverence bestowed upon the graves of prominent Ovaherero chiefs like Jonker Afrikaner, Samuel Maharero or Hosea Kutako, as well as the impressive marching parades of the *oturupa* commandos. *Otjiserandu* has become an occasion to celebrate the resurgence and reconstruction of the *Herero Nation*, which went through the tribulations of annihilation, displacement, and exile; still struggling with the loss of its erstwhile political power and influence (Krüger /Henrichsen 1998; Wärnlöf 1996: 54). As such, *otjiserandu* has become a distinctive institution of Ovaherero society, as well as "one of the most emblematic formats for representing cultural diversity in the Namibian national context" (Akuupa /Kornes 2013: 40).

[49] On the genesis and importance of otjiserandu; see Kössler 2015: 183–192; Förster 2010, 2008; Kavari /Henrichsen /Förster 2004; Gewald 1998; Krüger /Henrichsen 1998; Wärnlöf 1996; Werner 1990; and Katjavivi 1989: 26.

The rich texture of meaning connected with Heroes' Day highlights the complexities and contestations of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia.[50] The official proclamation of 26 August as a public holiday in 1990 gave rise to fears that the important contribution of Ovaherero to anticolonial resistance and the attainment of independence might end up side-lined in a narrative of national liberation, focusing on SWAPO's armed struggle exclusively (Förster 2010: 336).[51] In the years to follow, the polysemy of Heroes' Day became a symbolic battlefield for two emerging memory politics of political collectives each claiming to represent a nation (Förster 2010: 263–264; Melber 2005a: 100–109; Kandetu 2002; Wärnlöf 1996: 74–76). In this context, a significant reconfiguration of Ovaherero memory and identity politics has been taking place since independence. It is characterised by an increased emphasis on politicising the discourse on genocide to address both the German and Namibian governments with demands for recognition and restitution (Kössler 2015: 231–316; Förster 2010: 332–336; Melber 2005a: 106–109).

At the same time, the 'community' of Otjiherero-speaking Namibians itself is characterised by contestation over issues of genocide commemoration, tradition, and authority.[52] Complicating matters are multiple and intersecting affiliations and loyalties to political parties and various recognised and unrecognised traditional authorities, which tends to resurface during election times and also continually affects the politics of genocide commemoration (Melber 2005a: 107–109).[53] Insightful in this regard is a comment of late Katuutire Kaura, a respected Ovaherero elder and long-standing leader of the oppositional party DTA, who also repeatedly competed for presidency: "It is ironic how we are confronting the German Government on reparations yet we are not united but

[50] Wärnlöf (1996: 38–39) points out that even more events of great historical significance took place around that time in August, e.g. two important battles between Ovaherero and Nama in 1850 and 1880, the escape of Samuel Maharero to Bechuanaland in 1904, the return of his mortal remains in 1923, as well as the signing of Hosea Kutako's first petition to the United Nations in 1946. However incidental, his observation highlights the degree to which the last days of August are imbued with symbolic meaning.
[51] In this context, *The Namibian's* front-page on 27 August 1990 is remarkable, as it mirrors this polysemy and foreshadows conflicts over memory to come. Under the huge headline, "'Our freedom', Namibia's heroes are remembered", two photographs were printed. The picture on the left shows Ongulumbashe veteran Eliaser Tuhadeleni at the Heroes' Day commemoration in Ongulumbashe, the one on the right depicts an unnamed *oturupa* protocol officer at the *otjiserandu* commemoration at Okahandja.
[52] My Otjiherero-speaking friends and interlocutors would immediately object that no such thing as an Ovaherero 'community' does exist, pointing at the divisionism fuelled by party politics and rivalries among traditional authorities. However, even in its fiercest and at times even violent dissent, most Ovaherero I got to know somehow identified as part of a distinctive cultural community, at times idealised as *Herero Nation*, desperately trying to come to terms with its own social, economic, and cultural marginalisation in independent post-genocide Namibia. As Brubaker (2007) reminds us, even though the categories of ethnic common sense should not be guiding our analysis, they nevertheless are social facts.
[53] The existence of two rivalling organising committees for the centenary commemoration of the genocide in 2004 is a case in point (Förster 2010: 272–273). Another example is the controversy regarding the legitimate location of the Holy Fire, tied to questions of succession after the death of Paramount Chief Alfons Maharero. The dispute made headlines for months during 2012 and even led to violent clashes. As a result, police and local authorities cancelled Maharero Day for security reasons, which came as shock to observers and participants.

fighting amongst each other. Who will the German Government believe and will they not laugh at us?"[54] Maybe consequential, in hindsight, Kaura joined Swapo in 2017.

Next to conflicts regarding competing narratives of liberation, which follow ethnicised, regional, or ideological trajectories, this also has quite pragmatic political consequences. For many years now, official Heroes' Day celebrations follow the same model as Independence Day; with the main event rotating through the regions and smaller events taking place in all other regional capitals. Because of this, hardly any guests of honour of significant calibre like the president or members of cabinet are available to attend the celebration in Okahandja. Even though the organisers of *otjiserandu* usually anticipate this dilemma so that it takes place on the last weekend in August, non-attendance of government representatives appears as the norm. This is widely interpreted as a lack of recognition for the contribution that Ovaherero have made to the attainment of national independence.[55] Wärnlöf, however, who documented similar sentiments in the early 1990s, points out that for high-ranking government officials the attendance of *otjiserandu* implies a dilemma, since the event often is used as a platform for opposition politics and tribalism (Wärnlöf 1996: 74–76). This raises the question about the relationship between commemoration and ethnicity.

Soon after independence, the 1990s saw a powerful resurgence of politicised ethnicity, as one of the most durable legacies of apartheid in Namibia (Melber 2009; Kössler 2007; Kjæret /Stokke 2003; Diener 2001a; Åfreds 2000). Together with the highly controversial topic of land reform, which is closely related to the lasting effects of genocide and disappropriation during settler colonialism (Kössler 2015: 117–188; Melber 2014: 89–106; Kaapama 2010), this found a tangible expression in the emergence of genocide commemoration among communities in central and southern Namibia. As Förster has explored in great detail (Förster 2010: 260–318, 2008; see also Wärnlöf 1996), discourse on genocide began to enter and transform Ovaherero memory politics after independence with great momentum. Even though in its genesis, *otjiserandu* is of course inextricably tied to the genocide and its aftermath, as a political topic, genocide became a powerful point of reference for Ovaherero group formation. Especially through the agency of Ovaherero elites in opposition politics, discourse on genocide, and its commemoration developed a distinctly ethnic character (Förster 2010: 263–264).

Other communities developed distinctive memory practices too, which highlights both the existence of diverse histories of resistance and the fragmented nature of memory in post-apartheid Namibia (Kössler 2015: 222–223, 2007). This characteristically concerns communities, which are defined and legally recognised as "traditional communities" according to the Traditional Authorities Act of 2000.[56] As has been broadly discussed for the Namibian context, state policy, legal

[54] "Disunity unhealthy for reparation bid, Kaura", *Confidenté*, 30 August 2012.

[55] See Kandetu 2002; Melber 2005a: 107; and especially the columns of Kae Matundu in state-owned newspaper *New Era*, e.g. "We are all heroes and heroines", *New Era*, 23 August 2013. At the same time, Swapo always had a significant Otjiherero-speaking membership and cannot simply be discarded as an ethnic organisation.

[56] In a rather classic understanding of ethnicity, the act defines a traditional community as "an indigenous homogeneous, endogamous social grouping of persons comprising of families deriving from exogamous clans

recognition, public discourse, and everyday groupism are heavily intertwined when it comes to reproducing ethnicity as a social fact.[57] Accordingly, even though the communal commemoration of liberation struggle history is organised by traditional authorities as representatives of the state, their commemorative practice tends to be framed in public discourse as the cultural practice of distinctive ethnic groups.

As an institution of liberation memory, *otjiserandu* is probably the most poignant example for this, since it is considered by many people as tantamount to Ovaherero identity. Less prominent, but of great importance for an understanding of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia, too, are the annual commemorations of various Nama and Orlam communities, which have developed their own elaborate traditions of commemorating anticolonial resistance (Kössler 2015: 179–219, 2010a, 2004; Biwa 2012: 161–239; Biwa 2000; Sharp /Boonzaier 1994). Comparable events are also organised by other traditional communities, e.g. by Damara (Kößler 2008: 331, 2007: 381) and the Rehoboth Basters (Kjæret /Stokke 2003: 583–585); two population groups, which were also affected by the genocide and its aftermath.

While it is misleading to classify the multifaceted registers of communal, regional, and sub-national commemoration in Namibia as primarily ethnic in nature, they are one important social practice where national and ethnic identification are heavily interwoven. It is at this intersection, especially in the context of genocide commemoration, that the government found itself increasingly addressed with political claims for recognition and restitution. This development reflects the broader dynamics of nation-building and memory politics in independent Namibia:

> Several communities are 'inventing' or 'reinventing' their own past and their claim to territory and identity. This is understandable, for it takes place in the context of their relations to the state and their demands for group entitlement and symbolic recognition. These developments need not necessarily pose a threat to the political and territorial integrity of the state. However, they may well have to be considered when we assemble a new pantheon of heroes and heroines (du Pisani 1997: 30).

Du Pisani's assessment was written with the prospective Heroes' Acre memorial site in mind, emphasising the importance of symbolic recognition. It also contained a perceptive warning of the pitfalls of ethnic nationalism, which found its negative embodiment only two years later with the secessionist attempt of the Caprivi Liberation Army (Kornes 2013: 7–9; Melber 2009). For Kössler, the polysemy of Heroes' Day is thus a case in point for the fragmentation of memory in postcolonial Namibia, which brings different commemorative practices into opposition with each other,

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which share a common ancestry, language, cultural heritage, customs and traditions, who recognises a common traditional authority and inhabits a common communal area, and may include the members of that traditional community residing outside the common communal area"; see Kössler 2006: 1–25 on the importance of traditional authorities as custodians of genocide memory and their pursuit of 'revindicatory politics'.

[57] See for instance Stell /Fox 2015; Akuupa /Kornes 2013: 40–42; Akuupa 2015, 2010; Bedorf 2007; Hinz 2007; Kössler 2007; Kjæret /Stokke 2003; Diener 2001a; and Sharp /Boonzaier 1994.

characterised by a hierarchy between nation-state and sub-national communtities (Kössler 2007: 363). Similar conflicts are rife in other communities in Namibia as well, resulting in debate, estrangement, and frustration, but also modifications to state-sponsored Heroes' Day commemoration, as I will analyse in the corresponding chapter.

However, the politics of recognition in the domain of liberation memory extend way beyond the articulation of ethnic identity politics. It also manifests itself in a growing internal differentiation within the heterogeneous community relating itself – by active participation and biographical or familial affiliation – to the former armed liberation movement. This entails communities such as war veterans, ex-combatants, rank-and-file cadre, former political prisoners of both South Africa and SWAPO, exiles, remainees, workers, labour organisers, students, women and community activists, as well as, in generational differentiation, struggle children and born free, all in one way or another constituting mnemonic communities struggling for recognition.

Regardless whether the commemorative practices of different communities refer to anticolonial struggles against German and South African rule or to SWAPO's armed liberation struggle post-1966: liberation memory in Namibia is a dynamic and increasingly polysemic phenomenon. As such, especially in its reciprocal relationship with state-sponsored and communal memory practice, it is highly indicative of the manifold challenges that independent Namibia is facing due to the legacy of colonial and apartheid rule. In terms of nation-building, this manifests itself within the tension expressed by the two policy concepts of "One Namibia, one Nation" and "Unity in Diversity" (Akuupa /Kornes 2013), and the tangible shift towards cultural nationalism (Becker 2015, 2011; Akuupa 2010). A reoccurring issue in this regard, which I will explore in depth in chapter five, is the historical location of the genocide in Swapo's narrative of national liberation, tied to calls for recognition and restitution of the affected communities. One important arena where this relation manifests itself is memorialisation and memorial culture.

The Aesthetics and Politics of Memorialisation: Museums, Monuments, Memorial Sites

The German colonial influence in architecture and memorial culture has left a lasting impression in Namibia's capital Windhoek and even more so in the coastal towns strongly characterised by the German community, Lüderitz and Swakopmund. Historicised fortresses, timber-framed houses, war graves, *Heimatmuseen*,[58] monuments and memorials dedicated to colonial pioneers and soldiers are frequent reminders of this influence, as are colonial-era German-language place and street names,

[58] A characteristically German variation of a museum, which is dedicated to local history and cultural heritage, often privately-owned, managed and curated by enthusiastic laymen who are organised in cultural associations. The idealistic concept of *Heimat* is deeply interwoven with German romantic notions of ethnic nationalism and is a powerful source of identification. See Wessler 2007: 89–116 on *Heimatmuseen* in the Namibian context.

still often officially in use.[59] This German cultural element, so distinctive of Namibia, emerged during an often precarious and volatile venture into settler colonialism, which was contested by the local population throughout its entire duration (Zimmerer 2022; Kössler 2015: 49–78, 99–115; Silvester 2005).

The Slow Transformation of Memorial Culture in the 1990s

The fact that German colonial monuments, but also lesser known South African ones like the Owambo Campaign Memorial in Windhoek (Shiweda 2005: 33–56) were left untouched after independence, is significant. One reason for this may be seen in Swapo's proclaimed policy of national reconciliation. In his foreword to the official publication for the inauguration of the Heroes' Acre on 26 August 2002, then Prime Minister Hage Geingob phrased it accordingly: "Daily, we are greeted by colonial monuments, which have no significance to the majority of Namibians. We decided to retain those colonial relics in the interest of national reconciliation".[60] As has been pointed out repeatedly, however, national reconciliation as practiced by the Namibian government primarily translated into a negotiated settlement between the liberation movement, claiming political power, and the old elites, who were to retain their socio-economic privileges (Melber 2014: 16–18, 2003b; du Pisani 2001: 224, 1991). As symbolic markers of the social and economic order of the settler society, colonial monuments – in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Lüderitz, and other places – were left untouched. In the same vein, the German dominated museum sector, which was strongly characterised by private owned museums in the tradition of the German *Heimatmuseum* and a focus on the cultural representation of German settler colonialism, was largely maintained and reluctant to change (Wessler 2007: 89–116; Schildkrout 1995).

Still, the absence of memorial culture commemorating Namibia's liberation struggles but also the genocide, was a repeated cause of concern during the first decade of independence (Zeller 2004: 134–135). In her highly informative yet largely overlooked master's thesis, Åfreds (2000) has provided a thorough analysis of the political discourse regarding this absence. Interesting in her account is the discrepancy between an obvious desire for the construction of monuments, expressed by many politicians and members of the ruling party, and the slow implementation of such projects. In this, the National Monuments Council (NMC), as "national mediator of the past" (Åfreds 2000: 55), appears to have played a key role. Ideas and initiatives for new monuments, which were discussed in the National Assembly and other political fora, were routinely referred to the council

[59] Mbenzi (2009), in what appeared to be the only research paper on this subject at the time of writing, has highlighted the unsystematic policy on renaming in independent Namibia, which is a constant cause for public debate and contestation; see also Becker 2018: 2–3; Kössler 2015: 226; Diener 2001b: 330–331; and "Turn right at Bismarck", *Insight Namibia*, February 2011.

[60] Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison (2002: 6); see also Zeller 2004: 134. Swapo's policy of national reconciliation is based on the so called "Constitutional Principles" of 1984, agreed upon by all parties involved in negotiating the eventual political transition to independence. Despite the centrality of the policy in Swapo's political discourse, it was never codified nor institutionalised (Hunter 2008; see also Kornes 2013, 2010a; Saul /Leys 1995; Weiland /Braham 1994).

for implementation, where quite often they apparently were affected and hindered by political interference (Åfreds 2000: 55–59).

A most prominent example for this was a statue of Hosea Kutako, which was commissioned in 1990, partly funded by Norway and supposed to be erected in the Parliament Gardens in Windhoek. Kutako (1870–1970) is undoubtedly one of the most important figures in Namibia's history of nationalism (Henrichsen 2015: 136). He was one of the earliest organisers of political resistance against South African foreign rule and played a central role in making it an international legal issue by petitioning the UN (Wallace 2011: 244–247). In 1920, he was appointed Ovaherero leader by Frederik Maharero and also gave a speech at Samuel Maharero's funeral in 1924 (Kandetu 2002).[61] A life-size bust in his honour was donated to the UN in 1962 and still is on display in the central building in New York.[62] In his autobiography, Sam Nujoma refers to Kutako as the "father of our freedom struggle" (Nujoma 2001: 193) and a personal role model. Kutako's importance is further underlined by his inclusion in the national pantheon at the Heroes' Acre, where he was among the first group of national heroes honoured with a memorial tomb upon the site's inauguration in 2002. Significantly, a white Namibian artist, Hercules Viljoen, won the NMC's competition for the design of the statue.[63] In his dual role as a contemporary of the war with the German Empire and a leading nationalist, Kutako appeared as an excellent choice for a statue, since he embodies the historical connection between early anticolonial resistance, the genocide, and the national liberation movement. His statue was the first truly postcolonial monument, commissioned after independence; it was, however, only unveiled in 2001.

According to Åfreds, the statue became the object of intense contestation between government and the NMC, as well as between Swapo and the political opposition. Especially the categorisation of Kutako as either a national or tribal leader caused dissent, paired with the accusation that through nationalising Kutako, the Swapo (read: 'Owambo') government appropriated Ovaherero history (Åfreds 2000: 58–59). Furthermore, plans by the government to erect the statue at Windhoek's international airport, which in 1999 was renamed in honour of Hosea Kutako, instead of the Parliament Gardens, were vehemently opposed by Otjiherero-speaking members of the opposition. For Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako, the plans reflected government's ambition to marginalise Ovaherero people in independent Namibia.[64] The fact that the statue was eventually erected in 1999, but remained veiled for two years did not ease these sentiments, quite the contrary. In a statement on the matter, the National Unity Democratic

[61] Ojiherero-speaking Namibians played an important role in the formation of anticolonial nationalism and also established some of the country's earliest political organisations, like the Herero Chiefs Council and SWANU, Namibia's oldest political party and national liberation movement, founded in 1959 (Henrichsen 2015: 136–137; Emmett 1999: 213–250; Herbstein /Evenson 1989: 6–8).
[62] See <www.un.org/ungifts/content/bust-chief-hosea-kutako> [last accessed 15 October 2022].
[63] "Kutako's memory cast in bronze", *The Namibian*, 12 June 1998.
[64] "Hot air rises over statue", *The Namibian*, 23 June 1999.

Organisation, an opposition party dominated by Otjiherero-speakers, threatened that "[failure to unveil the statue] will result in the Herero nation turning to other measures".[65]

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day (10 December) in 2001, the statue was finally unveiled, flanked by additional statues of Reverend Theofilus Hamutumbangela and Hendrik Witbooi, which were also crafted by Hercules Viljoen.[66]

Fig. 3: Hosea Kutako statue at the Parliament Gardens. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

The question, whether the statue of Hosea Kutako, standing on its own in front of the parliament building, was too 'subversive' for the Swapo government and had to be contained by a prominent 'early resistance' leader (Witbooi) and a founding member of SWAPO (Hamutumbangela), inevitably became the subject of conspiracy theories (Zeller 2004: 134). The example of the first monument commissioned in independent Namibia to commemorate the liberation struggle, already reflects the predicaments of nation-building in postcolonial Namibia, as it foreshadowed similar

[65] "Nudo issues Kutako warning", *The Namibian*, 7 June 2000.
[66] See <https://www.nhc-nam.org/nahris/sites/1132001> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

debates to come.[67] The role of the NMC for perpetuating the status quo of memorial culture in the first years of independence, by protectively affirming colonial heritage and reluctantly proclaiming postcolonial heritage, should not be overemphasised without more thorough research into its institutional history.[68] It appears, however, that the combined effects of political meddling and budgetary constraints hindered the council to be effective in implementing projects. The only national monument proclaimed by the council after independence in the 1990s was the Nakambale Mission House in Olukonda in 1992 (Vogt 2004: 137–138).

The Swapo government, on the other hand, was also reticent in launching more substantial and prestigious projects. Next to the ensemble of statues dedicated to male resistance leaders in front of parliament (2001), it only inaugurated a monument at Ongulumbashe (1990) and a memorial stone in honour of King Nehale lyaMpingana's battle with German troops at Namutoni in 1904 (1996) (Zeller 2004: 134). Plans for a war museum, promised by President Nujoma already in 1990,[69] or a proper independence memorial, discussed as soon as 1991, were stalled and postponed, mostly for budgetary reasons (Åfreds 2000: 60). A memorial dedicated to the genocide, especially at the sites of former concentration camps like Shark Island or Swakopmund, did not materialise until 2014, even though it was already bemoaned by Swapo MP Michaela Hübschle as early as 1993, to no avail (Zeller 2004: 135). One can accordingly characterise the 1990s as an era of a very slow and reluctant transformation of Namibia's postcolonial memorial landscape.

Offering explanations for this can only be a tentative approach. The effect of the policy of national reconciliation on the maintenance of colonial memorial culture is one answer, while taking into account the already mentioned fuzziness of the policy's definition and implementation. One reason was certainly the not yet smoothly functioning bureaucratic workflows in a system that was undergoing a profound transitional process, with various institutions who had not yet established clear terms of reference and portfolios. It was only in 2004, for instance, that the NMC became the

[67] Fittingly, a photograph of the veiled statue became the logo of the history conference, *Public History: Forgotten History*, University of Namibia, 22–25 August 2000.

[68] On the history of the council, its different stages as Historical Monuments Commission (1948–1968) and National Monuments Council of South Africa (1969–1990), as well as its transformation to the National Monuments Council of Namibia (1990–2004); see the account of Vogt (2004), who was secretary of the NMC in 1993–1994. Many of the controversies, regarding German colonial monuments in Namibia in recent years, involve Vogt either in his role as a gatekeeper in heritage management or public commentator of public heritage policy (Kössler 2015: 153–154, 164–165). When the German colonial-era naval monument in Swakopmund was splashed with paint in 2017, Vogt was cited that Namibia lacked 'an understanding of the historicity of a monument'. According to him, public opinion in Namibia was 'anti-white', using colonial monuments as a projection screen: 'It is very easy to say that it was the white people who stole our land, and it is the white people who have all the wealth, and it is the white people whose kids go to better schools, and it is the white people who have everything while we have nothing. This is a very simple statement […] and I understand it fully, because the people of Africa, the majority, are of simple mind', see "A Colonial-Era Wound Opens in Namibia", *New York Times*, 21 January 2017.

[69] "'Ongulumbashe transformed the struggle': a tribute and pledges on historic Namibia Day", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1990.

National Heritage Council (NHC) with its own mandate.[70] Until then, it was still based on the National Monuments Act of South Africa of 1969. In addition, budgetary constraints, red tape, and political interference were factors that played a role, with differing degrees of impact.

Another reason, which I will explore in more detail in the following chapters, is the government's focus on the veterans as a social group. With independence came the task of reintegrating tens of thousands of exiles and ex-combatants into state structures, civil service, the security sector, and society at large, which presented its own challenges and conflicts (Metsola 2010, 2007). Commemoration largely focussed on the physical presence of veterans as the communicative memory of the liberation struggle. Not surprisingly, one of the few monuments inaugurated in the 1990s was dedicated to the memory of Ongulumbashe. At the same time, in the domain of culture and heritage policy, nation-building happened mainly along the lines of the Swapo-government's "common culture approach" (du Pisani 2010a: 9), which emphasised the centrality of the armed liberation struggle as a source of national identification for all Namibians (du Pisani 2010a: 16). National commemoration in the first years of independence thus focused primarily on national unity, reconciliation, and the search for an inclusive national culture (Akuupa 2016, 2010; Becker 2015; Akuupa /Kornes 2013; du Pisani 2010a, 2001; Diener 2001a, 2001b; Schildkrout 1995: 65–67).

Finally, and in a more holistic perspective, the first years of independence were characterised by the process of "harmonising the interest of the old and the new elites" (du Pisani 2001: 224). The policy of national reconciliation with its leniency towards colonial-era monuments has to be seen in this context, too. For the liberation movement, this implied the challenge of negotiating a new social order: between the party's elite and rank-and-file cadre, and between the exile and domestic wings of Swapo (Dobell 1998: 107–112). It was within this context that conflicts with roots in the pre-independence struggle era started to resurface. The debates about Swapo's human rights violations in exile, the politics of secession in Caprivi, the formation of a new opposition party around former SWAPO member, labour activist, and Robben Island prisoner Ben Ulenga were focal points of contestation during this era (Kornes 2013: 11–15). The Swapo-government under President Nujoma reacted to these challenges of its power of definition over the legacy of the liberation struggle with increasingly authoritarian measures. It was also in the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, that more and more national monuments were commissioned and inaugurated. These reflect the emergence of a more assertive and fervent nationalism with an accompanying nationalist memorial culture (Becker 2011).

[70] National Heritage Act No. 27 of 2004. One of its first proclamations was the recognition of Ongulumbashe as a national heritage site (see chapter six).

The Emergence of a Nationalist Memorial Culture in the 2000s

This development has found its most impressive materialisation in the Heroes' Acre, which was inaugurated in Windhoek in 2002. The Heroes' Acre was planned to be complemented by an Independence Memorial Museum, which however was opened only twelve years later. Other sites that represent this phenomenon are the still unopened Okahandja Military Museum, the ever expanding memorial landscape at Ongulumbashe, as well as a number of monuments throughout northern Namibia, dedicated to commemorating fallen PLAN combatants, including the so called Eenhana Shrine (Becker 2011: 532–535). Despite the differences in regional and historical background, format and context of origin, these sites have unique features: they are state-sponsored, they commemorate the liberation struggle, and they adhere to a specific aesthetic framework, which is best described as monumental modernist and nationalist memorial culture. At the same time, they reflect Namibia's contestations over nation-building, national reconciliation, and the acknowledgement of individual or collective contributions to liberation. Even though most appeared in the second and third decade since independence and thus largely during the tenure of President Hifikepunye Pohamba, quite often they had been started as projects by Sam Nujoma's governments.

For many authors, the emergence of this specific nationalist memorial culture is an expression of an authoritarian turn within the ruling party during the second half of the 1990s and the transformation of Namibia into an effective dominant party system, run by an uncontested former liberation movement in power.[71] In this sense, the transition from Sam Nujoma to his successor Hifikepunye Pohamba in 2005 has also been understood primarily in terms of continuity. As political commentator Alexactus Kaure phrased it with a hint of irony, both presidents have "one combined legacy", with Pohamba "continuing and emulating the legacy and achievements of President Nujoma and the 'good work' done by the Swapo Party Government over the last fifteen years".[72] Sites like the Heroes' Acre and the IMM in Windhoek, the Eenhana Shrine, and the new State House (Kirkwood 2011: 28–38) are the memorial culture representing this legacy.

Another factor that contributes to the perception of Namibia's emerging memorial culture as an expression of political authoritarianism has to do with its North Korean provenance. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of commemorative museum and memorial projects since the 2000s have been built Mansudae, North Korea's global market leader for the production of monumental memorial culture (Kornes 2019a; Kirkwood 2013, 2011). Indeed, the reconfiguration of memorial landscapes in Namibia, most prominently in the capital, but also in northern Namibia, is inseparably tied to the activities of the North Korean company. In order to make sense of Mansudae's unlikely emergence as a decisive stakeholder in the memorialisation of Namibia's

[71] See Melber 2014: 54–58, 2011, 2010, 2003a–d; Becker 2018: 7–8, 2011; du Pisani 2010a; Hunter 2008: 147–164; Lamb 2006; and Saunders 2003.

[72] "The Nujoma-Pohamba Legacy", *The Namibian*, 8 July 2011. Pohamba's successor Hage Geingob, Namibia's first non-Oshiwambo-speaking president and another old guard party stalwart, continues this legacy seamlessly (Shejevali /Weylandt 2018; Melber 2015).

liberation struggle, I will provide a concise explanation of the entangled history of Namibia and North Korea in chapter six, including the Okahandja Military Museum and the Ongulumbashe memorial landscape as case-studies. This will be followed by a detailed analysis of the construction of Heroes' Acre and IMM as the central sites of national liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia in chapter seven and of the curation of the IMM in chapter eight.

In dealing with museums and monuments as media of liberation memory, one specific group of actors enters the spotlight of my analysis, namely historians, who are engaged in academia and/or Namibia's museum and heritage sector. My study would neither be complete without analysing this particular field as well, nor would it have been possible to conduct it at all, were it not for the agency of Namibia's historians in my research. For that reason, I will conclude this chapter with conceptual reflections on my relation to Namibian history.

History and Liberation Memory in Namibia

In a paper he delivered at a workshop of the *South African Empire Research Group* in Windhoek on 15 November 2011, historian and long-standing head of the National Archives of Namibia Werner Hillebrecht voiced his frustration on the priorities of scholarship on Namibian history. His contribution was titled, "The 252nd dissertation about German colonialism, or the first about the Odendaal Plan?" and criticised an apparent bias in current research on colonialism in Namibia, which favoured the German era at the expense of South African apartheid rule. I was attending the workshop for research purposes, since I considered Namibia's scene of historians and museum and heritage experts as part of my field and wanted to familiarise myself with the Namibian discourse on history. However, even though I am not a historian, his critical interjection convinced me in my conviction, not to write the 253rd dissertation on the German genocide.[73] Instead, it became clear to me that the study I want to write is one that considers current debates on Namibian history as a backdrop for my ethnography of liberation memory and national commemoration in Namibia.

However, even though my own research is focussed on commemorative practices and the negotiation of liberation memory in independent Namibia, the historicity of the genocide played an important role. As Memory Biwa (2012: 7–11) rightly notes, the way the war and the genocide have been framed temporally ("1904–1908") and ethnically ("Ovaherero and Nama"), results in the exclusion of other communities who were affected. Furthermore, for many years discourse on the Namibian genocide centred on the question whether the German military campaign amounted to

[73] The South African Empire Research Group is a collective of historians from Southern Africa, Switzerland and England, situated at Basel, which is actively engaged in conceptualising pre-1994 South Africa as an empire in Southern Africa. During my research, I attended workshops and conferences of the group in Uppsala (2010), Windhoek (2011) and Basel (2013). The workshop in Windhoek took place on 14–15 November at the NAN and the history department of UNAM and included the official book launch of Marion Wallace's monograph, *A History of Namibia*.

genocide, especially in the context of Lothar von Trotha's infamous extermination order, and in how far continuities between colonial-era mass violence and the holocaust can be discerned.[74] This discourse, with its often misleading focus on numbers (Biwa 2012: 35), has shifted, though.[75] More scholarship has focussed on the role of the concentration camps as places of mass death, where prisoners were subjected to forced labour, sexual exploitation, medical experiments, exposure and neglect.[76] Death rates in the camps were high and had grave impacts on the communities which were affected by imprisonment, like the !Aman of Bethanie, for instance. With the end of the military campaign in 1908,[77] the concentration camps were closed. For the communities who had challenged German rule and survived the genocide, the war ended with defeat, forced displacement, and the disappropriation of their land. The long term effects of this are felt until today.

Wallace's critical endeavour to narrate the events with capital letters as the *Namibian War* (Wallace 2011) is noteworthy for recognising the internal dynamics and interrelatedness of resistance against German rule. At the same time, this also clearly aims at narrating and, in doing so, nationalising Namibian liberation history beyond prevalent ethnic frameworks. During her presentation at the workshop of the research group, she explained that she had written "not a nationalist, but a national historiography".[78] While both Biwa's and Wallace's approaches at narrating more exclusive accounts of national history in the Namibian context are laudable and innovative, it is important to be cautious of the pitfalls of methodological nationalism – especially, if history has been shaped by international agency to such a degree as in the case of Namibia.

It will be difficult to write a history of the war of 1903–1908, for instance, without taking into account the contemporary geopolitical dynamics of the wider Cape region, the exile of the Ovaherero in Bechuanaland, the deportation of members of the ǀKhowesin to Cameroon and Togo (Wallace 2011: 174), or the consequences of the war on domestic politics in the German Empire. In the same vein but even more poignantly, the liberation struggle since the 1960s has been shaped by international actors and entanglements to a degree that is at odds with any attempt to write it as a purely national endeavour. In engaging with these Namibian debates, which were hot topics during

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[74] See Klävers 2019; Kössler 2015: 79–97, 2010b, 2005; Eckl 2008; Hillebrecht 2007; Zollmann 2007; Kundrus 2006, 2005; Kundrus /Strotbeck 2006; Lau 1995; Dedering 1993; as well as contributions in edited volumes of Zimmerer /Zeller 2008 and Melber 2005b. Biwa has dedicated a whole chapter of her doctoral thesis to criticise the debate's inherent Germanocentrism (Biwa 2012: 7–60).

[75] In recent years the scholarly discussion has increasingly been internationalised and there is overwhelming consensus that the German Empire's military campaign indeed constitutes genocide. The German government, too, is slowly coming to terms to acknowledge this and started to speak of genocide (Kornes 2015b). After five years of negotiation between representatives of both countries, a reconciliation agreement (*Versöhnungsabkommen*) was struck in 2021. It continues to be heavily contested, though, by decendents of the communities who were affected by the genocide; see <https://roape.net/2021/06/22/germanys-namibia-genocide-apology-the-limits-of-decolonizing-the-past/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[76] On the central role of the concentration camps in the genocide; see Kössler 2015: 17; Zimmerer 2008, 2005; Adhikari 2008; Erichsen 2008a, 2008b, 2005; Zeller 2008; Zimmermann 2003: 174–176; Gaydish 2000; and Hillebrecht 1993.

[77] With the exception of Nama leader Simon Kopper, who remained undefeated and reached a settlement with the German authorities in 1909 (Wallace 2011: 172).

[78] Field notes, 15 November 2011, UNAM, Windhoek.

my research, I got cautious to do justice to the transnational complexity of Namibia's history of anti-colonial resistance and the way it is interwoven with people's biographies. The relationship between individual and collective, localised and transnational trajectories of resistance is a recurrent theme in most of my case-studies.

My encounters with Namibia's historians and academic history have benefitted my dissertation greatly, especially where my encounters with the research group and their amassed regional competence is concerned. Numerous informal conversations on my research topic with the scholars involved have sharpened my perception on the dynamics and politics of history in a nascent postcolonial nation-state such as Namibia, with its particular tradition of nationalist historiography. Furthermore, it has given me a tangible understanding of the degree to which historians are actively involved in producing, mediating, and contesting liberation memory in Namibia. Accordingly, they feature prominently in my study: both as a group of actors, whose professional work I investigated through participant observation, and as colleagues and friends, who have shared their knowledge, time, and passion about their subject with me.

In addition, this has given me privileged insights into the institutional workings of Namibian history and heritage production, not least concerning its precarious state of affairs. The downgrading of UNAM's history department and its merger with the geography, environmental studies and tourism management departments, for instance, was one issue that agitated people at the time, some of them detecting political interference. The difficult employment situation for well-educated historians in a country, where qualified positions in public service are rare and political affiliations matter a lot, was another one. Navigating this field as professionals in academia or the museum and heritage sector amounts to a tight-rope act between ambitions to produce work, which is based on sound and critical scholarship and the manifold political and economic dependencies attached to it. This formed an important background to my research, which influenced this study not only on the level of the privileged insights, it made available to me. Due to my particular field and subject matter, I had encounters with young scholars and professionals on a daily basis. People were open and willing to talk to me about their trials and tribulations, and as many examples during my fieldwork demonstrate, quite often they were willing to do so in public, too. I still had to take care that statements I use in this thesis will not negatively affect people's professional careers. For that reason, most of these encounters have been anonymised.

2. National Unity in Diversity: Celebrating Independence Day

On 21 March 2010 at 9 a.m. sharp, just as announced on the official programme for the day, the first guests of honour started to arrive at the Independence Stadium in Windhoek. Each of the foreign dignitaries was ferried in in a black limousine, greeted by a protocol officer and ushered to his, rarely her, respective seat. The range of guests was illustrious, reflecting the history of international and especially African solidarity with the Namibian liberation struggle. Robert Mugabe, Kenneth Kaunda, Laurent Kabila, Jacob Zuma, all representing important 'frontline states' and host countries for Namibia's exile community during the liberation struggle, were received with frenetic applause by the audience. Equally well received, however, was Martti Ahtissari, who administered the UNTAG mission in 1989, which oversaw the Namibian peace process.[79] Between the arrivals of dignitaries, Ndilimani, a music group founded in exile and closely related to Swapo, played liberation songs on the music stage. This, too, was greeted with exaltation on the grandstand. People were dancing, swinging raised fists, the women ululating.

At about 9:50, the military parade began. Led by the military brass band with its red uniforms, all branches of the Namibian defence forces – presidential guard, infantry, navy and air force – entered the stadium. The parade circled the playing field once, and then positioned itself on the grass. In the scorching sun, the soldiers awaited the arrival of the president-elect, Hifikepunye Pohamba. First, however, the "Founding Father of the Namibian Nation" arrived in a silver Mercedes Benz limousine.[80] For his arrival, Ndilimani played Sam Nujoma's personal praise song, *Sema oulipeni? Yelula pandela ola namibia* (Sam where are you? Raise the flag of Namibia). The moment Nujoma stepped out of the car, the audience in the stadium went wild with adoration. People started dancing, cheering, singing, raising their fists and ululating. Nujoma was greeted by the Speaker of Parliament Theo-Ben Gurirab, who approached the vehicle, enthusiastically pumping his fists into the air to the sound of the music. Nujoma himself greeted the audience and his liberation struggle peers among the invited heads of state with several power salutes, while Mr. Gurirab personally ushered Nujoma and his wife Kovambo Nujoma to their seats.

Several minutes later, Hifikepunye Pohamba entered the stadium with a motorcade consisting of three military jeeps and a police escort on motorcycles. He was standing in the open back of the second car, waving at the audience with his right hand. Like Nujoma, his entrance was accompanied by a special song, which Ndilimani performed in his honour: *Hifikepunye Pohamba, ndjila ndlipi wa enda na she tu endemo* (Hifikepunye Pohamba, show us which way you walk, so that we can go through it also).[81] After he had completed a round in the stadium, he stopped in front of the dais,

[79] The positive reception of Ahtisaari was noteworthy, since many Namibians blame UNTAG for not intervening militarily in the ceasefire breach of April 1989, which resulted in hundreds of casualties mostly on the side of SWAPO; see Henning Melber, "Beyond 'patriotic history'", *Insight Namibia,* May 2009.
[80] In 2005, Sam Nujoma was officially recognised and honoured with the title "Founding Father of the Namibian Nation"; see Conferment of Status of Founding Father of the Namibian Nation Act, 2005.
[81] Translations provided by Auguste Negongo.

which he mounted to witness a 21-gun salute and the playing of the hymns of Namibia and the AU by the military brass band. He then proceeded to inspect the troops. After that he was joined by his wife Penehupifo Pohamba and both were ushered to their seats as well, to oversee and participate in the celebration of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence. This also included Hifikepunye Pohamba's official inauguration as President of the Republic of Namibia, following the national elections of 2009. In the ceremonial presence of the national symbols, constitution, flag and seal of state, the Chief Justice made Pohamba take the oath of office. And with the words "It has been done according to our wish… Comrade President", Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, Minister of Finance and master of ceremonies for the jubilee celebration, congratulated Pohamba for his second term.

Fig. 4: Youth and cultural groups at Independence Day, Windhoek, 21 March 2010. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

During his inaugural speech and after the military had left the premises, a civilian parade entered the stadium. It consisted of regional delegations, representing some of Namibia's recognised ethnic groups in their respective traditional attires.[82] The groups assembled on the playing field, neatly sorted, forming a kind of ethnic tableau. Then entered another group which consisted of young people all dressed in the official Independence Day jubilee motto shirt. The young people, who were visibly diverse in regard to categories like ethnicity, gender, and skin colour, formed a half-circle around the other groups. Together, they constituted the backdrop for President Pohamba's speech. In their live installation, they gave a vivid representation of the Namibian

[82] To be precise, the cultural groups were all professional performers, who were casted for the event and represented regions, personified by ethnic groups associated with these regions. See Akuupa /Kornes 2013, regarding the ambivalent connotation of this representation in the context of South Africa's history of politicised ethnicity under apartheid.

variation of ethnic and cultural unity in diversity, within the confines of the nation and embodied by one of its most potent symbols: youth.

The proceedings of the twentieth Independence Day anniversary celebration outlined above give an impression of some of the social, political, and historical complexities attached to national day commemoration in Namibia. It highlights the routines of an established and well-rehearsed protocol, which of course is based on international standards for the ceremonial reaffirmation of the nation-state and its institutions (Lentz /Lowe 2018: 29–33; Cannadine 2010; Williams /Holland /Barringer 2010; Elgenius 2007, 2005; Zerubavel 2003). The fact that every five years after national elections the inauguration ceremony coincides with an Independence Day jubilee, adds a second layer of significance. In this duality, too, the celebration represents a by now routinised model for the self-representation of the Namibian state and its "regulatory power" (Becker /Lentz 2013: 3).

In the following, I will analyse the significance of Namibia's independence celebration of 1990 in this regard, both as a model for the sequencing of Independence Day and the staging of political national holidays in Namibia more generally. My elaboration of the model and its continuity is followed by a typology of Independence Day celebrations in Namibia based on distinctive characteristics, performative elements, and organisational procedures, both on stage and behind the scenes. Finally, I will take a closer look at the aesthetics and politics of Independence Day celebration, which I will explore in light of three aspects: first, the complex and ambivalent relationship between state, party, and nation; second, the significance of struggle nostalgia for liberation memory; third, the role of the youth as a specific target audience.

Independence Day, 21 March 1990: The Model of a National Day[83]

> Taking the destiny of this country in our own hands means, among other things, making a great effort to forge national identity and unity. Our collective security and prosperity depend on our unity of purpose and action. Unity is a precondition for peace and development. Without peace, it is not possible for the best and talented citizens of our country to realise their potential. Our achievement of independence imposes upon us a heavy responsibility, not only to defend our hard-won liberty, but also to set for ourselves higher standards of equality, justice and opportunity for all, without regard to race, creed or colour. These are the standards from which all who seek to emulate us shall draw inspiration.

[83] The following is based on a rich and abundant documentation of the event in national and international media reports, which is accessible either online or at Namibia's National Library, as well as on my analysis of various eye-witness accounts, interviews, informal conversations, public documents, reports, grey literature, the photo collections of the NAN and National Museum of Namibia, the old independence exhibition at the *Alte Feste* display centre, as well as the illustrated book of Seyman and Venter (1990). I provide sources only where I deem it necessary, to avoid a bloating of references and footnotes. A copy of the official programme is available at the National Archives of Namibia (NAN XX 1627 A).

> In accepting the sacred responsibility which the Namibian people have placed on me, as the first President of the Republic of Namibia, I would like to bow and pay homage to our fallen heroes and heroines, whose names Namibia's present and future generations will sing in songs of praise and whose martyrdom they will intone. In conclusion, I move, in the name of our people, to declare that Namibia is forever free, sovereign and independent![84]

With these famous words, Sam Nujoma concluded the speech which heralded Namibia's independence and his inauguration as the country's first president. Namibia celebrated the end of South African foreign rule and its independence as a nation-state on 21 March 1990. Official festivities began in the morning of 20 March with cultural performances to welcome the arriving international guests. At 4 p.m., the gates of the Windhoek Athletics Stadium opened for the public, which was entertained by a rich selection of Namibian choirs and dancing groups, as well as the live music of Ndilimani, while awaiting the arrival of the president-elect.

The date of independence had been proposed by SWAPO's Theo-Ben Gurirab in the Constituent Assembly, where he introduced a motion to choose the twenty-first in commemoration of the Sharpeville Massacre.[85] On that day in 1960, 69 people had been killed by the police during a protest march in the South African town of Sharpeville; an event, which sparked the rise of militant resistance against apartheid in South Africa and the region at large. The Constituent Assembly unanimously adopted Gurirab's motion. The choice of the date thus ingrained Namibia's Independence Day with the larger history of the struggle against apartheid and a significant dimension of transnational solidarity, not least since the date was commemorated annually since 1966 by the UN as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Given the fact that at the time of Namibian independence, white minority rule was still in place in South Africa, this decision carried symbolic weight.[86]

Independence was to take place at midnight.[87] It was preceded and initiated by speeches of UN Secretary-General Javier Péres de Cuéllar and South Africa's President Frederic Willem de Klerk, followed by the lowering of the South African flag. In a famous anecdote, many people recall the passionate chanting of the audience, including some of the incumbent cabinet members, to "Down! Down! Down!" the hated flag, while de Klerk stood at attention with his hand on his heart. At midnight, with some minutes delay, the new Namibian flag was finally hoisted, accompanied by

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[84] <https://www.republikein.com.na/nuus/inaugural-speech-of-the-first-namibian-president-> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[85] Debates of the Constituent Assembly, 21 November 1989 – 31 January 1990, 161, pp. 326–329.

[86] After its political transition to majority rule, South Africa officially declared 21 March as Human Rights Day.

[87] For accounts of the ceremony, see Lush 1993: 280; Vigne 1990: 4; National Namibia Concerns' *Namibia Newsletter* 13 (1) of spring 1990; Klaus Dierks' *Chronology of Namibian History*, available online: <http://www.klausdierks.com> [last accessed 15 October 2022]; *The Namibian*'s special edition for Independence Day 2013, which includes interviews with Gwen Lister, Conrad Angula, and Tony Figueira, who witnessed the celebration in 1990 as journalists. Geingob (2004: 165–166) has captured the heated debate within SWAPO and among the representatives of the frontline states over the invitation of de Klerk.

the lighting of the freedom flame and singing of the provisional national anthem.[88] This was followed by the swearing-in of Sam Nujoma as Namibia's first president by de Cuéllar. The audience, including some two dozen heads of state and representatives of 147 countries, also witnessed the first display of the new Namibian Defence Force (NDF), which was performing its first military parade in uniforms provided by the Kenyan army.[89]

In a postcolonial context, the ceremonial transition to independence at midnight had special significance and a famous precursor with the independence of India in 1947. In the decades of global decolonisation to follow, independence at midnight became a transnational travelling model in its own right, emphasising the symbolism of transition (Williams /Holland /Barringer 2010). The Namibian independence celebration thus functioned as a collective rite of passage, watched and followed by an enthusiastic audience in the stadium, in the venues of the regional capitals where simultaneous celebrations took place, and in front of radios and television screens. For the first time, Namibians officially constituted themselves as a national community.

The fact that Nujoma was sworn-in by the Secretary-General of the UN is significant and unique, too. It signals the high priority, which the Namibian peace process had within the fora of international diplomacy and especially for the UN, as "one of the world body's most successful missions" (Lush 1993: 273). For 21 March in Windhoek not only brought independence to Namibia, it also produced powerful images of the Cold War in dissolution: state representatives of both Germanys met with each other and even agreed to a joint police mission within UNTAG (Lange 2011), Yassir Arafat and Eduard Shevardnadze were seen shaking hands with Frederik Willem de Clerk; the latter and Nelson Mandela, a free man only since February, reportedly took the same airplane from South Africa. Even UNITA, back then still a military adversary of SWAPO, sent its congratulations. In a widely acknowledged gesture of proper protocol, the new Namibian government saw off South Africa's Administrator-General for Namibia Louis Pienaar and his wife with full honours in an act of state.[90] In a statement, de Cuéllar summed up this atmosphere of collective bliss: "The whole world, especially Africa, rejoices with Namibia. What is a triumph for Namibia is a triumph for Africa and indeed for the principles that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations" (in: du Pisani 1991: 2).

After the ceremonial transition at midnight, the celebration of independence continued in the morning of the 21st. In a peaceful reflection of the protest culture of the anti-apartheid struggle, a

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[88] Then still as a provisional arrangement. Since a national anthem still had to be composed, the Constituent Assembly decided to use the melody of *Nkosi Sikelele* with a preliminary text; see "CA approves coat of arms", *The Namibian*, 12 March 1990. Namibia's national anthem proper, titled "Namibia, land of the brave" and composed by Axali Doeseb, was introduced at the Independence Day celebration of 1991 and formally recognised with the National Anthem of the Republic of Namibia Act, No. 20, 1991.

[89] Since February 1990, 850 Namibian soldiers were trained and equipped by the Kenyan UNTAG deployment to perform the parade on Independence Day. After the withdrawal of UNTAG at the end of March, the Kenyan army continued the training until June; see Lieutenant-General Martin Shalli's account of the NDF's creation, "Tribute to the Founding President", *Windhoek Observer*, 18 May, 2012.

[90] Summarised from reporting in *The Namibian* of 20, 23, 26 and 29 March 1990.

huge independence march kicked off the festivities. Thousands of people gathered and moved from Katutura and Khomasdal, Windhoek's 'African' townships, along Kaiserstrasse, which soon was renamed to Independence Avenue, to the athletics stadium. The crowd was spangled with Namibia's new national colours; people sported the flag in all shapes and variations. It was printed on dresses, shirts and scarves, on balloons and sunscreens, ties and sweaters, while some people had even dyed their hair in the Namibian colours.

The civil parade mirrored the social and political diversity of Namibia's anti-apartheid movement and society at large. It included members of trade unions and women's rights activists, enthusiastically waving banners with struggle slogans in front of the cameras, as well as a women's group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, wearing skirts in the national colours. There was a delegation of the SWAPO pioneers, the party's children's organisation, clad in the colours of their organisation. They were led by flag-bearers who carried huge flags in SWAPO's blue, red and green and sported shirts imprinted with the portrait of Sam Nujoma. Ovaherero *oturupa* commandos in uniforms and traditional dresses, paraded in male and female detachments along Kaiserstrasse, replete with horse riders. Brass bands, majorettes and cultural groups from various Namibian regions provided music, dance, and entertainment. School children presented colourful costumes depicting ostriches, made from house-hold materials and collected garbage, while others had assembled as a gigantic lindworm decorated in the national colours. A procession of children carried hand-crafted suns on sticks, alluding to the sun-symbol on the new national flag. The parade included an array of floats of local schools and companies, colourfully decorated with the new national colours and/or emulating the national borders. One float depicted the 'birth of a nation' by showing Namibia hatched from an egg. Black and white Namibians lined the street, waving their new flags and enjoying a spectacle, surreal and unheard of.

From the city centre, the march continued through town to the stadium, where the Independence Day celebration was to continue. In the morning, the Constituent Assembly had already been transformed into the National Assembly and its members sworn-in. At 1 p.m., the guests of honour started to arrive at the stadium to witness the ceremonial swearing-in of prime minister and cabinet, President Nujoma's inaugural speech and a keynote address by Hosni Mubarak who represented the OAU. At 4 p.m. the entertainment programme began with a selection of performances, sport events, and music shows. Especially the latter had been anticipated for weeks, the rumour mills running free with international stars who were supposed to perform (Tina Turner! Stevie Wonder! Harry Belafonte!). Ultimately, a selection of bands and artists with a Namibian (Ndilimani, Mukarob and Jackson Kaujeua), South African (Mango Groove, Sipho Hotstix Mabuse, Lucky Dube, Brenda Fassie) and international background (Crazyhead, Saint Petersburg, Sakhile, Tabu Ley) performed. The music programme was headlined by Ziggy Marley

and his band The Melody Makers, who even wrote and dedicated a song to Namibia's independence, "People get Freedom in Namibia".[91]

Next to the exuberance of the music shows, which continued to take place all over Windhoek the next days, a highlight of the programme was the performance of 500 Namibian school children, who were brought from SWAPO's exile camps in Kwanza Sul (Angola) and Nyango (Zambia), where they had been trained by North Korean advisors for several weeks. The children demonstrated a combination of parades, marches, and gymnastics, including a human pyramid, and were dressed in their party's colours; some were waving huge SWAPO flags. This was accompanied by choreography on the grandstand, in the style of cultural-political mass events in socialist countries.[92]

Fig. 5: Exile children's performance at the Independence celebration, Windhoek, 21 March 1990. Photo: Courtesy of NMN.

The audience used coloured sheets to form slogans such as "United We Stand" and "Namibia is Ours" as well as an image of a radiant sun with the portrait of Sam Nujoma in its centre. After Independence Day, the children returned to Nyango again by bus to finish their school education.

[91] With his performance, he followed in the footsteps of his famous father, who had performed at Zimbabwe's independence celebration ten years earlier.

[92] Examples are the opening ceremony of the tenth Spartakiad in Leipzig in 1987 and the famous Arirang performances in North Korea. Similar choreographies are also known from African independence celebrations, e.g. in Mali (Leyh 2011), Malawi and Botswana (Williams /Holland /Barringer 2010: xvii–xviii). According to Mareike Späth, mass choreographies organised by North Korean trainers also took place on Independence Day celebrations in Madagascar in the 1970s and 1980s (personal comm., April 2019).

On their way, they also performed in northern Namibia and had the chance to briefly visit parents and family, until their final repatriation several months later.[93]

Fig. 6: Exile children's performance at the Independence celebration, Windhoek, 21 March 1990. Photo: Courtesy of NMN.

Their performance was significant in several regards. It provided a powerful representation of the (para-)military and educational discipline, which characterised SWAPO's exile camps as social laboratories of the nascent nation. At the same time, it brought – both practically and metaphorically – the children of the exiled nation back to the motherland, even though the children had to return to Zambia again afterwards. For many people in the audience, who had only recently been repatriated from Angola and Zambia, this performance surely did bring back tangible memories of life and hardships in exile. Finally, yet largely unrecognised, the performance is one example for the continuity of Swapo's pragmatic relationship with North Korea.

Next to the ceremonies and performances on Independence Day, a broad range of cultural events organised by the sub-committee on fine arts and crafts took place in the days before and after independence, with theatre plays, a cultural festival in Katutura organised by the local community centre, the painting of independence murals at various walls in town, as well as numerous exhibitions.[94] Several sport events took place, including a soccer match between Spartak Moscow and a Namibian selection, which was supported by international players, including Karl Heinz

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[93] The group was accompanied by their teachers, two of which narrated their experiences to me (interviews with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012 and 24 May 2013; and Likius Valombola, Windhoek, 30 May 2013). Photographic documentation of the performance exists in the National Museum's collection.

[94] Including exhibitions on John Muafangejo, UNTAG, and the different flag designs entered for the national flag competition, all at *Alte Feste*, where also the "Independence" display was officially inaugurated by President Nujoma; see "Newsletter #1" of the State Museum of Namibia, 1990.

Rummenigge.[95] Next to its rich and variegated programme, Independence Day was graced by much needed rainfall and even the birth of eleven "independence babies" was noted.[96]

Fig. 7: Independence mural, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Fig. 8: Independence mural, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Independence celebrations as well as cultural events, concerts, and performances of course also took place in other parts of the country, especially in northern Namibia (Lush 1993: 277–279). Lush describes a parade of thousands of flag-waving school children who crossed the border to Angola at Oshikango, a fierce battleground until April 1989, where they were greeted by Angolan FAPLA soldiers.[97] 2,000 visitors had gathered at the sports stadium in Oshakati to watch cultural performances and the live broadcasting of the main event in Windhoek. In replication of the official protocol, the South African flag was lowered by a commander of the South African police, after

[95] Still, Spartak won 6:1. In addition, there were hockey, rugby, and tennis matches against Zimbabwean teams and athletes, as well as an independence marathon.
[96] "Eleven 'Independence babies'", *The Namibian*, 27 March 1990.
[97] "Video Sam and the toyi-toyi invasion of Angola", *The Namibian*, 26 March 1990.

which the Namibian flag was hoisted. This was followed by the singing of the national anthem, led by SWAPO stalwart and master of ceremonies Mzee Kaukungwa. The festivities continued throughout the night in local bars and cuca-shops as well as during the next day with numerous marches, parades, and cultural performances.

In retrospect, Independence Day in Namibia appears as a thoroughly joyful and peaceful affair without any major flaws or mishaps in its organisation, reflecting the general mood of accommodation and cooperation reported for the Constituent Assembly (Geingob 2010, 2004: 115–191; O'Linn 2003).[98] Given the fact that a large segment of the incoming government came from exile and had to rely on the administration and bureaucracy of the colonial state, this is quite remarkable. According to Hage Geingob, who chaired the National Steering Committee, the civil servants of the former regime proved largely "cooperative and helpful" (Geingob 2004: 166). The committee oversaw the proceedings and cooperated with business people, civil society organisations, and traditional authorities. The budget of the celebration was R10 Mio, half of which was contributed by the South African government. A large part of the Namibian share was collected through donations made by Namibian and South African companies and business people to the Namibia Independence Celebration Funds, which had been established by Sam Nujoma. These interactions highlight not only a prevailing spirit of cooperation but also the ambivalence of the transitional period.

Because observers of course noted the strikingly smooth accommodation of the incoming government by the local white business community, dubbed as "Boerestroika".[99] For Namibian journalist and anti-apartheid activist Gwen Lister, the ideological elasticity of the time was remarkable:

> To witness formerly anti-Swapo, conservative businessmen, rising to their feet when the President-elect entered the hall, was ironic, to say the least. A large cross-section was present: comrades, diplomats, the newly-converted, the cynics and the opportunists - all brought together in what appeared to be a moment of success for 'national reconciliation'. [...] I could not help-wonder what was going through the minds of some of those former vehement anti-Swapo lobbyists as they rose to their feet when the President-elect walked in. [...] The situation of the coloniser of this country, which fought tooth and nail against the implementation of 435 for so many years, for fear that it would produce a Swapo government

[98] Some friction was reported for Okakarara and Rehoboth, two strongholds of ethnic opposition politics; see "Grassroots celebration hitches 'coming right'", *The Namibian*, 7 March 1990 and "Defiant Diergaardt set to join AWB?", *The Namibian*, 23 March 1990.

[99] According to Lister, the term was coined by Klaus Dierks, see "Political Perspective", *The Namibian*, 2 March 1990; Lush (1993) also named a chapter in his book accordingly. The term was also used in the South African context as early as February 1990; see "Brief Report 4/90" of the South African Institute of International Affairs.

> (as it subsequently did) contributed so 'magnanimously' to our independence celebrations, was also not without irony[100]

The sight of "SWAPO leaders rubbing shoulders with opposition politicians and making jokes with the top brass of the South African Defence Force" (Katjavivi 2010: 30) was hard to process for many former anti-apartheid activists. So was the realisation that former enemies were going to be part of the new dispensation and able to largely retain their economic privileges, while returnees often struggled with the new realities (Kambombo 2014: 69–70; Shaketange 2008: 122–123; Namhila 1997: 189–196, Lush 1993: 274–275). A different, yet related critique referred to the event's elitism. For Lush, the celebration catered mostly to VIPs and residents of the capital, while Namibia's majority population, living in townships and rural areas, was going to watch their own independence from the side-lines (Lush 1993: 273). In the run-up to Independence Day, demands were voiced for the organisers to take care that the event would be accessible for normal people and free of charge, and that the audience was provided with food and accommodation.[101]

In sum, the celebration of independence was characterised by an impressive display of cooperation between representatives of the state, incoming government, Swapo Party, as well as non-state and international actors. In its ceremonial protocol, the event was reproducing an established international model with the proper regalia of nation-state symbolism. The transition at midnight placed the event in the transnational continuity of decolonisation, while especially the programme of the 21st added a distinctly Namibian flavour. The independence march, the exile-children's performance, the concerts and popular entertainment reflected the diversity, history, and cultural dimension of the struggle for independence and its rallying cry, "One Namibia, one nation" (Becker 2015; Akuupa /Kornes 2013). The image projected by the event, in its totality as well as throughout its individual elements, was one of national unity, common purpose, and reconciliation, as expressed by Sam Nujoma in his inaugural speech. Namibia's white minority, now suddenly addressed as compatriots, was invited to contribute to this vision, be it through joining the independence march or engaging in the negotiation of business opportunities with the new political elite of independent Namibia.

Next to having a strong national imprint, the celebration was also significant for its inter- and transnational characteristics. The first in regard to the role of the UN and international diplomacy for negotiating Namibia's independence, the latter especially in terms of the world-wide solidarity movement, which involved people on both sides of the Cold War divide for the Namibian cause. The presence of so many international guests testified to this, with a special focus on the role of the frontline states that supported the liberation movement in its armed struggle against South Africa and hosted Namibia's exile community. Independence Day on 21 March 1990 was the celebration

[100] "Political Perspective", *The Namibian*, 2 March 1990.

[101] "Let the people eat and be free", *The Namibian*, 15 March 1990. The topic of free meals continues to resurface as a contested issue, as I will explain below. With some exceptions, it has become common practice that the audience at Independence Day celebrations is provided with a free lunch.

of a nascent nation-state by a victorious national movement, conscious of its history and optimistic about its future.

Independence Day, 1991–1992: Continuity of the Model

The first anniversary of independence was closely modelled after the event's blueprint of 1990. Under the heading of the official motto, "Rural Development and Food Security", organisational structures were reactivated and a National Steering Committee installed.[102] It included sub-committees on hospitality and protocol, security and traffic control, military participation, transport requirements, entertainment, programme coordination, information and press liaison, regional events, and budgets.[103] In comparison to the organisational structure of later Independence Day celebrations, this setup reflects a rather pragmatic, ad-hoc approach, oriented at specific needs identified for organising the event. As can be gathered from the documentation of the committee, which I was able to consult, the organisational process relied on the practical experiences made in the previous year while also establishing a professional routine with more clear-cut structures.

The official programme involved many elements of the original Independence Day. This included the presidential address, the presence of state guests and a reception in their honour, a military parade with the first official presentation of the honour guard's new uniforms,[104] the lighting of the independence flame, a parade of athletes and majorettes, cultural group performances, a soccer match between the under-23 national teams of Namibia and Zimbabwe, and a music concert with several Namibian bands and artists. A complementary entertainment programme involved a theatre show about the life of famous Namibian artist John Muafangejo,[105] a concert by the Namibian Symphonic Orchestra, which included the presentation of Namibia's new national anthem, and several exhibitions, including one with photographs of John Liebenberg and another with graphic works of John Muafangejo, organised by the Arts Association of Namibia. In terms of continuity on the level of performances during the celebration, the well-received mass gymnastics display of school children was repeated, this time with 1,200 children of six different schools as participants. As it turns out, the organisers were contacted by the North Korean government, seemingly through the Ministry of Defence, with an offer to send a team of trainers to coach the children.[106] The visit of the North Korean trainers was budgeted with R100,000[107] and five rehearsals were planned.[108]

[102] First Independence Anniversary (March 21, 1991): Report of the Cabinet Ad-Hoc Committee, 23 January 1991.
[103] Press Release: Independence Anniversary Celebrations, 21 March 1991 (undated, March 1991); Agenda of Meeting of the First Independence Celebrations Committee, 5 March 1991.
[104] Minutes of the First Independence Celebrations Committee Meeting, 27 February 1991.
[105] *Forcible Love*, directed by Terence Zeeman and Mees Xsteen. Muafangejo was played by Banana Shekupe.
[106] Recommendation of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to Cabinet on 1st Independence Anniversary, 23 January 1991.

Next to the main event in Windhoek, celebrations were held in all regional capitals; in each case with members of cabinet or other high ranking government representatives as keynote speakers. A document of the committee highlights this as a result of a cabinet decision.[109] Noteworthy is the fact that the list appears to be drafted in a way that made sure that speakers will appear in a region not associated with their ethnicity or origin: Hendrik Witbooi spoke in "Okaoko" [most likely referring to Opuwo], Hidipo Hamutenya in Caprivi, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo in Rehoboth, Ben Ulenga in Karasburg, Reggie Diergaardt in Otjimbingwe, etc. While this may be a coincidence, of course, it neatly fits the approach of "One Namibia, one nation", which characterised the government's nation-building policy in the first years of independence (Akuupa /Kornes 2013: 37–39).

With R2,5 Mio, the budget was significantly smaller compared to the previous year. No fund-raising took place, which was to be restricted to jubilee celebrations. Organisers and participants were instructed to "keep the costs as low as possible",[110] for example by promoting Namibian talent where it came to inviting performing artists. There was also no free food provided for the general public. In terms of the attendance of international guests of honour, the celebration was also significantly smaller in scope. The organising committee decided to invite only one prestigious international head of state who would be honoured with a state banquet, "either President Mugabe or President Fidel Castro Ruz".[111] Eventually, Robert Mugabe attended and also delivered a speech at the celebration.[112] In the run-up, a number of invited international guests asked to be excused and the committee noted a "poor feedback" in this regard.[113] Another point of critique was the poor attendance of whites at the event, particularly in the regions. In its debriefing session, the organising committee discussed this topic. A proposal was made to attract more white Namibians through performances which involved their children and also by inviting white Namibians explicitly as a group.[114] While no statistics exist on the participation of various demographic groups, lamentation about the non-attendance of whites continues to reoccur annually ever since and remains a contested issue, as I will analyse in the next chapter more thoroughly.

As regards the organisational dimension of Independence Day, the committee made several recommendations for improvement in its evaluation report.[115] First of all, the planning process

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[107] First Independence Anniversary: Report of the Cabinet Ad-Hoc Committee, 23 January 1991; Independence Day Anniversary Celebrations, Transport Sub-Committee: Initial Report for the First Meeting of the Working Committee on Friday, 22 February 1991; Minutes of the First Independence Celebrations Committee Meeting, 27 February 1991.
[108] Meeting of the Working Committee for the First Independence Anniversary, 5 March 1991.
[109] Speakers on Independence Day, 21 March 1991, undated (after 13 March 1991).
[110] Minutes of the First Independence Celebrations Committee Meeting, 22 February 1991.
[111] First Independence Anniversary: Report of the Cabinet Ad-Hoc Committee, 23 January 1991.
[112] Minutes of the First Independence Celebrations Committee Meeting on 27 February 1991.
[113] Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Committee of the First Independence Anniversary, 20 March 1991.
[114] Independence Anniversary Celebrations Committee: Minutes of the 'Post Mortim' [sic] Meeting on the First Independence Celebrations, 26 March 1991, Independence Stadium.
[115] Independence Anniversary Celebrations Committee: Minutes of the 'Post Mortim' [sic] Meeting on the First Independence Celebrations, 26 March 1991, Independence Stadium. Quotes below are from the same document.

turned out to be too short, with not enough time for proper advertising of the event, resulting in a low level of participation. Organisational work should commence at least three months in advance. Furthermore, compliance with protocol was considered to be inconsistent with international standards and should be updated based on recommendations by the UN. Other points of criticism were the existence of parallel structures, miscommunication, and divergent practices in the regions, e.g. regarding the provision of free food.

In general, it was noted that a number of mistakes of the initial celebration were repeated and that a need for greater "continuation" existed. In order to tackle these short-comings and to improve organisational structures, the establishing of a permanent standing committee for national festivals was proposed, "consisting of capable people who could appoint sub-committees and liaise with the Government". It should be appointed by cabinet and have a permanent chairperson. In addition, the committee suggested to cabinet to decide that large-scale celebrations should take place only every five years, while regular events were to be kept "low profile". However, in light of an impressive programme which outweighed these flaws, the committee declared the organisation of the first Independence Day celebration a success. This was summarised by the committee's chairman, Prime Minister Nahas Angula: "We have proved that as a nation we can work together and celebrate together".[116]

In the following year, the organisational effort for Independence Day was reduced even more drastically. There were supposed to be less concerts and international state guests, and no sport matches with teams of neighbouring countries. The budget was cut from R2,5 Mio in 1991 to a staggering R100,000 in 1992 and no elaborate cultural programme took place. Instead, President Nujoma hosted a garden party, while the Prime Minister held a reception for the elderly at the People's Primary School in Katutura. In his announcement on the matter, Bob Kandetu, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting explained that government had decided to focus on jubilees for large scale celebrations and keep regular annual events low key.[117] It thus implemented a recommendation made by the organising committee of the 1991 Independence Day celebration. Events in 1993 and 1994 were kept low key as well.

Independence Day, 1990–2015: A Typology of Namibia's National Day

Ever since 21 March 1990, Independence Day celebrations in Namibia are based on an established and stable format, which clearly draws on the original model and its attached routines, yet also leaves space for the inclusion of new elements. For the official state protocol of regular Independence Day celebrations, this model includes the following items: arrival of government representatives, dignitaries, and state guests; parade of defence forces, police, and prison service;

[116] Nahas Angula: Press Release, undated.
[117] "Independence fest 1992 to be low key", *The Namibian*, 19 March 1992.

torch-lighting ceremony; arrival of the head of state by motorcade; the president's mounting of the dais; national and African Union anthem; 21 gun salute; the president's inspection of parade; prayer; the presidential address; (occasionally) awarding of national honours on visiting guests of honour and selected public figures of national significance; marching off of parade; African Union and national anthem; (occasionally) fly-past and/or parachute jumping; departure of head of state, dignitaries, and invited guests for the state banquet. In case the celebration is a jubilee, it additionally includes the swearing-in of the president-elect with oath taking and presentation of national symbols; the swearing-in of prime minister and deputy prime minister; the presentation of the new cabinet; and the inaugural speech by the president. After the departure of the head of state and his guests, the entertainment programme commences with cultural performances, music shows, and sport events.[118]

To establish a typology of Independence Day in Namibia, I will focus on several aspects which prove as either consistent or significant within the general sequence of the event. For regular Independence Day celebrations, this includes the organisational structure, spatial aspects, entertainment and cultural activities, honours, and mediatisation, while for jubilees the emphasis is on official logos, military and civilian parades, entertainment and cultural activities.

Organisational Structure of Independence Day

Independence Day, like other commemorative national events in Namibia, is organised within a complex interplay of different actors and institutional structures. As indicated above, the celebrations of 1990 and 1991 were quite successful in their results but also based on ad hoc structures, improvisation, and unclearly tailored fields of responsibility. Accordingly, the organising committee called for the establishment of a permanent organisational structure, responsible for state ceremonies. I could not find out whether such a structure was put into place already in 1992 or only later, but the organisational scope of the fifth independence anniversary suggests that it was operational by then. My analysis of the organisational process behind Independence Day is largely based on the structure at work for the jubilee celebration of 2010, which was explained to me by the chairman of the technical committee, Secretary to Cabinet Frans Kapofi.[119]

The organisational committee consists of two levels, a ministerial committee, mandated by cabinet and chaired by the prime minister, and a technical committee, chaired by the secretary to cabinet. Situated on the level of the line ministries, the technical committee is responsible for the implementation of the practical workload. The secretary to cabinet, in accordance with his structural

[118] This is based on my evaluation of media reports about Independence Day celebrations since 1990, as well as the official programs of the events of 1990, 1991, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, and 2010.

[119] Interview with Frans Kapofi, Windhoek, 25 March 2010. Additional information was contributed by two interviews with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and chairman of the sub-committee on information and publicity Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 17 March and 1 September 2010; see also Statement by Right Honorable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister at the launching of the Republic of Namibia's 20th independence anniversary logo and theme at UN Plaza, 17 February 2010.

position in Namibia's system of government, acts as an intermediary and informational link between the ministries, cabinet and the Office of the Prime Minister.[120] The technical committee is subdivided into six sub-committees: (1) finance, (2) information and publicity, (3) entertainment, (4) catering, (5) logistics, transport and accommodation, (6) protocol, safety and security. Each sub-committee is chaired by the permanent secretary of the respective relevant line ministry. The sub-committees bring together representatives of the various ministries, of public and parastatal institutions like police, defence force, or NBC, as well as actors of the private sector like companies, media practitioners, and artists. Technical committee as well as the various sub-committees meet on a regular basis and report to the chair of the ministerial committee.

This organisational structure is reactivated and put into practice annually for the celebration of Independence Day and other political national holidays. Depending on the occasion, e.g. whether the event is a jubilee celebration, the scope and magnitude of the structure differs, especially as regards to the direct involvement of the prime minister. Every five years, Independence Day becomes the stage for the swearing-in of the Namibian president-elect by the chief justice and the official presentation of the new cabinet, which involves an even more elaborate organisational routine and protocol. This quinquennial dual structure gained elevated importance at the 15th anniversary of independence in 2005, which marked the first presidential transition in independent Namibia, and again in 2015 with the inauguration of Namibia's third president since independence, Hage Geingob.

Spatial Aspects of Independence Day

In the past, the Independence Day main event, designated by the presence of the head of state, mostly took place in the Independence Stadium in Windhoek. Since Hifikepunye Pohamba took office, the event tends to rotate through Namibia's regional capitals.[121] Occasions, when the celebration is held in Windhoek, are jubilees and the attendance of international state guests, whose presence demands a more elaborate state protocol. Examples for the latter are the state visits by the Presidents of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, and Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, in 2016 and 2019, respectively.

The Independence Stadium has a capacity of 20,000 people and is located in the Olympia suburb, five kilometres from the city centre, yet some 20 kilometres from the heart of Katutura. From the very beginning, as mentioned above, this situation has been criticised, since the venue is situated far away from the city's main residential areas, whose population struggles to afford transportation. In its evaluation of the 1991 Independence Day celebration, the organising

[120] <http://www.opm.gov.na/web/office-of-the-prime-minister/department-cabinet-secretariat-policy-analysis-and-coordination> [last accessed 2 July 2020].

[121] Regional capitals where the central event took place are Otjiwarongo (2011), Mariental (2012), Oshakati (2013), Rundu (2017) and Tsumeb (2018). President Pohamba also introduced a rotation of Heroes' Day, which during Nujoma's tenure usually took place at Ongulumbashe (see chapter four).

committee recommended to hold future events in the capital closer to Katutura and Khomasdal to allow more people to attend, presupposing an investment into the upgrading of local venues.[122] This, however, did not materialise. Instead, the City of Windhoek usually provides a gratuitous shuttle bus service to and fro, while the audience is also provided with a free meal at the stadium.

In the regional capitals, simultaneous Independence Day celebrations take place at the major sports grounds, which are usually located closer to residential areas. In these places, too, however, people often have to travel long distances if they come from remote farms, villages, or cattle posts. In the absence of viable public transport or communal bus services, transportation is largely based on *bakkies* (pickup trucks) filled to the brim with people, young and old. Just like the main event, regional Independence Day celebrations have become a stable and well-established format. They usually mirror the protocol of the main event in Windhoek, thus implementing the national framework on the regional level. If military personnel are absent, a parade is usually performed by the regional police force, preceded by the singing of the anthem and the hoisting of the flag. This is followed by prayer and a welcoming address by the master of ceremonies, who usually is a mayor or regional governor. The same person, or occasionally a guest of honour, representing the central government, will then read the presidential Independence Day address. This concludes the state protocol and is followed by an entertainment programme, which often relies on cultural performances (Akuupa /Kornes 2013; Akuupa 2006: 20–28).

Entertainment and Cultural Activities on Independence Day

Depending on whether Independence Day is a jubilee or not, the entertainment programme varies in scope and magnitude. On regular Independence Days, there always are performances of cultural groups, representing either regional or ethnic cultural identities within the framework of Namibia's policy of unity in diversity (Akuupa 2015: 169–196, 2010; Becker 2015: 31–34; Akuupa /Kornes 2013), and of popular musicians, bands, and choir groups, who sometimes travel from quite afar to attend a celebration. Sports events are a regular feature, mostly involving popular sport codes like soccer, rugby, and boxing, quite often with contestants from South Africa, Botswana or Zimbabwe. For jubilees, the entertainment programme in the form of concerts, boxing matches, exhibitions, theatre shows, cultural group performances, etc., usually begins a week or at least several days before the main event.

Regional entertainment often relies on cultural performances and music concerts more closely attuned to regional preferences. For Independence Day in Rundu in 2006, for instance, Akuupa notes the significance of cultural authenticity in performances and speeches, when it comes to local conceptions of 'MuKavango' identity (Akuupa 2006: 21–27). My own observation during Independence Day in Gobabis, the regional capital of Omaheke, in 2010 showed similar results.

[122] Independence Anniversary Celebrations Committee: Minutes of the 'Post Mortim' [sic] Meeting on the First Independence Celebrations, 26 March 1991.

Here a central element of the celebration was the parade of local police, which gradually shifted into *oturupa* marching formations. The national police thus performed its own variation of unity in diversity, by staging a performance which clearly addressed the fact that the majority of the population in the Omaheke region and in the stadium had an Otjiherero-speaking background. Noteworthy, this performance was enthusiastically received by the audience, which at other times during the celebration was rather distanced or even unruly and admonished several times by the master of ceremonies to pay attention.[123] The ceremonial script of the Independence Day model leaves space to engage with notions of cultural diversity, ethnicity, and regionalism within the framework of the model's emphasis on national unity. Regional celebrations can thus be conceptualised as a reproduction in miniature of the concept of national unity in diversity, as it was performed and embodied by the ethnic tableau of the jubilee celebration in 2010, described above.

As regards the culinary aspects of Independence Day, organisers usually provide free meals and drinks for the audience. Food is either pre-cooked by caterers and handed out in boxes, as I experienced both in Windhoek (2010) and Oshakati (2013), or prepared on the spot in large pots on open fire as meaty *potjiekos*, as was done, fittingly, in Gobabis, Namibia's self-proclaimed 'cow capital' (2010). For those who are able to spend money on food and drinks, market women set up their stalls in front of the venues, offering popular street food like *kapana* (grilled meat), *vet koeks* (a highly saturating, deep-fried ball of dough) and *omagungu* (dried or stir-fried caterpillars, *Gonimbrasia belina*, also known as *mopane*), as well as sweets, soft drinks, and chilled lager. In some places like Oshakati, the stadium is surrounded by a flurry of bars, cuca-shops and eateries, where eventually the celebration will extend to, providing income for the innumerable segment of small business owners who make some of their most important income during these days.

Independence Day as an Occasion for Honours

The symbolic prominence of Independence Day makes it a popular occasion for the inauguration of institutions of national significance. One example is the independence exhibition at the *Alte Feste* display centre, which was opened by President Nujoma in 1990, with UN special representative Martti Ahtisaari as guest of honour.[124] Other, more prominent examples are the new State House (2008) and the Independence Memorial Museum (2014), both built by North Korea's Mansudae Company. For the inauguration of the State House, Kim Yong-nam, the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea, attended the Independence Day celebration of 2008 as the most distinguished international guest of honour, together with a 23-member delegation, including several ministers.[125] Both the private-owned museums of Warmbad (2002) and

[123] Field notes, 28 March 2010; see also Kornes /Akuupa 2013: 43–44.
[124] For a detailed account of the event; see "Newsletter No.1" of the State Museum of Namibia, 1990. The exhibition was on permanent display until 2014, when the *Alte Feste* display centre was closed and the IMM inaugurated. Parts of the various exhibitions have been moved to the new display centre.
[125] "DPRK entourage jets in", *New Era*, 19 March 2008; "State House Inaugurated in Style", *New Era*, 25 March 2008.

Onandjokwe (2013) were inaugurated on Independence Day; two museums, which portray quite diverse histories of colonialism and anticolonial resistance.

In 1991, the Namibia Legal Coin & Medal Co. produced a commemorative set of medals with the coat of arms and a portrait of Sam Nujoma for the first anniversary of independence.[126] Commemorative stamps were issued in various years on Independence Day, e.g. in celebration of Namibia's women (2002), to commemorate the genocide (2005), and on the occasion of the twentieth jubilee of independence (2010). Independence Day 2011 was the occasion for the official introduction of new banknotes, featuring the portraits of Hendrik Witbooi and Sam Nujoma.[127] For the thirtieth anniversary of independence, the Bank of Namibia even issued a commemorative N$30 bill, bearing the portraits of all three presidents since independence.

In addition, Independence Day also is a prominent platform for the official recognition of individual achievements through the conferring of honours. The Namibian national honours system was introduced in 1995, coinciding with Independence Day, and includes seven different orders and medals.[128] During the celebration in 1995, Sam Nujoma, Robert Mugabe, Eduardo dos Santos and Ketumile Masire were decorated with the highest ranking Order of the Most Ancient Welwitschia Mirabilis, while several war veterans were honoured with the Liberation Medal. Bishop Leonard Auala, Anton Lubowski and Tobias Hainyeko, all prominent and respected figures of resistance in their respective domains, were posthumously accorded the Eagle Medal (Hunter 2008: 161). Since then, national honours are repeatedly conferred on Independence Day, sometimes for visiting state guests who contributed to Namibia's independence, yet mostly to Namibians who participated in one way or another to the liberation struggle.

A different form of awarding is the pardoning of convicts by the president, which is done on a fairly regular basis and in differing degrees of magnitude. Nujoma set the precedent when he pardoned a number of convicts in March 1990.[129] For the tenth anniversary of independence, he again pardoned a sizable number of prisoners (Hunter 2008: 161). This practice is not limited to jubilee celebrations: in 1993, Nujoma pardoned close to six hundred prisoners; ten years later even 1,700 convicts.[130] Neither is this limited to Independence Day: Nujoma's successor Hifikepunye Pohamba repeatedly pardoned convicts on the occasion of Heroes' Day.[131]

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[126] Namibia Coin & Medal Co., letters to the Independence celebration committee, 18 February and 12 March 1991, and letter in reply of the National Steering Committee on Independence Celebrations, 13 March 1991.

[127] A decision, which caused a controversial public debate in 2011 about the level of veneration, Nujoma was accorded during his lifetime.

[128] Proclamation by the President of the Republic of Namibia, No. 2 of 1995, 17 March 1995. The categories, in order of precedence, are: Order of the Most Ancient Welwitschia Mirabilis, Most Brilliant Order of the Sun, Most Excellent Order of the Eagle, Order of the Mukorob, Most Distinguished Order of Namibia, Independence Medal, Liberation Medal. *Mukorob* is the name of a rock formation in southern Namibia.

[129] "Pardon for prisoners", *The Namibian*, 28 March 1990.

[130] "575 prisoners released", *The Namibian*, 26 March 1993 and "Präsident begnadigt hunderte Straftäter", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 March 2003.

[131] "Pohamba pardons some prisoners", *The Namibian*, 27 August 2010 and "No pardon for murderers, rapists", *Informanté*, 13 September 2013.

Independence Day as a Media Event

Independence Day celebrations are broadcast live on television and radio by the NBC, usually preceded by panel discussions, documentaries, or feature films on the liberation struggle some days ahead of the event. Newspapers, depending on their political background and institutional dependencies, cover the event extensively and with more or less vigorous critical introspection. Particularly popular formats are letters to the editor and *vox pops*, where reporters ask random people on the street about their opinion about the status quo of independence. On the occasion of jubilees, newspapers often publish special independence issues, which include articles about the history of Namibia's independence, memoirs of people involved in the liberation struggle, photographs from the struggle days, interviews with members of the Constituent Assembly, and comments of public intellectuals, artists, or veteran politicians about the meaning of independence. Radio channels often use their call-in shows to allow for debate, while social media platforms are abuzz with comments and assessments, heaping praise and damnation on political elites and government. All in all, Independence Day in Namibia usually is accompanied by an extensive public discourse, which allows ample space for open debate, critique, and collective introspection.

Jubilees

The role of jubilees has now been mentioned several times. In general, jubilee celebrations follow the same routines as regular Independence Day celebrations, but are larger in scope and often extend festivities to several days or even weeks. Jubilees are more extensive in budget and organisational effort, have more international exposure in terms of attending state guests, include a larger entertainment programme, often have additional and more sizable military parades and envelope the quinquennial presidential inauguration. In addition, another characteristic of jubilee celebrations is the employment of specific logos, which represent a particular theme. Usually, jubilee logos are designed or commissioned by the sub-committee on information and publicity.

Jubilee Logos

In 1995, the logo consisted of two Namibian flags with a burning torch in its midst and imprinted with the number five. The symbol of the torch (*onyeka*) is closely linked with the iconography of the liberation struggle. For the tenth jubilee celebration, a logo was designed which consisted of the slogan "10th Independence Anniversary", forming a half-circle and framing the image of a radiant sun and wavy lines in the blue, red, and green of the national flag.

Fig. 9: Selection of Independence Day programmes. Source: NAN. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

In 2010, a competition was held to find an official logo. The winning design was presented to the public by the committee's chairman Nahas Angula on 17 March. It is a composition of the national flag and the words "Independence 1990–2010" and "a visionary nation on the move towards 2030". The latter was the official motto of the jubilee celebration and refers to the national development policy plan *Vision 2030*. The flag is inscribed with the words "20 years", written in gold and crowned by eleven human figures, each in a different colour, their arms raised in exaltation. According to Prime Minister Angula, the logo represents "our and indeed national unity in diversity, a vibrant nation forging ahead to achieving our national goals".[132]

[132] Statement by Right Honorable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister at the launching of the Republic of Namibia's 20th independence anniversary logo and theme at UN Plaza, 17 February 2010.

Fig. 10: Official logo of the twentieth independence jubilee. Source: Government of Namibia (2010).

Fig. 11: PS Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana presents the jubilee shirt to the author. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

The decision to represent the Namibian population with eleven figures raised some questions, though. The number eleven is frequently and incoherently used in the Namibian context to denominate languages, as well as ethnic and linguistic groups, often blurring the boundaries between these categories. This is one lasting result of the structural logic of the apartheid regime's Odendaal plan, which had segregated Namibia along arbitrary lines into eleven ethnic homelands (Kornes 2015a: 40–42). Choosing thirteen figures to represent diversity would

have been a more neutral approach, allowing a reference to Namibia's administrative structure, which until August 2013 was composed of thirteen regions.[133]

The logo of the 25th anniversary was again chosen from the entries of a competition. It was composed of a text block in the left half, reading "25 years of independence 1990–2015" and the official motto, "United we stand, for the love of Namibia". In its right half, the logo consists of a circular national flag with four additional lines in the national colours, which dynamically move into the upper right corner where they dissolve into another variation of jubilant human figures. Again, "unity in cultural difference" was represented by colourful people; only four this time, however.[134] Compared to the previous examples, the logo of the thirtieth anniversary celebration was rather simplistic and reduced to the national colours. It centres on the number "30" in the colour blue, with "1990–2020" written above and "years" written below, and a waving national flag in the digit zero of the "30". Beneath it, there are three wavy lines in blue, red, and green.

The jubilee logos are used to brand the event, for public advertising and the production of special promotional items, like T-Shirts, stickers, sun-screens, hats, and paper flags. These usually are distributed for free in the run-up to Independence Day, e.g. in schools, or during the actual event in the stadium. Logo and promotional materials are also used for all annual Independence Days in the following five years.[135] Furthermore, government makes the logo available for commercial use by private companies as long as it is promoted as a "national asset".[136]

Military and Civilian Parades

With regards to military parades, the protocol of every Independence Day includes a parade with the participation of the different branches of the NDF, including guard of honour, infantry, navy, and air force, as well as police and prison service. On the occasion of jubilees, parades are sometimes held twice, i.e. not only in the stadium but also in the capital's city centre. For instance, the fifth anniversary celebration of 1995 included a military parade on 18 March all the way from Katutura to Ausspannplatz in central Windhoek, including a presentation of "all wings of the army".[137]

On 20 March 2010, a day before the main Independence Day event, a military parade was performed on Independence Avenue in Windhoek's central business district. The parade was significantly larger than the one in the stadium the next day and also presented all existing categories of armoured vehicles, tanks, and artillery of the NDF. It also included a fly-past with

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[133] Remarkably, the only public commentator who seemed to have noticed the ambivalence of the symbolism was Eberhard Hoffmann, editor of the German-language daily *Allgemeine Zeitung*. In his contribution to his newspaper's independence jubilee special edition, he ridiculed the designers for bringing back the ethno-national segregation ("*Volkseinteilung*") of the Odendaal plan; see *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 March 2010.
[134] "25th independence logo unveiled", *The Namibian*, 4 March 2015.
[135] In 2010, 100,000 T-Shirts were produced for a cost of N$1,9 Mio; see interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 17 March 2010.
[136] Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 17 March 2010.
[137] Republic of Namibia, Programme 5th Independence Celebration 17–22 March 1995 (NAN JZ 0825).

reconnaissance airplanes, troop carriers, three jet fighters, and a military helicopter, which carried the national flag. The parade, which was observed by President Pohamba, Sam Nujoma and several of the invited state guests, was extremely well received by the audience. The presentation of heavy armoured vehicles was met with enthusiastic applause from the watching crowd; in particular, when the master of ceremonies explained that they were built domestically and as such an expression of Namibia's defensive capabilities.

Even more exaltation caused the female battalions of the Namibian armed forces. When the women in their white, blue, or camouflaged uniforms marched past the parking space in front of the Kalahari Sands Hotel, where the majority of spectators was gathered, frenetic applause and ululation erupted especially among the female audience. The master of ceremonies highlighted that in the army, "we don't discriminate",[138] emphasising the important role that women play in the Namibian military. The parade was the largest in the history of independent Namibia and underscored the symbolic importance of armed forces for a nation-state, whose independence is inextricably interwoven with the experience of armed decolonisation.

While military parades feature annually at Independence Day in celebration of armed resistance and militant national resilience, civil parades tend to be restricted to jubilee celebrations. The example of the independence march in 1990 has already been described above. It also included colourfully decorated trucks and floats, which took part in the march (Saayman /Venter 1990: 84–85). On 25 March 1990, groups representing various Katutura-based schools paraded to the local Community Arts Centre, where a large cultural festival took place. On their route, they were performing traditional dances and *toyi-toyi,* the dance-like protest march popularised by the liberation movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In 2000, a civil parade with floats and trucks on Independence Avenue was also part of the celebration. On 20 March 2010, after the military parade on Independence Avenue, a vibrant civil parade followed, which was the largest since 1990. The parade was spearheaded by the military brass band, followed by a procession of floats representing companies which helped to sponsor the event, the ministries involved in organising it, as well as Windhoek's various universities. On the floats, people were dressed in colourful costumes, dancing, and dishing out sweets and promotional gifts to the crowd on Independence Avenue. Cultural groups marched along as well and presented songs and dance.[139]

Entertainment and Cultural Activities

Next to military and civil parades, jubilees are further characterised by extensive cultural programmes, which usually span several days and include exhibitions, music concerts, sports events, and theatre plays. The official festivities of Namibia's fifth anniversary in 1995 began on 17 March with the inauguration of a senior secondary school in Okalongo by President Nujoma, the

[138] Observation based on my field notes, Windhoek, 20 March 2010.
[139] Field notes, Windhoek, 20 March 2010. Next to being an international model for public celebration in its own right, the civil parade had many similarities to the German-style street carnival, as it is also practiced in Namibia.

opening of an exhibition at the National Art Gallery, and the planting of trees at various sites throughout the country. The following days saw a flurry of sport events, music shows, church services, fireworks, and even a different kind of independence march, this time composed of Namibia's various political parties.[140] The jubilee of 2000 was significantly smaller in scope, with organisational deficiencies and a budget still set at N$5 Mio probably limiting the organising committee's possibilities.[141] The official programme for Windhoek only involved cultural group performances to greet arriving foreign dignitaries the day before Independence Day. In the regions, celebrations were limited to the 21st of March, with the exception of Keetmanshoop, where events started with an ecumenical church service on the 19th followed by a street carnival and a music show on 20 March.[142]

The jubilee of 2005, as mentioned above, was significant for marking Namibia's first presidential transition, i.e. the inauguration of Sam Nujoma's successor, Hifikepunye Pohamba. The symbolic importance of this was captured and expressed by the official motto of Independence Day, "celebrating a legacy and continuing nation building", which referred as much to the history of the liberation struggle as to the personal legacy of Sam Nujoma.[143] The attendance of twenty sitting and five former international heads of state as guests of honour, including Robert Mugabe, Nelson Mandela, and Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo who represented the African Union, underlined the significance of the event.[144] This made the jubilee of 2005 the largest Independence Day celebration since 1990, as demonstrated by the fact that the government and the City of Windhoek provided forty busses to transport people to the stadium.[145] The celebration was again preceded by a number of sporting events, like a tri-national boxing competition in Windhoek, a cycle race in Omaruru, and a soccer match in Rehoboth.[146]

The twentieth jubilee celebration of 2010, finally, saw the most extensive entertainment programme for an Independence Day so far. Preparatory work began as early as November 2009, when cabinet mandated the technical committee under the chairmanship of Frans Kapofi with the organisation of the event.[147] Festivities in the capital began three weeks in advance and included a string of public lectures, music shows, literary readings, various photo and poster competitions, art exhibitions, and even the premiere of an independence musical. The focus on arts and culture was noteworthy and visible. In his speech at the official opening of the exhibition, "Namibia – a nation

[140] Republic of Namibia, Programme 5th Independence Celebration 17–22 March 1995 (NAN JZ 0825).
[141] "Tender rules ignored", *The Namibian*, 9 March 2000.
[142] Republic of Namibia, Programme 10th Independence Anniversary, 21 March 2000 (NAN JZ 0825).
[143] Interview of Elizabeth Kalambo with Theo-Ben Gurirab, in *Namibia Review* 13 (1), 2005, pp. 1–6.
[144] "Secrecy shrouds VIPs for Independence Day", *The Namibian*, 18 March 2005. Of significance was also the attendance of Jan de Wet as guest of honour, who served as South African Commissioner General of Indigenous People until 1978 and later joined Namibian politics with the white nationalist party Action Christian National, which he represented in the Constituent Assembly. Apparently, Margot Honecker was among the attending guests of honour, too (Henning Melber, personal comm. 27 May 2011).
[145] "Stadtverwaltung für Feier zur Unabhängigkeit gerüstet", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 March 2005.
[146] "Sporting Events", *The Namibian*, 18 March 2005.
[147] Interview with Frans Kapofi, Windhoek, 25 March 2010.

on the move", which showcased contemporary art reflecting on the theme of the jubilee, Minister of Environment and Tourism Willem Konjore emphasised the importance of art for nation-building. He further underlined the role of artists as advocates of the people and their contribution to the "true liberation of cultural self-understanding of tradition and diversity".[148] The fact that a significant number of the works on display linked the topic of independence to critical social issues such as poverty, injustice, or gender-based violence provided a subtle commentary on Konjore's words.

The 25th anniversary celebration, finally, was the largest and most extensive one since independence and included the inauguration of Namibia's third president, Hage Geingob.[149] The celebration featured a broad range of music concerts, sport events, and cultural performances, and was lauded for giving Namibian artists the opportunity to participate.[150] It thus continued the trend, visible at least since the 2010 jubilee, to rely more closely on arts and culture and local stakeholders like the National Theatre or the College of the Arts, as well as on popular music performers.

In sum, Independence Day is characterised by a stable routine and an established organisational structure, regardless of shifting symbolism and emphases, or limited budgets. Independence Day continues to demonstrate the capability of the state to stage complex and near-flawless national events, showcasing its "regulatory power" (Becker /Lentz 2013: 3) as postcolonial state and nation-builder. A focus on struggle nostalgia is clearly discernible, expressed in the veneration of the Founding Father, the display of comradeship with the frontline states, or the appreciation for the military. At the same time, during the last decade Independence Day celebrations have been increasingly characterised by a shift to popular entertainment, arts, cultural and educational formats.

The Aesthetics and Politics of Independence Day

The aforementioned shift towards cultural and popular entertainment reflects the organisers' effort to attract new and diverse audiences. This takes place in the context of a significant transformation within Namibia's postcolonial society, especially in regards to diverging perspectives on the meaning of independence in light of generational differentiation. In order to contextualise this with the aesthetics and politics of celebrating Independence Day, I will in the remainder of this chapter look at the relation between liberation memory and entertainment in more detail. For this, I will first highlight the role of party politics during Independence Day celebration. Second, I will analyse the representation of liberation memory with a focus on the musical *Creation* (2010). Finally, I will focus on the role of the youth as a specific target audience for Independence Day. My analysis is

[148] Field notes, National Art Gallery, Windhoek, 15 March 2010. The exhibition included 39 paintings and eight sculptures of 30 artists.
[149] "3,000 for Geingob party", *The Namibian*, January 12, 2015.
[150] "Namibian arts shine at silver jubilee celebrations", *The Namibian*, 24 March, 2015.

built mostly, but not exclusively, on data gathered on the occasion of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence in 2010.

Independence Day and the Politics of Liberation

As a *lieux de mémoire*, independence has a lot of potential for inclusivity. The emphasis on national unity in Independence Day celebrations, practiced on the discursive and performative level, testifies to this. In their symbolism, Independence Day celebrations appeal to national identification within the framework of national unity in diversity. Furthermore, they strongly rely on the symbols and attached virtues of the nation-state and parliamentary democracy. Seen from this angle, Independence Day is an occasion to celebrate the nation as a community, which was liberated by means of a 'long and bitter' struggle for national independence, collectively engaged in overcoming the legacy of apartheid by national reconciliation.

At the same time, however, the past is always present at Independence Day. Be it through the speeches, which summon the heroes, martyrs, and comrades of the struggle days, the presence of Sam Nujoma as personified liberation struggle heritage, the invited guests from the frontline states like the ubiquitous Robert Mugabe or delegates from North Korea, the accompanying broadcasting of films and documentaries, which narrate the victorious struggle of the liberation movement, the corresponding martial nature of the military parades, the raised fists and ululation to Ndilimani's vibrant kwasa kwasa sound, the sight of party colours worn by representatives of state and government, or the general mood of struggle nostalgia, which pervades the celebrations. As Sam Nujoma phrased it for posterity in his inaugural speech in 1990, the invocation of "our fallen heroes and heroines, whose names Namibia's present and future generations will sing in songs of praise and whose martyrdom they will intone", is an inherent part of the symbolism of Independence Day. And in the same vein, the history of Namibia's independence is inseparably intertwined with the history of Swapo.

It is precisely this ambivalent role of Swapo as the victorious liberation movement and perpetual ruling party, which makes the nationally inclusive version of liberation memory on Independence Day a contested issue. The conflation of nation, state, and ruling party is characteristic of many postcolonial states in Southern Africa that are ruled by former liberation movements (Melber 2013, 2011; Southall 2013). In this regard, Namibia is no exception. As I will argue in the remainder of this chapter and also in the two following chapters on Cassinga Day and Heroes' Day, it is especially in the context of political national holidays and commemorative events, where this relation becomes apparent and quite often also contested.

An oft-cited reason for people to refrain from attending state-sponsored political holiday events is the presence of Swapo's party colours, worn by spectators but also by representatives of

the state and government.[151] According to Melber, a perception persists "that national public holidays now tend to be monopolised by SWAPO as the party in control of the government" (Melber 2014: 29). This debate is multifaceted in itself, referring to questions of the neutrality of the state in matters related to national policy, to the neutrality of government vis-à-vis the political opposition, or more generally the feeling of many Namibians that the ruling party is biased in terms of ethnicity or regionalism (Melber 2009: 475–476; Bedorf 2007: 48–49; Wärnlöf 1996: 74–76).

In 2012, Swapo's Jerry Ekandjo fuelled the debate with his insistence that Swapo members should be allowed to wear their colours wherever they wished to do so, even in church.[152] As a minister and representative of government, Ekandjo is known to be a steadfast party hack who frequently wears Swapo-colours in his official functions.[153] His statement was met with wide-spread condemnation in the liberal media.[154] At the same time, it reflects common practice and perspectives in this regard. Members of government like Jerry Ekandjo, Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana or late Petrus Iilonga frequently appear(ed) in their official functions wearing Swapo colours in public. When travelling through northern Namibia and especially Owambo, Swapo flags hoisted on homesteads, cuca-shops, or village trees are a familiar sight; showing allegiances, and demarcating spheres of political influence.

Based on my own experience, the presence of Swapo Party colours at national events is an undeniable fact, which also varies, however, depending on occasion, location, and actors. In the context of Cassinga Day, for instance, both audience and government representatives including presidents frequently wear party colours (see next chapter). At the Independence Day celebrations that I attended in Windhoek and Gobabis in 2010 and Oshakati in 2013, this was different. Among the audience, Swapo colours were visible, but definitely not dominant. Rather, most people sported casual dress while especially women preferred their Sunday best and/or traditional attire, depending on the location. Even in Oshakati, the most metropolitan city in Owambo and Swapo's northern power base, most people attending the celebration wore neutral clothes or, if women, traditional *ondhelela*, while President Pohamba donned a dark suit.[155] My observation corresponds with Becker, who noted in the case of Independence Day in Ohangwena in 2004 that Swapo colours were "only dots in the crowd" (Becker 2012: 7). Still, the choice of clothes can obviously not be equated with political attitudes. In the questionnaire that I used to survey the audience of the 2010

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[151] For nuanced perspectives on this debate; see "Political Activities and Party Colours On National Days", *New Era*, 23 March 2012; "Political Party Attire and Colours - a Thorn in the Flesh", *New Era*, 13 April 2012; "Foreign diplomats in Swapo regalia irk RDP", *The Namibian*, 9 May 2012; "Whites feel excluded from independence celebrations", *The Namibian*, 20 March 2017.

[152] "Ekandjo advocates for Swapo colours at church services", *The Namibian*, 8 May 2012.

[153] In 2012, Ekandjo was Minister of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development. For examples of public appearances in colours, see "Ekandjo warns against illegal land occupation", *New Era*, 12 November 2012 and "Ekandjo warns Build-Together defaulter", *Namibian Sun*, 14 November 2012.

[154] For a rich and varied collection of responses to Ekandjo's statement during May 2012, see *The Namibian's* popular SMS column, where readers can contribute short text messages. Especially members and voters of the political opposition voiced their outrage.

[155] Field notes, 21 March 2013.

independence jubilee, 89 people (58%) responded with "no" to the question whether party colours should stay at home on Independence Day, while only 57 (37%) answered "yes".[156] The outcome suggests that even though people may not wear party colours at national events, a majority still are either supportive or tolerant about their presence.

In a way, the body language of President Pohamba and Sam Nujoma at the 2010 celebration, which I described in the introductory vignette, reflects the same ambivalent relationship. Pohamba's open arms was the gesture of a statesman who addressed the nation, while Nujoma's raised fist appealed to the struggle nostalgia of the liberation movement, its supporters in the audience, and his comrades from the frontline states. As the ultimate embodiment of Swapo's liberation memory, Nujoma is a ubiquitous and indispensable element of all major national events. Where his successors Pohamba and Geingob tend to make an effort to represent the nation-state in their choice of dress, discourse, and demeanour, Nujoma always co-presents the liberation movement.

It is in this relation of nation-state and ruling party that the dialectics of liberation politics in Namibia manifest themselves in all their ambivalence. This became even more obvious at the inauguration ceremony for President Pohamba at the 2010 jubilee celebration. After Pohamba had taken his oath of office, sworn on the constitution of the republic, the master of ceremonies Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila congratulated him for his re-election as president. When she said that this had been done 'according to our wish […], Comrade President', she did so regardless of the fact that the election was fiercely contested by the political opposition due to allegations of fraud against the ruling party. Pohamba's inauguration was only possible after the Supreme Court had dismissed the opposition's complaint (Kornes 2011: 212–214; Melber 2010).

For Phil ya Nangoloh, human rights activist and one of the Swapo government's most vocal critics, celebrating independence was justified in terms of history. For that reason, he attended the celebration in the stadium, but declined the invitation to attend the state banquet. According to him, in light of poverty and unemployment in Namibia such events too obviously catered for the country's rich and well-connected elite. The ruling party was disrespectful of the constitution and rather implemented its party manifesto as a foundation for national policy; there was "party rule instead of state rule".[157] His sentiment was seconded by a senior Swapo member with widely acknowledged struggle credentials, who explained his dismay to me in the following words: "our political holidays, all of them: instead of uniting us, they are dividing us. Independence Day: SWAPO is prominently using that day to propagate itself. Heroes' Day: the same. Cassinga Day: the same. So, where is the nationality in those commemorations? Except by praising only one

[156] The closed question was "This is a day of the nation and party colours should stay at home", as such part of a subset of declarative statements. Interviewing was done by my field assistants and me in different parts of the venue, inside and outside of the stadium, to gather a broad spectrum of interviewees. If we assume that the stadium was filled to its maximum capacity of 20,000 people, n154 responses amount to 0.77% of the audience.
[157] Interview with Phil ya Nangoloh, Windhoek, 30 March 2010.

political party?"[158] Even though Swapo's power of definition over the history and legacy of liberation is a reoccurring matter of contestation on Independence Day, one should not underestimate the importance of liberation memory, especially in regards to resistance and exile, as a positive source of identification for many Namibians. Both the outspoken veteran quoted above, a decorated ex-combatant himself, and Phil ya Nangoloh, who also fought in the liberation struggle, are living proof of this. In the following, I want to explore this significance of liberation memory in the context of Independence Day in more detail.

Independence Day and the Representation of Liberation Memory

A highlight of the 20th independence anniversary was the musical *Creation*, directed by Sandy Rudd, in which Namibia's long struggle for national independence was presented as a historical narrative both linear and fragmented.[159] At the onset of the play, a voice off-stage introduces *Creation* as "the story of the nation". It opens with a scene depicting the Cassinga massacre of 1978 in harrowing detail; performers are killing, dying, and running for their lives under the impression of authentic photographs of the attack, which are projected on a screen. A woman and a little girl manage to escape the attack. They hide; and to soothe the girl's fear, the woman tells her the story of the nation, which is structured along popular tropes of Namibian history. Beginning with pre-history, the San are introduced as Namibia's first people, followed by Owambo peasant culture, the arrival of missionaries and colonialists, genocide and apartheid, exile and the struggle for liberation, and finally, independence. The musical offers an abundance of references to relevant topics for a discussion of Namibian ideas about national belonging, ethnicity, indigeneity, race, or gender. For brevity's sake, I will highlight three aspects of importance for my analysis of liberation memory.

First of all, the choice of Cassinga as the starting point of this particular national narrative is significant. It underlines the centrality of the "Cassinga event" (Heywood 1996) as a *lieu de mémoire*, which is tied to the experience of Namibians in exile.[160] The intensity of the opening scene recalled for the audience one of the central tropes of the liberation movement in tangible uneasiness and graphic detail: that "the struggle will be long and bitter".[161] This topic, of a nation born through violence and suffering, was reiterated again and again throughout the play in its depiction of the genocide, of apartheid, and the armed liberation struggle against South Africa. In this, Rudd carefully managed to avoid party political readings of history and instead narrated Cassinga as a collective national trauma.

[158] Even though my interlocutor's reputation as an officially recognised liberation struggle hero is indisputable and he gave me his consent for publishing his statement, I will refrain from naming him. We talked on the side-lines of an event in the context of the independence jubilee in 2010.

[159] I watched *Creation* twice at the National Theatre of Namibia, including its premiere on 18 March, on which the following observation is based.

[160] This is explored in detail in the next chapter. On Cassinga memory; see Williams 2010a, 2010b.

[161] From the famous statement of Andimba Toivo ya Toivo at court in Pretoria in 1966 (SWAPO 1987: 316). Parts of his speech were also read in the play.

This was reinforced by the dramatic display of exile. In one of the most powerful scenes of the play, Tuli Shityuwete, the daughter of liberation struggle hero and ex-Robben Island prisoner Helao Shityuwete, performed exile through a ballet solo, which was based on Mvula ya Nangolo's poem *From Exile* (1976):[162]

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone to touch me
very, very tenderly
and gradually put me at ease
I wish to feel again how life feels

I've not been home for many, many years
for many years I've been out of sight
for many years I've not been touched
and I've learnt to be homesick here in exile
where life is not so bright

I've not been touched so tenderly
I've been searched by bullets
going through my camouflage
and leaving my heart so fresh
I wish to feel again how life feels

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone
to introduce the newly born babies
help me identify those grown-ups
and lead me to the cemetery
where friends and playmates have long gone

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone
to understand my silence
the letter that didn't arrive
about our clan and tribe
for now I only belong
to my country and nation
still I wish to be touched tenderly

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[162] <https://www.revuenoire.com/en/mvula-ya-nangolo-namibia/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

by hand and atmosphere
of people in a peaceful sphere

Her performance vividly captured the emotive dimension of the text, which is one of Namibia's most popular and widely cited poetic expressions of the exile experience. She was accompanied by a female member of the choir, who sang parts of the poem, including the passage about the transcendence of clan and tribe, and the birth of the nation in exile. Exile, as another foundational topic of liberation memory, was performed and portrayed as a painful, yet formative source of nation-building.

Other scenes of the play, which displayed the military life of PLAN combatants in exile, added to this with an emphasis on the importance of solidarity and comradeship. Significantly, the display of resistance in the play – both in exile by PLAN combatants, and inside Namibia by civilians – was mostly enacted by female actresses. Scenes, where women on stage resisted German or South African security forces, were met with spontaneous applause from the audience, which included a great number of government officials, party members, and war veterans with their families. In congruence with this decidedly patriotic reading of history, the last scene of the play was a large dancing sequence which brought all roles, including the former enemies, in their ethnic, cultural and racial diversity together in another tableau of national unity and reconciliation. The scene ended with the playing of the national anthem, sang by the choir, while the stage was illuminated in the colours of the national flag. The symbolism was explicit and effective. In the audience, people – black and white alike – rose and proudly sang the hymn, followed by jubilant cheers of "viva!" and thunderous applause.

In its narrative of national independence, *Creation* most tangibly expressed the ideals of "One Namibia, one nation", which gave the struggle against apartheid and for national liberation its momentum and also inspired the original independence celebration. The play portrayed Namibia's history as an ordeal of violence and suffering, forced upon its people by outside forces. Yet, despite cultural or ethnic differences, the *peoples* of Namibia were willing to resist and to unite as one *people*, one nation. The experience of exile, armed resistance and the trauma of Cassinga are important moments in this process of proto-national group formation. Violence is a catalyst in this history. In the play, however, it was neither glorified nor did it serve as a resource for heroism. Instead, *Creation's* vision for nation-building is unity in diversity, across the boundaries of ethnicity and race, and in the spirit of national reconciliation.

With this message, the play was perfect as an item of the cultural programme of the twentieth independence jubilee. It premiered at the National Theatre and was supposed to be performed at the Independence Stadium on 21 March as well. The play's allotted time-slot was just after the presidential address. As described in the introductory vignette, during Pohamba's speech cultural groups and a youth group clad in the official independence logo shirts had assembled on the playing field, where they formed a human installation representing national unity in diversity. Their

performance would have transformed seamlessly into the play, whose actors and singers, including the participating cultural groups had gathered on the track, ready to begin. However, just when President Pohamba had finished his speech, people suddenly started to leave the stands in scores and poured unto the playing field. At the same time, people from outside the stadium, who had not been allowed to enter due to place limitations, also started to climb the fences and walls in order to get in front of the stage, anticipating the pop concerts. Due to this situation of chaos and confusion, the play was cancelled for security reasons and thus not part of the entertainment programme of the day. The play had received N$600,000 from the jubilee celebration budget, which was a significant financial contribution from government for a cultural production. For this reason and in face of the effort put into the play, the cancellation was a great disappointment for Rudd and her team, including the group of San performers from Tsumkwe.[163] Still, the play was shown at the National Theatre several times and some 4,000 school children had been able to watch it, deeply moved and excited, according to Rudd.

Sandy Rudd is a well-known and experienced playwright, choreographer, and curator who worked throughout Southern Africa. At the time of writing, she was artistic director, lecturer, and manager of the Bank Windhoek Theatre School, which is part of the College for the Arts. She holds Namibian citizenship, even though she was born in Harare (Zimbabwe) in 1955 from where she moved to Namibia in the 1980s. In our interview, she characterised herself self-consciously as a "white African", representing the fifth generation of her family on the continent. For her, the play was also serving as a kind of "personal catharsis" to face the racism of the white settler society in Rhodesia, where she grew up. In a way, her contribution to the twentieth independence jubilee brought her full circle, since she also choreographed the performance of a children's choir at the original independence celebration in 1990.[164]

When I asked her about the significance of Cassinga in the play, she told me that in her opinion Cassinga marked a decisive turning point on the road to Namibia's independence, when the world finally realised the true nature of South Africa. That's why she let the play begin with the attack on Cassinga. She drew on knowledge and experience of an exhibition, which she had curated for Cassinga Day in 1998. According to her, this story – of Cassinga, of life in exile, of *Creation* – was also that of her choreographer and co-writer Banana Shekupe, who joined SWAPO in exile at the age of fourteen and who was instrumental in co-founding Ndilimani in Lubango (Angola) in 1981/1982.[165] For Shekupe, music was an inherent part of the liberation struggle – something, he tried to express with *Creation*:

[163] Field notes, 22 March 2010; interviews with Sandy Rudd, Windhoek, 24 March 2010 and Banana Shekupe, Windhoek, 24 March 2010.
[164] Interview with Sandy Rudd, Windhoek, 24 March 2010.
[165] He is not active in Ndilimani anymore. As a music group so closely affiliated with the liberation movement, Ndilimani – who perform regularly at national events like Independence Day or Heroes' Day – are a case in point for the blurring of the boundaries between the liberation movement SWAPO and the ruling party Swapo. For a related case of merging pop culture and party politics in neighboring Zimbabwe; see Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009.

> Music was playing a role in our liberation struggle, you can say that it was a spiritual tool for keeping our struggle alive, it was music and arts, dance, everything, which we were using all the time whenever we had problems […] music was used as a healing process, for soldiers, even the wounded, you have to sing, you had to dance for them and they get smiling […] they get courage. So I based the story based on that.[166]

This message, he emphasised, was important to tell to young people so that they understand the extent of suffering that Namibians had to endure in the war, many of whom were children themselves at the time, including Banana. *Creation* thus not only resonated with the ideals of Namibia's policies on national reconciliation and national unity, but also reinforced the anniversary's prospective focus on youth.

Independence Day and the Youth as a Target Audience

The importance, to address and engage Namibia's youth and born free generation with entertaining and educational formats, was repeatedly emphasised by people involved in the organisational process.[167] In the run-up to the twentieth anniversary, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting produced a series of documentaries under the motto "Footprints of the Namibian March to Freedom", to educate the nation about Namibia's independence struggle and the supportive role of the frontline states in Southern Africa. According to Permanent Secretary Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, the films were especially addressing the born free to create awareness that the freedom they enjoyed today was based on the suffering and sacrifice of neighbouring countries, which supported Namibians in exile.[168]

The focus on youth and the born free was most obvious in regards to the music programme, which catered for different audiences and tastes, including kwaito, hip hop, christian rock, gospel and reggae and took place at venues all over town, including Katutura, Khomasdal and central Windhoek. Bands and musicians had gone through competitive auditioning and were selected by a jury to perform at concerts either in the run-up to Independence Day or at the actual event.[169] For the main music show in the stadium on 21 March, some of Namibia's most popular performers were on stage, including The Dogg, Castro, Gal Level, Damara Dik-Ding, PDK, Tate Buti and many more. It

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[166] Interview with Banana Shekupe, Windhoek, 24 March 2010.

[167] Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 17 March 2010; informal conversation with Greta Gaspar, Arts Education Officer at the Ministry of Education, Windhoek, 23 March 2010; interview with Banana Shekupe, Windhoek, 24 March 2010; interview with Frans Kapofi, Windhoek, 25 March 2010.

[168] Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 17 March 2010. See also Statement by Right Honorable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister at the launching of the Republic of Namibia's 20th independence anniversary logo and theme at UN Plaza, 17 February 2010.

[169] Interview with Banana Shekupe, Windhoek, 24 March 2010. Shekupe was the chairman of the Independence Day music organising committee within the fold of the sub-committee on entertainment. In this capacity he was responsible for the selection process.

was the largest concert in Namibia since 21 March 1990.[170] I attended most of the concerts, which varied in scope and attendance, also due to organisational constraints.[171]

MCs and artists used the concerts to appeal to their mostly youthful audience to attend the upcoming Independence Day celebration and get involved in democracy. Some artists also used their moments on stage to voice political criticism. For instance, the singer of a reggae band that performed at Katutura's UN Plaza addressed government in-between songs, alluding to the official poverty alleviation policy framework: "Our message goes to our leaders, […] here we are, still poor and waiting. We still want the message you gave us, Vision 2030, to be accomplished".[172] Another, slightly different example was the performance of Namibian kwaito super star Martin Morocky aka The Dogg, who challenged his audience at the Independence Day concert: "It's twenty years after independence, but you still remain stupid".[173] In what way this critique was political and at whom it was directed remains open for speculation, but the artist's political track record might offer a clue.

Morocky, who was born in exile in Zambia in 1983 and returned to Namibia in 1989, has repeatedly demonstrated his allegiance with the ruling party. In 2004, he and fellow kwaito artists Gazza and Pablo contributed with the song "Presidential Call" to the election campaign of Hifikepunye Pohamba.[174] He and other artists also supported Pohamba's re-election campaign in 2009 by following the campaign trail with music shows; addressing and mobilising young voters. In Pohamba's own words, this artistic support "reinforced the Swapo Party as the political party of choice for our young people. It showed the young people that it was 'cool' to participate in the political process and to support the political party of your choice".[175] Where Ndilimani represents an explicit historical connection to Swapo, artists like The Dogg or Gazza thus bring a rather implicit affiliation to party politics to the stage of Independence Day. This interweaving of popular youth culture and politics by means of "poli-tainment" (Shiweda 2009: 31) obviously serves to tap into the reservoir of the youth vote and to foster a generational shift within the ruling party.

A comparable development has been described for Zimbabwe since approx. 2000, when Zanu-Pf embarked on a more culturally informed form of nationalism to make its so called 'third chimurenga' more attractive for a younger generation.[176] As Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009: 952) have analysed, the ruling party made extensive use of formats which merged pop-cultural

[170] Interview with Banana Shekupe, Windhoek, 24 March 2010.

[171] Most performers I talked to were happy about the opportunity to perform, but criticised the delayed announcement of the official programme and a lack of proper advertising. As a result, some shows were attended rather poorly, as for instance the performance of BMB and Young Lady in Khomasdal on 19 March, which also happened to take place at noon in the soaring sun; field notes, 19 March 2010.

[172] Field notes, 19 March 2010.

[173] Field notes, 21 March 2010.

[174] Noteworthy, the song featured a vocal performance of Sam Nujoma; see "Nujoma sings his heart out", *Windhoek Observer*, 14 August 2010.

[175] Quoted in "Pohamba thanks performing artists", *New Era*, 19 April 2010.

[176] The term chimurenga refers to the history of armed anticolonial resistance in Zimbabwe, first against British then Rhodesian colonial rule. During Mugabe's reign, his party Zanu-Pf popularised the notion of a 'third chimurenga' to lend legitimacy to its controversial land reform (Ndlovu-Gatsheni /Willems 2009).

entertainment and commemoration, including dramatised TV documentaries and a revival of chimurenga music, to "forge a consciousness based on its narrow version of the 'party-nation'" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni /Willems 2009: 953). For Zimbabwean artists, this implied the challenge, threat, or opportunity, to publicly align with the ruling party and to benefit from this relationship, or to be side-lined and discredited as political 'sell-outs'. At the same time, war veterans of the independence struggle were employed as educators in so-called national service youth training camps to teach Zimbabwe's born free about the merits of patriotic history and the vices of Western imperialism (Ranger 2005: 11–13). The emergence of cultural nationalism in Zimbabwe has to be seen in context with the country's profound economic crisis, thus revealing "the fragility of the national project" (Ndlovo-Gatsheni /Willems 2009: 964).

Employing this perspective on crisis, youth, and nationalism for an analysis of Independence Day celebration in Namibia is helpful. The independence jubilee in 2010 took place against the background of a lively debate on youth unemployment, following a government study which put the rate at close to 60%.[177] Even though the findings of the study were contested on grounds of methodological issues, discourse on unemployment and especially its impact on the born free generation overshadowed the jubilee celebration and continued throughout the year.[178] In his lecture on 2 March 2010, titled "Namibia: A Nation on the Move!", Prime Minister Angula explicitly made reference to this situation.

His talk officially initiated a series of public lectures which took place at different venues, including Windhoek's universities, throughout March and particularly addressed the youth and born free. Angula started with two quotes from Sam Nujoma's inauguration and farewell speeches in 1990 and 2005, respectively. He then challenged the audience to reflect on whether Namibia was on the right track in regards to nation-building. For this, the Prime Minister highlighted the manifold challenges that the born free were facing in regards to poverty, HIV, and unemployment. Especially the latter, he said, posed "a threat to our social cohesion […]. The youth challenge is a national challenge. We must all share this responsibility. There will be a point when young people suffering from poverty and unemployment will say enough is enough. That is not a threat – just a warning".[179]

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[177] See the "Namibia Labour Force Survey 2008" of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The report was published in March 2010, thus inevitably having an impact on the jubilee celebration. It put the unemployment rate in the working population at 51,2%, with 59,9% in the age group of 15–34.

[178] Some examples: "Time to man-up on unemployment", *Insight Namibia*, February 2010; "20 years of independence meaningless to some – RDP", *Namibia Economist*, 19 March 2010; "Unemployment: Namibia's headache 20 years on" and "There is reason to celebrate", *Southern Times*, 19 March 2010; "Immer wieder bereit sein", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 March 2010; "Voting whether Namibia is a 'shining example'", *The Namibian*, 23 March 2010; "The Land Grab Is Not On", *The Namibian*, 26 March 2010; "Political Perspective", *The Namibian*, 1 April 2010; "Namibian youth marginalized", *New Era*, 7 October 2010; "A hopeless generation", *New Era*, 8 October 2010; "Geingob doubts accuracy of unemployment statistics", *New Era*, 27 October 2010.

[179] The questions he asked the audience were: "Has the Namibian nation succeeded during the last twenty years to engender hope and confidence in its citizens? Are we nurturing the traditions of a vibrant and viable democracy? Are we continuing to heal the wounds of the past?"; see Namibia: A Nation on the Move! By Right Honourable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister, Auditorium, Government Office Park, 2 March 2010; and "Progress since Independence debatable", *The Namibian*, 4 March 2010.

The relevance and urgency of his warning was indeed proven throughout the independence jubilee, when on several occasions young, homeless people started occupying public land in the capital's destitute outskirts.

Cases of residential land-grabbing, in the context of a massive and largely uncontained rural exodus into the capital, occur on a fairly regular basis in Namibia. In March 2010, however, rumours quickly spread – according to some, propagated by the political opposition – that government was allowing the landless to take land free of charge as a gift on the occasion of the independence jubilee.[180] The televised images of young Namibians, defending their makeshift shacks against the bulldozers of the City of Windhoek, provided a contested backdrop to the glamour of the independence jubilee. In light of pressing social issues like poverty and unemployment, the born free did indeed play an important role during the 2010 jubilee, albeit differently, than planned by the government. In the meantime, a powerful youth-based protest movement, spearheaded by organisations like Affirmative Repositioning and the Landless People's Movement, has gained momentum (Becker 2016).[181]

In the absence of statistical data on the demographic composition of Independence Day audiences over time, I can only rely on my personal observation and the results of the questionnaire we used to survey the audience in Windhoek in 2010.[182] To all appearances, the majority of the people attending the jubilee celebration were in the age group of 18–34, considered as "youth" from a Namibian perspective. Of the 154 people we surveyed, 103 belonged to that category, while 34 were age 35 or older and 17 were younger than 18. As "audience of the celebration", the sample was rather unspecified, so a certain bias may exist in so far, as my research assistants and I might have inadvertently preferred interviewees in our same age range. Still, the findings of the questionnaire correspond with the general perception that the audience largely consisted of young people.

When asked about their reasons for attending the Independence Day celebration, the 103 young people replied the following: 40 explained it as an expression of "patriotism", 20 wanted to see the international "guests of honour", 18 came for the "entertainment" programme, 12 went to see the "President", while 10 opted for "free food and drinks". Significantly, 55 had been to an Independence Day celebration at least once before. 62 had attended some of the independence-themed events in the run-up to Independence Day, with a clear preference for the concerts (48), while public lectures (13), exhibitions (11) and theatre plays (5) had found their youthful audiences, too. The figures suggest that of those young Namibians who attended the celebration, many did so

[180] "Landless mark 20 years differently", *New Era*, 23 March 2010; "Land grab in Windhoek", *The Namibian*, 24 March 2010; "Zoom In", *Namibia Today*, 26 March 2010; "Councillors fingered in land grab", *New Era*, 26 March 2010; "Housing shortage – Namibia's Achilles heel", *Southern Times*, 19 April 2010.

[181] The trajectory of this movement is beyond the scope of my study at this point, but worth following up for an analysis of shifting opinions about independence. Heike Becker (2016) has provided insightful observations on the "Fanonian moment" of Namibia's youth and urban land activism.

[182] Observations for other Independence Day celebrations, I attended in Gobabis 2010 and Oshakati 2013, are similar. A tendency towards more youth-oriented formats in Independence Day celebrations can be discerned.

for reasons of identification with the nation-state and/or interest in political affairs, and that they also did attend Independence Day repeatedly. Furthermore, a majority had made use of the entertainment and educational programmes that accompanied the jubilee celebration.

Fig. 12: Young people queuing for the independence celebration, Windhoek, 21 March 2010. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

Regarding their opinion on party colours, 34% (35) of the youth group agreed to the statement that Independence Day "is a day of the nation and party colours should stay at home", while 62% (64) disagreed. Support in favour of party colours was thus slightly higher in the youth group than in the general sample (58%). It must be mentioned, though, that in this question we did not ask for party political affiliation. Some respondents who opted to answer the question with "no" used the open questions-section to criticise the ruling party or comment that Independence Day celebrations should be more accommodative towards the political opposition.

Asked whether Independence Day was "important for nation-building", seventy people answered with "yes" and 29 with "no". The question whether "celebrations like this help to overcome tribal or political divisions" was answered by 57 people with "yes" and 42 with "no". This marked difference suggests that a large segment of young people did appreciate Independence Day as a positive and potentially useful institution. At the same time, however, they seemed to

assess its impact on society in more sceptical or, respectively, realistic terms. This assessment was supported by open question commentary, which interviewees could use to specify their "own ideas and reflections on Independence Day". The overwhelming majority used the space to leave a positive feedback, mostly in brief statements about how much they enjoyed the day and that they considered it an important event to take place and to attend. Some, however, used the space to leave more nuanced and thoughtful statements, e.g. to heap praise on the organisers,[183] to underline their commitment to patriotism and nation-building,[184] to remember the hardships of the liberation struggle,[185] to criticise Independence Day for its politics or expenditure,[186] but also to voice their concerns about the political and economic status quo.[187]

In summary, the audience of the Independence Day jubilee celebration of 2010 consisted to a large extent of youth, including the born free. Young people who decided to attend the celebration did so for various reasons, as an expression of a patriotic conviction, in support of the ruling party, or primarily for fun and entertainment. A significant amount had made use of the supporting cultural and educational programme, organised by the government. Regardless of whether they looked for politics or entertainment, most of the young people had their own specific opinions about the meaning and purpose of Independence Day. While the majority appreciated the occasion as important and meaningful, many were open to voice their concerns and criticism about the politicising of the event and the amount of money spent in face of poverty and youth unemployment. Supporting the event through attendance and still having a critical opinion about it,

[183] "I am proud of our country and what the GRN has done in the past 20 years" (30, female, police woman); "The Independence Day was very enjoyable and informative and well organised. I feel very proud of our country to host such event peacefully and to thank the diplomats from different countries that attend the event" (20, female, student).

[184] "This shows that Namibia is a very peaceful country, with peace and stability among the citizens" (29, female, soldier); "This is a very special event; every Namibian should be encouraged to come for this celebration" (27, male, student); "This is the event of reconciliation and national [sic!] building" (32, male, unemployed); "I think this is the day we all think and feel happy to live in such a nice country, living in peace and united as one" (33, male, soldier).

[185] "It should be a day when people should come together and commemorate the years we spent fighting for our own Independence" (30, female, teacher); "I feel comfortable when Namibians celebrate its Independence because we fought for this country and it was hard for us to bring up Namibia" (18, male, student); "It is important as a reminder for young people to work hard like freedom fighters to achieve the goals and realise the union of the country" (34, male, teacher); "Independence day is when elders share with young people the sufferings of war so that young people appreciate what they have today and enjoy the privilege of being free" (20, female, student).

[186] "This year's independence day was celebrated well. However I think this should be a day for rejoicing and celebrating joyously and not for swearing in certain GRN officials" (20, female, student); "The GRN is wasting money on this types [sic!] of events rather to spend it on something" (28, male, unemployed); "People should be grateful that war is finally over but there is no need for spending money like that" (22, male, student); "The GRN is wasting money on this type event rather for them to use it on other things" (28, male, cleaner); "It should be stopped because we are tired of listening to contradictions in history" (19, male, student).

[187] "I want the GRN to work out the issue of unemployment among the youth" (31, male, social worker); "The GRN must pay attention to unemployed people" (26, male, unemployed); "Members of parliament should not only concentrate on [the] ruling party but they should try to look on both sides" (20, female, learner); "The GRN must give us work because 20 years of Independence are too many unemployed" (22, female, domestic worker); "The GRN is wasting our money; they should pay attention to old people, unemployed people" (20, female, student).

was seemingly not a contradiction. This insight is relevant to differentiate generalising statements about the ideological character and one-sidedness of political national holiday celebrations in Namibia. Instead, it should primarily be seen as a conscious expression of publicness by people, who made individual decisions to attend (Roy 2006: 224). This implies, of course, that the vast majority of Namibians, young and old, does not attend national events like Independence Day, but rather spends the time with friends and family at home or in the village, most likely *braaing*, drinking, and discussing the state of the nation.

3. “Are you also a survior?” The Mnemonic Communitas of Cassinga Day

“Are you also a survivor?” With these words, I was welcomed at the official Cassinga Day commemoration at UN Plaza in Windhoek’s former township Katutura on the morning of 4 May 2012. The man who addressed me this way revealed himself as one of the organisers and greeted me in person; apparently, because I was the only white person among the audience to attend the ceremony. I kindly replied that I was too young to be a survivor of the Cassinga attack, but that I deemed it important to attend. At that moment, I was still a bit confused due to the thorough conduct of the security personnel who just checked my camera equipment for explosives, to fully understand the context of his words. I only made sense of their meaning during the course of the following events, when the category of the ‘survivor’ became tangibly enacted in the performances of the commemorative ceremony. The question of what the category implies and whether I could indeed be a survivor and if so, who could not, will be at the center of my analysis of Cassinga Day.

Cassinga Day commemorates an air strike of the SADF on two exile camps of SWAPO in southern Angola on 4 May 1978. The simultaneous raid on Cassinga transit camp and Chetequera military base, the latter more commonly known by its code-name *Vietnam*, left approximately 1,000 people dead; the majority being refugees or other civilians, many of them women and children. The attack caused international outrage and condemnation, and significantly bolstered the perception of SWAPO as the legitimate representative of the Namibian people, fighting a just war of liberation against an increasingly ruthless and vicious South African regime. While the figures above read as the cruel and devastating facts of war, they also reveal the inherent contestations arising over a conflict that was framed very differently by the warring factions. For SWAPO and its international solidarity movement, it was a just and legitimate armed anticolonial liberation struggle, while for apartheid South Africa the battle was fought against the spectre of a communist revolution in Southern Africa; a pretext, of course, for the prevention of majority rule.

Accordingly, the question whether people residing in SWAPO’s camps are categorised as civilians and refugees or as combatants and guerrilla fighters is intrinsically tied to ideological standpoints regarding the conflict. The response to this question, whether the Cassinga attack was a ‘massacre’ of civilians, or a tragic, yet legitimate ‘operation’ against a military target, has shaped much of the discourse on Cassinga, both during the struggle days and after independence. This has also profoundly affected the mediation of Cassinga memory, whether by means of oral history, commemorative ceremonies, or memorialisation.

Of Namibia’s political national holidays, Cassinga Day stands out for the unique and stable characteristics of the commemorative practices attached to it, as well as for its dramatic historical background. While Independence Day draws its symbolism from the notion of national unity derived from the collective experience of anticolonial resistance, Cassinga Day appears as something rather different. Marking SWAPO’s single most devastating loss of life, Cassinga Day

commemorates the suffering of the Namibian exile community, which was subjected to the aggression of a vicious military adversary who committed the worst war-related crime against humanity of the entire apartheid era against Namibians. For SWAPO, Cassinga thus came to represent the “bitter pride”[188] of the liberation struggle, a symbol of the liberation movement’s “determination to resist and to make sacrifices” (Melber 2003d: 313).

Since the historic background of Cassinga Day is inextricably interwoven with apartheid South Africa’s imperial claim to power in the region, it has received more scholarly attention than all other national holidays in Namibia. Academic writing has largely focused on two aspects of the ‘Cassinga event’ (Heywood 1996). The first is the historical reconstruction of the attack.[189] The second is the analysis of the construction of Cassinga as a *lieu de mémoire* by the liberation movement, both during the war and since independence.[190] A different genre is testimonials and memoirs of people who were residents of the camp and survived the attack (Namhila 1997: 40–45; ya Nangolo /Sellström 1995; IDAF 1981).

As Williams concludes, Cassinga is “at the center of Namibia’s national narrative” (Williams 2009: 24) and thus central to liberation memory. For this reason, the attack is a frequent point of reference to contextualise and structure individual experiences of exile, e.g. as an ‘exile child’, caught in the aftermath of the attack (Nghiwete 2010: 18–21); as a PLAN combatant, operating in the vicinity of Cassinga (Ekandjo 2011: 46–59); or as a SWAPO dissident, critical of the liberation movement’s military strategy (Nathanael 2002: 173–175). Only few authors, however, have focussed on the performative aspects of the actual Cassinga Day commemoration.[191] With this chapter, I aim to contribute to the latter with a thick description of two Cassinga Day commemorations I attended in 2012 and 2013. In order to make sense of Cassinga Day in the context of Namibia’s commemorative calendar, I will focus on the category of the survivor as an integral element of liberation memory, mediated by and through Cassinga Day. Based on this analysis, I will discuss the survivor category in light of its potential to serve as a vehicle for nation-building. To contextualise my ethnography with the contested discourse and practice of Cassinga memory, I will first provide a brief historic overview of the attack and its construction as a potent *lieu de mémoire*.

[188] “Two commemorations in May”, *The Combatant* 3 (11), 1982.
[189] See Williams 2016, 2010b, 2009: 29–72; Wallace 2011: 283, 290–291; Baines 2009, 2007; Lamb 2001; Heywood 1996; and Katjavivi 1989: 110–119. Alexander 2003 also provides a perspective centred on South Africa’s military.
[190] See Shigwedha 2011; Williams 2016, 2010a, 2010b, 2009: 29–72; Borer 2009; and Vögeli 2009.
[191] Especially Becker 2012: 10–18, 2008a; and Williams 2010b: 243–247, 2009: 67–72. Lush 1993: 91–93 adds a more historical account.

The Attack on Cassinga and its Aftermath

Following the end of Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, SWAPO moved its exile structures into Angola in order to establish a closer link to the northern Namibian frontline and its embattled civilian population in Owambo. Before 1975, the route to SWAPO's exile headquarters in Tanzania and Zambia was long and arduous, leading through territories under tight control by colonial authorities. With the collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola, Namibians could more easily "climb the fence" (Thornberry 2004: viii) and cross the northern border. They were aided by local guides and PLAN combatants, who led them into SWAPO's protective fold. Whether Namibians chose to cross the border in order to pursue better education, receive guerrilla training, or simply avoid the constant harassment by South Africa's security forces: once people made their way into Angola, they often arrived at Cassinga transit centre. From there, after days or weeks, they were taken further inland to SWAPO's main camps in Huambo, Luanda, or Lubango.

Cassinga, an old mining settlement, was provided by Angola's revolutionary government for SWAPO to establish a camp. According to Williams, Namibian exiles settled in Cassinga as early as April 1976, after being transferred from SWAPO's camps in Zambia (Williams 2010b: 215).[192] In May 1978, 4,000–5,000 people stayed in Cassinga, the majority of them refugees from northern Namibia (Shigwedha 2011: 2; Williams 2010b: 228). On 4 May, after intense airborne reconnaissance in the preceding weeks, the SADF launched its attack on Cassinga and Tchetequera base with aerial bombardments and the deployment of several hundred paratroopers. At the end of that day, after immense bloodshed and carnage, about 1,000 Namibians were killed in both camps, the majority of them in Cassinga.[193]

Much of what happened during the hours of the attack is rendered through the testimonies of survivors and a set of iconic photographs of mass graves, taken by international journalists in the aftermath of the attack.[194] Through repeated mediation in state broadcasting, publications, and Cassinga Day ceremonies, testimonies and pictures form the foundation of a very distinctive

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[192] According to Heywood, among those killed was a consignment of 'rehabilitees', i.e. SWAPO cadre who were involved in the SPYL rebellion in Zambia in 1975/1976 and who had been released from detention in 1977. To undergo ideological rehabilitation, they were transferred to Cassinga just prior to the attack (Heywood 1996: 21). On the SPYL rebellion; see Williams 2009: 73–118; Dobell 1998: 40–54; and, as one who was affected and detained as a 'dissident', Nathanael 2002.

[193] This is not the place to analyse this attack in detail. Authoritative in his description and access to South African sources is Alexander 2003. On Alexander's biased representation of SWAPO's rendition of the attack; see Baines 2009: 6. The high number of casualties, in unison with survivors' narratives of point blanc executions, makes it rather difficult to frame the attack as a military battle and not a massacre. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission categorised the attack as a war crime. Noteworthy in this regard is the account of the attack's commander Jan Breytenbach, who described the operation as "an astonishing military accomplishment, carried out with remarkable audacity" (Breytenbach 2009: 163).

[194] The pictures also appear in the contemporary documentary film *Remember Kassinga*, produced by Gaetano Pagano and Sven Asberg. Pagano is the journalist who made the iconic photograph of the mass grave; see Williams 2009: 322. The film, which portrays the attack as a war crime against civilian refugees is regularly broadcast on Namibian television in the context of Cassinga Day.

Cassinga memory. As Shigwedha has meticulously carved out, Cassinga survivors, who annually reproduce their narratives during Cassinga Day, have become "modeled into living testimonies or *metaphors* of untold human suffering" (Shigwedha 2011: 13). Survivors are in a position as custodians of the memory of the attack and of those who were killed and since have acquired the status of national martyrs. This puts survivors in a complex and at times uneasy relationship with the government, which also claims to represent the memory of Cassinga (Baines 2009: 20).

Due to its symbolic value, Cassinga became a rallying point in the international campaign against South Africa's foreign rule over Namibians. At the same time, Cassinga became synonymous with the readiness of SWAPO and the Namibian people to make sacrifices for the independence of Namibia. This narrative of martyrdom was both embodied and mediated through the photographs of the mass graves, which shaped the iconography of Cassinga memory (Williams 2016: 52–54, 2010b: 238–239). The gruesome photos were circulated widely, adopted by international solidarity movements, and laid the foundations for becoming one the most emblematic symbols of SWAPO's liberation struggle. All this contributed to the effective contemporary construction of Cassinga as one of the most important *lieux de mémoire* of SWAPO's armed liberation struggle.

The mass grave iconography of Cassinga, however, has early on gained momentum to shape perceptions of the attack – and blur, or even obliterate, other histories and memories of Cassinga (Williams 2016, 2010b: 233–241). According to Williams, it was mainly through the powerful agency of these images that the notion of Cassinga as an exclusively civilian camp was popularised and the attack, accordingly, internationally regarded as a war crime against unarmed women and children (Williams 2010b: 238). However, as the research of Heywood, Williams, Shigwedha and others has shown, Cassinga was neither only *this* – a civilian camp, housing refugees, or *that* – SWAPO's military headquarters, as the SADF maintained to legitimise its attacks (Baines 2009: 9–15). Instead, Cassinga is best understood as a "hybrid space" (Williams 2016: 57) with military and civilian spheres inseparably entangled, due to the increased militarisation of the conflict.

According to Peter Ekandjo, who was operating as a PLAN combatant in the border region in the 1970s and 1980s and who was based at Cassinga just before the attack, about 200 soldiers were stationed there to guard the camp and provide military training (Ekandjo 2011: 57–58).[195] Parades, mandatory for all inhabitants of the camp, took place every morning to distribute news and hand out work assignments, subjecting the civilian population to military culture and discipline (Ekandjo

[195] Ekandjo officially launched his autobiography at the Cassinga Day commemoration in Windhoek in 2012, which gave me the possibility to obtain a copy and have a brief chat with him. His struggle narrative is remarkable for being, at least at the time of writing, the first published autobiography of a rank and file PLAN combatant, exuberant with details on PLAN operations in the border region. It reads as a sort of literary monument to his fallen comrades, full of compassion for their sacrifice and replete with Hemingwayan combative heroism.

2011: 57; Williams 2010b: 223).[196] At the same time, teenage boys were eager to lay their hands on old Cuban uniforms and wooden 'guns', emulating the grown-up combatants (Williams 2016: 49–51) and thus likely to appear as guerrilla fighters or child soldiers. The reality of a heavily militarised environment in exile created a situation in which the boundaries between military and civilian spheres were continuously blurred, making the occurrence of human rights violations more likely (Lamb 2001: 25).

A Concise History of Cassinga Day Commemoration

Ever since 1978, the attack has been commemorated by SWAPO within Namibia and among the Namibian exile community. In exile, this happened both in the physical space of camps in Angola and Zambia where Namibians were living and in the transnational space where Namibians were connected as a discursive community via print media and radio. Commemoration often took place in the form of parades, with speeches and short performances of choirs and cultural groups; short, since camps were always in danger of attacks by South Africa.[197]

Mbenzi (2015) has underlined the significance of songs and singing for the cultural dimension of Namibia's liberation struggle. Bands like Ndilimani would play songs to commemorate Cassinga (SWAPO 1986: 7) and other tragic events in the history of the liberation movement (SWAPO 1986: 16). SWAPO's exile radio was another venue to commemorate Cassinga Day or other marked events of SWAPO's commemorative calendar (Heinze 2014: 47). Next to liberation songs and radio, SWAPO's array of print publications was an important medium of commemoration in exile. Newspapers and bulletins like *The Combatant*, *Namibia Today* or *The Namibian Woman* were circulated widely among the exile community. Issues in May regularly featured survivor's testimonials, poems, speeches, as well as the graphic images of the mass graves to commemorate the attack (Akawa 2014: 95).

In *The Combatant's* edition of May 1985, for instance, survivor Mutumbatuli Festus was interviewed about the attack. His narrative ends with a dedication to honour the sacrifice of those who were killed by intensifying the efforts to fight for liberation:

> *The Combatant*: How was your morale after the attack?
> *Mutumbatuli*: Our morale was high. The gathering held afterwards had shown it. Those of us who survived in Cassinga asked to be given guns and to go and fight.

[196] Drawing on Malkki's work on refugee camps in Eastern Africa, Williams has extensively analysed the important role, camps and parades played for SWAPO to 'order' the Namibian nation in exile (Williams 2015, 2011, 2009). See Nghiwete 2010: 24–25, 58 on parades in SWAPO's exile camps as rare occasions to socialise, written from the perspective of a juvenile who grew up in exile camps.

[197] Information by Fousy Kambombo, who worked as a teacher in SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia during the 1980s; see interview, Windhoek, 24 May 2013.

> *The Combatant*: When you recall the Cassinga massacre what message do you have for the PLAN combatants?
>
> *Mutumbatuli*: Recalling that tragic day, I want to call upon my fellow PLAN fighters to redouble and rededicate our efforts to the cause of freedom which our people had and continue to sacrifice for.[198]

The attack on Cassinga was thus turned into a symbol of resistance and those killed into martyrs of the liberation movement. Testimonials similar to that of Mutumbatuli Festus were included in textbooks and teaching materials used in SWAPO's primary and secondary education centres in exile in Kwanza Sul (Angola) and Nyango (Zambia), but also in schools in the GDR which accommodated children who survived the attack or were orphaned by it (Krause 2009: 138–140). In addition to the centrality of Cassinga memory in education in exile, this latter example once more highlights the transnational dimension of Namibian liberation memory.

Before independence and inside Namibia, Cassinga Day commemoration was largely based on activism of church bodies and youth organisations, affiliated with SWAPO. Church services often led to political rallies in the capital, while in the regions church buildings were used to host commemorative ceremonies.[199] In the wake of the South African school protests of 1976, Namibian schools also became embattled spaces and hotbeds of civil unrest, with the Cassinga attack as an important point of reference. At Petrus Ganeb Senior Secondary School in Uis, for instance, learners organised a Cassinga Day commemoration in 1979, in defiance of school authorities. What ended with police intervention, tear-gassing and bruises, but also the temporary closure of the school, became a catalyst for the political awareness of young activists, many of whom went into exile afterwards.[200]

In Gibeon, a SWAPO stronghold in southern Namibia, school children staged a re-enactment of the attack on Cassinga Day 1985, as documented by a set of photographs in the National Archive.[201] For the tenth anniversary of Cassinga in 1988, a huge program of events was devised by SWAPO, spanning five days and including memorial services, film presentations, theatre performances, public talks, panel discussions, and a public rally in Katutura on 8 May. More rallies were announced for Keetmanshoop, Grootfontein and Arandis.[202] A memorial service took place in the Katutura Community Hall, where about 800 participants paid their respects and listened to a speech of Pineas Aluteni, who narrated the events from the perspective of a survivor of the attack (Lush 1993: 91–92). A mobilising factor for the 1988 Cassinga Day commemoration was the fact

[198] *The Combatant*, May 1985; reprinted by Krause (2009: 136–138).
[199] Interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 31 January 2013. See also "Engraved on Namibian hearts", *The Namibian*, 9 May 1986 and "Intimidation incidents on Cassinga Day", *The Namibian*, 8 May 1989.
[200] Interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 31 January 2013; informal conversations with Gerhardt Gurirab, Otjiwarongo, 5 June 2012 and Windhoek, 16 July 2012.
[201] NAN Photo Collection, Nos. 12957, 12959, 12962.
[202] See announcement in *The Namibian*, 29 April 1988.

that in Oshakati, the South African army held its own commemorative event and military parade to remember the attack (Nujoma 2001: 376; Lush 1993: 90–91).

Eventually, the rally in Katutura in 1988, which was staged mostly by learners and students, became the largest protest march in the history of Namibia's anti-apartheid struggle. Thousands were on the streets, creating an 'electric' atmosphere of defiance (Lush 1993: 88). Protesters sported shirts and banners with slogans and images referring to Cassinga, raised their fists and sang revolutionary songs (Liebenberg /Hayes 2010: 144, 167; Lush 1993: 88–91). From every school along the way, young people joined the march, which was on route to the Augustineum School in Khomasdal. When protesters came too close to 'white' Windhoek, the police fired tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd, which responded by throwing rocks. For Lush, then a journalist with *The Namibian* and on scene together with photographer John Liebenberg, the significance of the protests was comparable to those in South Africa in 1976, which were also spearheaded by radical learners and students (Lush 1993: 88–91).

As I explained above, photographic representation of the mass grave was highly influential for mediating the memory of Cassinga, by means of SWAPO publications such as *The Combatant* and *Namibia Today*, as well as political posters (Borer 2009; Vögeli 2009). Cassinga motifs on T-Shirts and posters were a common sight in political rallies and had an important dual function as tools for mobilisation and "mobile memorials" (Borer 2009: 141). As an "icon of outrage" (Baines 2009: 20), the mass grave image helped to shift international public opinion in SWAPO's favour, doing a great deal to delegitimise South Africa's military intervention. Significant in this regard is the important observation made by Vögeli, of how commemorative iconography in the form of posters, shirts, or banners represented Cassinga as an icon of suffering and martyrdom, while the "battle of Ongulumbashe" on 26 August 1966 was branded into a symbol of militancy (Vögeli 2009: 158–159).

This representation of Cassinga was neatly transferred into the commemorative practice of independent Namibia. In a joint statement on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of the attack, the Namibian National Students Organisation (NANSO) and the Namibian National Teachers Union called on government to declare Cassinga Day a public holiday, underlining their conviction "that it is through the spirit of supreme self-sacrifice, the spirit of Cassinga, that a new Namibian nation has been born".[203] The same organisations subsequently dominated the Cassinga Day commemoration in Windhoek, which again built on a large march of mostly young people from Katutura to Windhoek's city centre. Commemoration also included an exhibition of photographs of the camp, the attack and its aftermath in Katutura's Immanuel Shifidi Secondary School, launched by Sam Nujoma, as well as a screening of the documentary film *Remember Kassinga* at the Katutura Community Centre, which was attended by more than 1,000 people. As even a cursory analysis of

[203] "'Cassinga Day should be a public holiday'", *The Namibian*, 27 April 1990. Cassinga Day was recognised by the Public Holidays Act of 20 December 1990.

contemporary media reports demonstrates, the iconic mass grave image was omnipresent at the event and its media coverage.[204]

In the years to follow, Cassinga Day established itself as one of the major struggle related public holidays in independent Namibia. It is characterised by a relatively stable commemorative format based on survivor testimonials, solemn ceremonies of mourning, and dedicated pledges to collectively "remember Cassinga" (Becker 2012: 10–18, 2008a; Williams 2010b: 243–247, 2009: 67–72). However, the state-sponsored commemoration of Cassinga never got the same public attention as Independence Day and Heroes' Day and never attracted comparable crowds. Already in 1992, political analyst Graham Hopwood noted a low turnout at political rallies, including Cassinga Day, what he partly attributed to a decline of political mobilisation and a "new passivity" since independence.[205] Media reports throughout the years suggest that usually several hundred people attended the Cassinga Day event in Windhoek, more only on occasion of jubilees like in 1998 or 2010. Seldom, more than 1,000 people participated, however.[206]

It was also in the early 1990s that white Namibians began voicing concerns about an exclusive nature of Cassinga Day, as averse to the "spirit of reconciliation" (Lush 1993: 325). Since then, contestation over the politics of Cassinga Day as well as its ambivalent role as a national holiday within Namibia's commemorative calendar has become an integral part of Cassinga memory. In this context, critique of Cassinga commemoration tends to focus on two aspects: first, that it represents a one-sided, political reading of national history from the perspective of Swapo. This narrative, to quote Steve Mvula, a vocal critic of the ruling party, aims at "whitewashing the liberation movement"[207] of its failure to protect its civilian population in exile. Critique along these lines, usually with an emphasis on the military nature of Cassinga, is widespread among the political opposition and SWAPO dissidents and is a reoccuring subject of debate in newspapers and social media (Baines 2009, 2007; Williams 2009: 262; Nathanael 2002: 173–175).[208] The second point tied to contestation over Cassinga Day is the question of its exclusivity: is Cassinga Day a day of

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[204] "'Death rained down' at Cassinga in '78", "Fighting words from Mzee", "Cassinga relived", *The Namibian*, 7 May 1990.

[205] "Whatever happened to May Day?" *The Namibian*, 8 May 1992.

[206] At the tenth anniversary of the attack in 1998, less than 1,000 people seem to have attended; see "'We shall not forget'", *The Namibian*, 5 May 1998. The commemoration in 2010 drew several thousand attendees; see <http://www.swapoparty.org/thousands_commemorate_cassinga_day.html> [last accessed 15 October 2022]. This increased attendance may have been a result of the elevated focus that all political holidays received in the year of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence in terms of budget, advertising, and organisational scope; see interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, 1 September 2010. For 2003, Becker also gives an estimate of 1,000 people (Becker 2003: 18), while events in 1993–2000 were "surprisingly low-key" (Becker 2008a: 16). When I attended Cassinga Day in 2012, the venue was packed to the brim, in my estimate with close to 1,000 people. The year after, the event was significantly less attended. This was probably due to extremely cold temperatures in May, Namibia's first month of winter.

[207] "Cassinga massacre is told in political propaganda fashion", *Namibian Sun*, 1 May 2014.

[208] See also former Minister of Veteran Affairs Ngarikutuke Tjiriange's reply to Mvula's critique: "Knowingly or not knowingly to argue that the presence of guerrillas at Cassinga might have given 'the enemy a pretext to attack the camp,' may just be perceived to indirectly give the South African regime's presence in Namibia a credibility and legal justification"; in "Some Comments on Cassinga Are Unwarranted", *New Era*, 9 May 2014.

Swapo or of the nation? Does it exclude Namibians who – by virtue of their biographies, their political orientation, or their whiteness – are considered as outsiders to the collective, which mourns and commemorates? Is Cassinga Day an occasion to commemorate the dead of the liberation struggle beyond partisan politics of belonging? Or does it only address the suffering and loss of a very limited and particular mnemonic community?

I will address both aspects of contestation at the point where they intersect: the performative construction of a collective of mourners in the course of Cassinga Day commemoration. My ethnography is inspired by the above mentioned observations by Shigwedha, Baines and Williams on the central role of survivor testimonials for the construction of Cassinga memory. I will look at these testimonials and the ceremonies in which they are embedded as performance contributing to group formation. This process is highly situational and contingent, and resonates in a rather uneasy fashion with the Swapo vs. nation dichotomy, which informs much of the contestation tied to Cassinga Day commemoration. In the following, I will analyse this ambivalent relation with a focus on the performance of survivors, ceremonial elements, protocol, and organisational aspects.

Ethnography of Cassinga Day Commemoration

One of the most stable characteristics of Cassinga Day is the location of the main commemorative event, which most of the years has been held at UN Plaza in Katutura. Even though plans were discussed after the inauguration of the Heroes' Acre in 2002, to commemorate both Heroes' Day and Cassinga Day at the new monument site (Becker 2008a: 17), this never materialised. A rare exception to the rule took place in 2016, when Cassinga Day was commemorated at the site of the former camp in Tchetequera (*Vietnam*). For the occasion, a delegation of 32 survivors travelled to Angola, accompanied by government representatives. This was the first visit of this kind, of survivors returning to the sites of the attack since 1978, which can be seen as a result of increasing demands from survivors that the government should put more effort in maintaining the site of the mass grave. Upon their visit, the delegation reportedly was dismayed by the state of neglect of the two sites.[209] In the aftermath of the visit, the government announced that efforts were being made to build a monument at Cassinga.[210] In 2018, Cassinga Day was indeed commemorated at Heroes' Acre, because it coincided with the state visit of Angola's President Joao Lourenco, who attended as guest of honour. In the course of his visit, the two governments signed an agreement to build monuments at Cassinga and Tchetequera.[211] While the main events of Cassinga Day usually take

[209] "Remembering Cassinga Day", *New Era*, 3 May 2016; "Cassinga survivor recalls atrocity", *Windhoek Observer*, 8 May 2015.
[210] "Remembering Cassinga Day", *New Era*, 3 May 2016; "N$60m Cassinga monument fails to take off", *The Namibian*, 2 May 2018; "New Cassinga monuments planned", *Namibian Sun*, 7 May 2018.
[211] "Namibia, Angola to build Cassinga memorials", *Xinhuanet*, 4 May 2018.

place in the capital, commemorations are also held on regional and district levels, with varying degrees of magnitude and a clear focus on the northern regions (Becker 2012, 2008a).

Set and Setting

The central state-sponsored Cassinga Day commemorations in the capital on which I largely base my analysis and which were the ones I attended in 2012 and 2013, are also characterised by established ceremonial formats. Media reports on the event in Windhoek indicate that these are very consistent, which is also corroborated by Becker's (2008a: 16–17) observations for the years 1993–2000. Likewise, Williams' (2009: 67–72) description of the ceremony in 2007 is largely congruent with the ones that I observed in 2012 and 2013.

The event takes place at UN Plaza, a popular public park which contains a roofed arena with a stage and seating rows for approximately 1,000 people. On Cassinga Day, the formal activities take place inside the arena, while outside and on the adjacent streets vendors set up stalls and kapana grills, catering for culinary needs and the sweet tooth of school children, who usually constitute a large segment of the audience. When people arrive, after meeting and greeting, they take their seats on the arena's tiers. Late-comers will find a standing position at the edge of the bowl, still being able to watch. A seating section to the right usually is reserved for the community of the survivors and selected guests; another to the left is ear-marked for the brass band of the NDF. While the bottom of the bowl forms a stage for performers, encircled from three sides by the audience, the fourth side has a small elevated platform, which accommodates the VIP section. Here, at a long table, the president, the Founding Father, their wives, the regional governor, the mayor of Windhoek, and selected guests of honour are seated. The table is decorated with a floral wreath and a huge white candle. To the right of the table, the representatives of the diplomatic corps are sitting on chairs. To its left, a standing desk decorated with the coat of arms and framed by the flags of Namibia and the AU allows for speeches to the audience. In general, the setting is modest, small-scale, and intimate in comparison to most other public political holiday ceremonies.

The man who had welcomed me upon my arrival in 2012 was part of the municipality's organising committee for Cassinga Day, as he told me later on. From my seat nearby, I could observe that he and several other men specifically greeted the arriving survivors and directed them to their seating section. Many of the visitors, survivors and regular audience alike, sported Swapo colours in all forms and variations: as scarves, parasols, handbags, tiepins, headbands, hats, shirts and skirts; some men even wore suits in the colours of the party. Both in 2012 and 2013, some visitors had brought large-scale party flags which they waved repeatedly throughout the ceremony. The display of Swapo colours was much more prominent in comparison to Independence Day, highlighting the close connection between Cassinga memory and the Swapo Party. Colours were worn, however, mostly by adults and elders, while the majority of the audience, which were school children and youngsters, preferred casual street fashion.

Like the general audience, the collective of survivors, too, has distinctive practices of signifying belonging and identification by dress or accessories. While many of them also wore casual dress or Swapo colours for the occasion, the display of unique signifiers was also common. Both in 2012 and 2013, for example, several women wore white headscarves and T-Shirts imprinted with slogans like "Cassinga Survivor" or "We shall never forget our fallen heroes and heroines", sometimes with additional photos of themselves and/or other survivors. Williams (2009: 67) describes the same for the ceremony of 2007. In 2017, a sizable group of survivors had dressed in the colours blue, red and green, so that together they formed a huge animated Swapo flag, which covered three rows of the seating section.[212] In a similar display, survivors dressed in Swapo colours performed a marching formation and praise song for Sam Nujoma at the Cassinga Day commemoration in 2018, which took place at Heroes' Acre.[213] In the context of Cassinga Day, the choice of commemorative dress thus communicates a notion of shared history and solidarity of the survivors within the fold of Swapo, as a distinctive community within a larger community, equipped with a particular brand of struggle credentials.

Furthermore, the practice of commemorative dress also highlights generational and biographical differences of those who constitute the community of the survivors. At the two occasions I attended Cassinga Day, the group of the survivors numbered between 40–50 people, the majority being women. Some of them I could recognise, either because I knew them personally, like Ellen Namhila or because they were prominent spokespeople of the survivors, like Agnes Kafula.[214] A lot of them were in the age-span of 50–60; some, however, significantly younger, indicating that they were children at the time of the attack.

In 2013, there were a recognisable number of visitors who wore garments indicating a personal relationship with Cuba. Significant were especially those who had shirts imprinted with the year dates "1978–1983", personalised photographs, and the slogans "Isla dela Juventud Cuba" and "Cassinga survivor". It happened to be some of the younger survivors of the attack, who were sent to Cuba, then one of Namibia's closest allies, to continue their education. Two schools for children under Swapo's protection were established in 1978 (Hendrik Witbooi School) and 1981 (Hosea Kutako School) on the Isla de la Juventud. The schools provided education for Cassinga survivors and other Namibian children who were living in exile. In 1983, both schools jointly accommodated close to 1,200 pupils (Krause 2009: 135; see also Nghiwete 2010: 26).[215] Remarkably, this connection transcends the boundaries of Cassinga Day commemoration. For the "Cuban" group also

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[212] "Cassinga attack replays in survivors' minds", *New Era*, 5 May 2017.

[213] "Cassinga drama evokes emotions", *Nampa*, 4 May 2018 and "Never forget", *The Namibian*, 4 May 2018.

[214] Ellen Namhila, former director of the NAN, is one of Namibia's most recognised historians, specialising in the oral history of Owambo; Agnes Kafula, who later in 2012 was elected mayor of Windhoek, is one of the survivors, whose narrative of the attack has been most widely circulated (Shigwedha 2011: 181, 239–241; Williams 2009: 69–71).

[215] See Krause 2009: 80, 135 on the historical connection of the schools in Cuba and the School of Friendship in Staßfurt, East Germany. The transnational history of Namibian exiles, living and studying in countries like Cuba, GDR, Nigeria, The Gambia or Finland, has hardly received any systematic scholarly attention so far.

appeared at the memorial service for Minister of Education Abraham Iyambo at Parliament Gardens on 8 April 2013.[216] The group of about 40 former students was again wearing their signature shirts, some carried Cuban flags. One of them contributed a eulogy, in which he emphasised the shared history of Namibians and Cuba. The alumni, who had found a new home in Cuba after surviving the Cassinga attack, personified this connection, as did the late Iyambo, who had studied in Havana in 1982–1985. The group then sang revolutionary songs with Spanish lyrics.

This observation underlines the generational complexity of Cassinga memory and the multi-layered character of the Namibian exile experience more generally. At the same time, it highlights the existence of a (post-)socialist memory-scape in which memories of anti-colonial liberation struggles are mediated transnationally. In the case of Cassinga, this memory-scape interweaves people and biographies from, among others, Namibia, Angola, Cuba, and the GDR, as it connects different generations with different experiences. Generational and biographical differences, whether between younger and older exiles, struggle kids and born frees, Northerners and Southerners in exile, or exiles and remainees, are a defining feature of liberation memory in Namibia. In this regard, Cassinga Day is not different from other days of Namibia's commemorative calendar. The people, who attend the commemoration, often in dual capacity as audience and participant/survivor, represent this multi-layered nature of liberation memory, too. At the same time, however, the community they enact by means of commemoration is different than the ones imagined and performed during Independence Day or Heroes' Day. This, I will argue, is largely a result of the specific communitas invoked by the ceremonies of mourning and collective remembering on Cassinga Day.

Cassinga Day and the Mnemonic Communitas of Survivors

For Turner, the concept of communitas is intimately tied to the rite of passage and the status of liminality (Turner 1989, 1979). It refers to the ritual transition of social status "as a process, a becoming, and in the case of rites de passage even a transformation" (Turner 1979: 234). Individuals are transformed into, and experience the state of liminality as, a community of equals (Turner 1989: 96). For Turner, the ceremonial production of communitas is not limited to religious ceremonies, but necessarily constitutes a marked division from the sphere of everyday social life (Turner 1989: 96). In the face of a burgeoning appropriation of Turner's theory of liminality to explain all sorts of social phenomena and also its inherent conceptual flaws (Bräunlein 2011: 156–157), I advocate for a more conservative and careful adaption of the concept, which limits its use to ritual and ceremonial processes. Still, within the context of Cassinga Day commemoration, with its distinctly nationalist and religious symbolism, I consider it a useful approach to analyse the ceremonial and performative construction of a situational community of equals: the communitas of survivors.

[216] Field notes, 8 April 2013. Iyambo died of a heart attack at the age of 52. Due to his disciplined work ethic, he was popular and respected with many Namibians, especially among the younger population.

Like other political holidays in Namibia, Cassinga Day is commemorated by means of a well-established and canonised set of ceremonial and pop-cultural elements, which together constitute Cassinga Day as an event. A formalised first part consists of the routines and protocol of the nation-state, i.e. the singing of the national anthem, prayer, and speeches of the president and representatives of the state, like the mayor of Windhoek or the regional governor. It also includes a broad range of cultural performances by music and dance groups, choirs and pop singers. Above all else, however, this first part is characterised by ceremonies centred on the survivors and their narratives. A second, more informal part consists of music performances by popular artists after the formal protocol is finished. As mentioned, in Windhoek the event takes place at UN Plaza, which offers limited space to accommodate large audiences. Consequently, the first part of the protocol takes place in a solemn and intimate social and spatial environment. The second part, after the departure of the president, allows for informality and mingling throughout the perimeter, including the adjacent park. Even though my analysis has its focus on the ceremonial aspects of Cassinga Day, it is important to emphasise that this makes Cassinga Day not exclusively an event of mourning, but also leaves ample space for pleasantries and enjoyment.[217]

In general, cultural performances enjoy a high status during the formal part of the ceremony. Some acts I observed in 2012 and 2013 included musical items, dance and songs, performed by the choir of the Swapo Party Womens Council, the Swapo pioneers, Owambo dance groups, the Swapo-affiliated Bazooka cultural group, and renowned national pop artists like Ras Sheehama, D-Naff, Stella, or Frieda Haindaka. Bazooka performed struggle songs from the days of exile, its performers wore Swapo colours and re-enacted marching formations. Ras Sheehama, who also spent many years in exile, sang his famous song "Cassinga", which has become one of the most popular musical expressions of Cassinga memory.[218] The Cassinga Day commemoration at Heroes' Acre in 2018 included a dramatised large-scale re-enactment of the attack involving both actors and survivors, with scenes of battle, executions, and armed resistance, replete with dramatic sound effects. At the same event, dressed in green, red and blue, and in marching formation, survivors performed a song in honour of Sam Nujoma.[219]

It is important at this point to make a distinction regarding the status of the performances in the general context of the Cassinga Day event. When the official state protocol has ended and the president left the venue, popular artists perform regular concerts to entertain the audience. During

[217] To once again challenge Assmann's (2007: 53–58, 1991) overly functionalist construction of the *Fest* as a ceremonial institution at the heart of social memory, strictly separated from mundane affairs, as well as Etzioni's (2004) binary division of recommitment and tension management holidays.

[218] The memory of exile in popular culture is another interesting field for inquiry. Throughout my research, I have attended several concerts of Ras Sheehama. Whenever he played "Cassinga", people were visibly affected by the solemn message of the song: by lighting pocket lighters, singing together, standing at attention, or unfolding and waving Namibian flags. This is significant, since Ras Sheehama identifies with the Rasta community, which in the Namibian context is a politically rather subversive subculture, often facing repression by state authorities.

[219] "Cassinga drama evokes emotions", *Nampa*, 4 May 2018 and "Never forget", *The Namibian*, 4 May 2018.

the commemorative ceremony, however, performances take place in front of the invited VIPs. Artists, who perform songs or dance, directly address the president, the Founding Father, as well as the survivors. They will usually perform only one or two items and then return to their seat in the audience. This makes them both performers and audience in the intimate social setting of the ceremony, which features the performances primarily as a gesture of appreciation towards the collective of survivors.

Another category of performance and the most distinguished ceremonial element of Cassinga Day is the performance of survivor memory in the form of singing, testimonials, and collective rituals of mourning. Inseparably tied to the commemoration of Cassinga Day is the hymn "We remember", which has become a defining feature of Cassinga memory (Williams 2010b, 2009: 68; Borer 2009: 146; Becker 2008a: 5). The song consists solely of the words "We remember Cassinga, we remember", which can be supplemented by other place names connected to violent episodes of the liberation struggle, like Oshatotwa or Oshikuku. As a memory-political imperative of Swapo, the hymn works as a "mobilising tool" (Borer 2009: 146), but even more so as a medium for the performative construction of a mnemonic community. With its repetitive character, sung repeatedly throughout the event, the hymn has a strong impact on the audience. When I attended the ceremonies, I of course joined in the singing. I immediately felt both the appreciation of those surrounding me and a strong sense of commemorative bonding, of being collectively engaged in mourning and remembering. Even though I am not a religious person, I nonetheless experienced the commemoration of Cassinga Day as a compellingly spiritual affair, as for sure did a large segment of the audience and participants, too. Ultimately, Cassinga Day is a commemoration in the strict sense of the term: a ceremony, to collectively remember those who died.

The importance of testimonials for Cassinga memory has been emphasised by Shigwedha (2011: 86–128) and Williams (2016: 56–57). Ever since the attack, survivors' narratives have been collected, published, and mediated through different channels.[220] Their impact on the construction and mediation of Cassinga memory and liberation memory more generally cannot be overstated. At the same time, the testimonials involuntarily function to contain or even sanitise the trauma of those who experienced the attack, who have been maimed or lost friends, family and comrades. As Shigwedha has convincingly argued, there is a chasm of meaning between the bodily memory of harm and suffering, which survivors experienced, and their oral history and testimonials; an incongruence that cannot be negotiated by words (Shigwedha 2011: 86, 123–128). Also, despite the canonisation of Cassinga testimonials by means of oral history, publications, and commemoration, the experience of survivors still is ultimately an individual one and "uniquely different" (Shigwedha 2011: 123) in each case.

[220] For survivors' testimonies; see IDAF 1981; ya Nangolo /Sellström 1995; Heywood 1996; Namhila 1997: 40–45; Shigwedha 2011: 228–241; and Williams 2009: 29–71. For the significance of survivors' testimonies in constructing Cassinga memory; see Shigwedha 2011 and Williams 2016. Survivor memories are mostly remediated as biographical portraits and interviews in newspapers and public broadcasting around the time of Cassinga Day.

Unlike Shigwedha, however, who has interviewed survivors about their experiences, I am more interested in the genre of the Cassinga testimonial as a device to mediate a particular idea of national martyrdom through Cassinga Day commemoration. Most survivor narratives emphasise the status of Cassinga as a civilian camp, overwhelmingly populated by women and children. As a matter of fact, it is striking how distinctly female Cassinga testimonials actually are. This attests to the fact that a large segment of Namibia's exile community were indeed women, especially as a result of the mass exodus beginning in the mid-1970s, which led to a "drastic change of sex ratios within the exile community" (Becker 1995: 146; see also Akawa 2015, 2014). It also adds a nuanced gendered perspective to the otherwise male bias of liberation struggle memory (Currier 2012; Becker 2011: 530–531). Still, in doing so it also reinforces the predominant narrative that Cassinga was a refugee camp and its inhabitants mostly women and children, thus obscuring the military dimension of Cassinga.[221]

A defining feature of most testimonial narratives is the sense of profound shock that people experienced while being attacked in the early morning hours, when the camp community had assembled for its daily briefing, with hundreds of children present. The South African military had particularly chosen the routine assembly at 6.30 a.m. for their attack to have a maximum impact in their use of anti-personnel bombs with shrapnel (Breytenbach 2009: 146, 153; Alexander 2003: 121–122). For the inhabitants, the first phase of the attack was characterised by profound confusion. This situation turned into mayhem when the parachutists landed. Many survivors narrate this situation as one of intense brutality, of South African soldiers bayonetting wounded Namibians,[222] even pregnant women,[223] and shooting prisoners point blanc (Heywood 1996: 36). In an oft-cited anonymous statement by a South African officer who participated in the attack, he admitted to such acts: "We found this woman clutching her screaming baby. It was only when we tore the child away, that [sic!] we saw the terrible wounds inflicted by an air force bomb. There was no hope for her. I had to shoot her. She looked at me. I can never describe what it did to me. It was too much. I later broke down".[224] These narratives of gruesome violence, together with the iconic mass grave photographs, have become canonised within the mediation of Cassinga memory. Since 2014, they

[221] It is notably the testimonials of former combatants, who challenge this clear-cut division; see for instance the accounts of Ekandjo 2011: 57–58 and Willy Nelumbu Hamukonda, "The Cadre Who Repelled the South African Air Force During the Cassinga Attack (1951–2009)", *New Era*, 28 March 2014.

[222] See accounts of Tunga-eumbo Mboti, "The Cassinga Massacre", *The Namibian*, 2 May 2014 and Hilka Levi, "Cassinga survivors say dark memories of attack still fresh in their minds", *NBC*, 3 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzoR4o3MGdU> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[223] Account by Hellao Jambeulu Hellao, "Cassinga horror relived", *The Namibian*, 5 May 1998.

[224] His statement is quoted in the Final Report of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission conceded that South Africa's military command did not issue directives to kill wounded or prisoners, even though this obviously happened during the attack. Due to "[the] foreseeable killing of civilians at Kassinga" the commission still classified the attack as "a breach of humanitarian law", see Final Report, Vol. 2, Ch. 2, Subs. 5 <http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume2/chapter2/subsection5.htm> [last accessed 15 October 2022]. It is remarkable, how the commander of the attack describes his feeling of "guilt" for leaving children behind in the camp, when he obviously had no second thoughts about the legitimacy of the attack in the first place; knowing, that a large segment of the camp population was children. According to him, "all combatants, of course including commanders, resident in Cassinga, were to be destroyed" (Breytenbach 2009: 143).

also find a vivid representation and authorisation in the IMM's Cassinga section, which I will analyse in the final chapter.

In the context of the Cassinga Day commemoration, testimonials have an additional performative function, which I will illustrate with a more detailed account of the 2012 event. It was about ninety minutes after the arrival of President Pohamba, with which the proceedings had begun. Prayer, several speeches and music performances had already taken place, when the master of ceremonies called a woman who was sitting among the group of survivors to come forth to the table where the President was seated. As it turned out, it was Agnes Kafula. While she approached, the survivors began to sing "We remember", rose from their seats and followed Ms. Kafula. The rest of the audience joined in the singing, while the group of survivors gathered in the stage area. In their hands, they were holding white candles, which they had been given at the beginning of the event.[225] They formed a queue in front of the President, with Ms. Kafula as the first in line. Meanwhile, the President was handed a lighter with which he lit the huge candle in front of him. While the audience was still singing, each and every one of the survivors now came forward to light their individual candles on the large one in front of the President, with a striking similarity to the Christian Easter candle ceremony. They then gathered as a group, candles alit, facing Mr. Pohamba, while Agnes Kafula went to the standing desk and started to narrate her memories of the Cassinga attack.

Fig. 13: Candle ceremony at Cassinga Day commemoration, UN Plaza, Windhoek, 4 May 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

She spoke for about twenty minutes, supported by the vigil of her fellow survivors. The VIPs on the table, including seasoned politicians and even President Pohamba, started to cry, wiping tears from

[225] The candle ceremony is documented at least until 2006 (Shigwedha 2011: 239).

their eyes. When she stopped speaking, survivors and audience again started singing, “We remember”.

Through the ceremony and its institutionalised framework, Agnes Kafula’s narrative was transformed into a monument of collective and, ultimately, national ordeal. Over and over she emphasised the importance of being “survivors”, as an identity based on the collective experience of suffering. In her speech, she did not limit this to just Cassinga: “Everybody in the land of the brave is a survivor”,[226] she said. She spoke for those present and those absent, alike. Her testimony, together with the candle ceremony and its obvious religious undertones of martyrdom and resurrection, was an impressive performance of mnemonic communitas. It brought President Pohamba, the anthropologist, and a large part of the audience to tears. Yet, despite the powerful symbolism and its contagious allure, it was obvious that the ceremony took place by and for a very small, close-knit and exclusive community of Namibians with a biographical connection to exile.

The dynamics of group formation during Cassinga Day commemoration are highly significant in two aspects. First, it is important to acknowledge the central role of the survivors who are both performers and audience at the event. They were seated in a special section of the venue and performed the most important ceremonial item of the commemorative protocol. In marked difference to Namibia’s other political national holidays, the president and the Founding Father, as well as other government representatives appeared as addressees of the survivor-audience’s performance: they remained passive, listened, and participated in the ceremonial acts of mourning. This invigorates the intimate relationship of the mnemonic communitas, which is bonded by the collective biographical experience of exile and suffering. Quite in the sense laid out by Turner (1979: 237–238), this also reaffirms the paternal authority of president and Founding Father as ‘elders’, who are addressed by the ceremonial community but also watch as audience. Second, however, the ceremony is also revealing in terms of who is absent and excluded from commemoration, which I will explore in the following and final section.

Cassinga Day and the Politics of Inclusion/Exclusion

Since its official inception, Cassinga Day has been struggling with the ambivalence of being a national day of commemoration and its very narrow focus on the history of SWAPO in exile. In his speech on Cassinga Day 2016, President Geingob implicitly recognised this conflict:

> As we commemorate Cassinga Day, let us remember our mothers, fathers, daughters and sons who continue to water our freedom with the blood of their sacrifice. It is a day for us to reflect on the painful journey we have walked in order to arrive at this point in our history […] Let us dedicate ourselves to honour our fallen heroes and heroines by uniting as one

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[226] Field notes and audio recording, 4 May 2012.

> people, one Namibia, one nation, in the spirit of Harambee to build a Namibian House worthy of their struggle. We should strive never to relive the horrors of war again.[227]

In his speech, he summoned the suffering and martyrdom of those who died in the liberation struggle as a source of legitimacy for the independent nation-state and a resource for national reconciliation. His message reflects the political philosophy of *Harambee*, attributed to Jomo Kenyatta, which has been utilised by Geingob as a political leitmotif since his election campaign. It also draws on his metaphor of the "Namibian house", which he employed in his doctoral thesis as a model for nation-building in independent Namibia (Geingob 2004: 143). Contrary to Geingob's idealistic vision of national reconciliation, however, Cassinga Day still appears as the least inclusive political national holiday in Namibia when it comes to commemorating the struggle for independence. This contradiction becomes most obvious regarding attendance at Cassinga Day events. While I described typical and regular audiences above, it is interesting to note which segments of the population are absent, which people have reservations to attend, and how Cassinga Day is also utilised to draw clear-cut boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

Both in 2012 and 2013, I was the only *shilumbu*/*blanke* (white person) among the audience. On both occasions, my presence at the commemoration was specifically acknowledged by the organisers. In 2013, it so happened that I was featured in the NBC's broadcasting of the event, when the film team zoomed in on me, sitting in the audience. A number of people texted me, that they had seen me or told me about it the day after. For those who watched the broadcast and didn't know me, however, I may have represented a white Namibian attending Cassinga Day, inadvertently turning my participation into a political message. The attention, I received, highlights the fact that white Namibians are virtually absent during Cassinga Day, as on most national holiday ceremonies.

When I attended the event in 2012 with the tragic history of Cassinga in my mind, this gave me mixed feelings about my presence as a white person. A year later, however, I felt much more at ease and less an outsider than in 2012. I chose to wear a T-Shirt for the occasion that I had bought at the Outapi War Museum, bearing a reprint of a prominent slogan from the days of the anti-apartheid struggle, to "support the frontline states". In doing so, I signified my solidarity with the event and its history; and I felt, as I did on many occasions before, that this was a socially accepted way for white people in Namibia to participate in political affairs, commemorative events, and plainly, social life. It was a mere gesture of accepting a difficult history, without making any political concessions or, still anathema for a majority of white Namibians, signalling sympathies for Swapo. For most people in the audience, I was a white Namibian showing respect for those who suffered in the liberation struggle, symbolically filling the void of their white compatriots' absence. It was only two or three people among the organisers who actually knew that I was a foreign researcher and not a Namibian citizen.

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[227] Message by His Excellency, Dr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, on the Occasion of the 38th commemoration of Cassinga Day, 4 May 2016.

Reflecting on my role performance in the field, it becomes obvious that doing research as a white anthropologist in a former settler colony invokes a particular range of positionalities. These are entangled with societal discourses about and relations between segments of society, which are differentiated on the basis of 'race'. Throughout my research, I was challenged by this predicament and had to continuously negotiate my role as a white person – also in face of highly nuanced Namibian subject positions tied to whiteness.[228] Still, the absence of white Namibians on Cassinga Day and other national events was a tangible fact. Whenever I raised the topic of attendance in informal discussions with Namibians, regardless of their skin colour or ethnicity, passionate and heated debates usually followed suit. For many people, it was simply unattractive to spend a long time in the soaring sun and listen to 'endless' speeches at 'badly organised events'. They rather spent the day at home, or in their favourite 'watering hole'. If there was a choice, as one Oshiwambo-speaking friend of mine put it, the shebeen was 'second to none'.[229]

A reoccurring reason stated by white Namibians for avoiding Cassinga Day and other public holiday ceremonies, however, was the politicised nature of the events. One German-Namibian man explained to me that he abhorred any display of nationalism and patriotism, and would thus feel uncomfortable at national events. Another Namibian of British descent recalled how he attended a Heroes' Day celebration in one of the regional capitals some time ago, also as the only white person in the audience. According to him, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry Petrus Iilonga, clad in his trademark beret and a Swapo scarf, gave a speech with a lot of rhetorical allusions to 'boers', whites, and 'imperialists', which made him feel very uncomfortable. For another German-Namibian man, national day events were primarily platforms for 'Swapo propaganda' and the 'worshipping' of the ruling party. In the same debate, an Oshiwambo-speaking woman, who had lived for a number of years in Germany, rejected such critique as 'ignorant'. For her, the days celebrated the 'triumph of humanity' and 'the Namibian dream of oneness', something that people should appreciate, regardless of race, ethnicity, or class. For her, the days were also occasions to educate her daughter on the country's history and to spark a 'genuine love' in her for the constitution.

Debates like this, re-enacted over and over annually in social media, radio chat-shows, newspaper vox-pops, shebeens, and bus stops, are part and parcel of national commemoration in Namibia. They unveil sentiments and resentments, quite often clad in the idioms of race, which are widespread in society as are fears of marginalisation among the white population. A lot of white Namibians feel uncomfortable with the politics of liberation memory and the othering of 'boers' and

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[228] Including, being German, of course. This is a very complex topic that deserves its own study. In northern Namibia, I was mostly perceived as a 'boer', until people realised that I am a German national, which usually changed their behaviour towards me significantly in a positive way. In southern Namibia, people also took me for a 'boer' on first impression, but once they realised that I was German, they tended to bond through the historical connection via the genocide, often in a mocking, humorous way, seldom with outright rejection. People rather saw me as a 'good' German, different from the 'bad' Germans who owned the farms in the region.

[229] Indirect quotes in this section all come from a public discussion, which I started on a popular Namibian social media site in 2013. Since I did not acquire informed consent from participants, I will avoid particulars.

‘imperialists’ as the villains in Swapo’s dramatic narrative of national liberation. This has two implications, worth considering.

First, it implies that some white Namibians accept a role which is not necessarily ascribed to them, but rather constitutes a historical subject position as ‘the coloniser’. As I argued above, participating as a white person can be a valuable experience if one is open to accept the difficult history of apartheid and liberation as a shared history. Second, it must be emphasised that whites are of course only one segment of the majority of the Namibian population that does not attend Cassinga Day events. White Namibians, at least where the liberal urban community is concerned, did attend in large numbers at events like the premiere of the musical *Creation* in 2010, which also depicted the Cassinga attack in harrowing detail, or film screenings and exhibitions about the liberation struggle. Any critique of the non-attendance of white Namibians at national events and commemorations must thus take into account more holistically the reasons of other ‘non-white’ Namibians for not attending Cassinga Day either.

As a category of differentiation, ‘race’ obviously matters in terms of liberation memory. It is worthwhile, though, to consider other distinctions, made on the basis of ethnicity, or regional, generational, and political background, more closely. Cassinga Day commemoration is predominately attended by people with a biographical connection to SWAPO in exile, i.e. a population with a northern Namibian background. Accordingly, compared to other places in the country where the event is commemorated, Cassinga Day in northern Namibia is different due to the biographical proximity of the event (Becker 2008a: 12–14, 17–18). As Becker has analysed in great detail, the memory of Cassinga and the liberation struggle at large is inextricably interwoven with the lived experience of the people in central northern Namibia (Becker 2011, 2008a, 2008b).

For Namibians from other regions, this close relation to the history of the liberation movement is thus often perceived as an expression of ethnicity. Political analyst Alexactus Kaure, for instance, expressed this when he criticised that national commemoration in Namibia was inherently burdened by group-based identity politics, an obstacle to nation-building. For him, this dilemma culminated in a simple question: “whose day is Cassinga Day?”[230] For many people, this question is easily answered by pointing out the narrow focus on Swapo’s history in commemorating the victims of its own liberation struggle. As already described, the prevalence of Swapo colours among the audience is a significant feature of Cassinga Day commemoration. The perception of a conflation of Cassinga Day and Swapo Party politics is, however, also reinforced strongly through the politics of dress displayed by government officials.

In 2013, President Pohamba combined a shirt with the party colours and a baseball cap with the Namibian flag. Sam Nujoma wore a black suit which he accentuated with a large scarf and a hat, both in Swapo colours. The Regional Governor Laura McLeod-Katjirua donned a pink suit with a fancy headdress and a Swapo scarf as well. As the most distinguished guests of honour present, they

[230] “Cassinga Day in A Contemporary Context”, *The Namibian*, 5 May 2017.

obviously sent a message through their choice of dress. In 2012, President Pohamba wore a black suit, a striped shirt and a black hat, thus avoiding party colours; Sam Nujoma did not attend. Sitting behind the President, however, was a group of selected guests of honour, seemingly war veterans, including two women wearing "Cassinga survivor" shirts. One man in the group wore a shirt in the party's colours; another one had a scarf with the colours draped around his neck. With their party-political insignia, they formed the backdrop for the televised image of the President.

As I explained in the chapter on Independence Day, the question of party colours worn on national events by state representatives is a difficult and contested issue. This is especially true for Cassinga Day with its close connection to the history of SWAPO. Next to the presence of the survivors and obvious symbols of affiliation like party colours and Cuban solidarity-memorabilia, this also involves the role of the Founding Father. In his speech on Cassinga Day 2013, President Pohamba addressed the audience whether they knew the man who was sitting next to him? To the cheer and ululation of the audience, Nujoma stood up and raised his fist to the power salute; a small boy sitting next to me shouted "Viva Swapo!" Pohamba then continued his speech with a lengthy excursion into manifold victories and the historical importance of Nujoma, who listened, smiled, and nodded in agreement.

This dominant representation of Swapo at the ceremony provoked public criticism, yet also highlights Swapo's indisputable central role in liberating Namibia, as the following exchange of statements in *The Namibian's* SMS section exemplifies:

> Is Cassinga Day a national day or Swapo day? I saw the President and other national leaders in Swapo colours instead of national colours. Stop hijacking national days![231]
>
> Let me answer the person who asked if Cassinga Day is a Swapo day or a national day. I think you are not a Namibian because every Namibian citizen knows that Cassinga is a Swapo day only our Swapo brothers and sisters lost their lives in the Cassinga transitional camp no one else. So like it or not, we have to commemorate the day with Swapo colours[232]

In their polarised perspectives, these two anonymous comments illustrate the ambivalent nature of postcolonial liberation memory in Namibia. The criticism of Swapo's narrow focus on its own history, victims, and martyrs in national commemoration often is coupled with the allegation that it neglects the suffering of other Namibian communities, for instance at the expense of remembering the victims of the genocide on equal par.[233] While critique in this vein often comes from political actors and organisations with a background in Ovaherero opposition politics (Tötemeyer 2012: 5–7; Åfreds 2000: 29–41), it is also addressed more generally regarding omissions and blank spaces in Swapo's dramatic narrative of victimhood.

[231] SMS to *The Namibian*, 8 May 2013.
[232] SMS to *The Namibian*, 10 May 2013.
[233] "Calls for a genocide commemoration day", *Windhoek Observer*, 5 May 2017.

In August 2012, a collective of former Swapo detainees and human rights NGOs, some of them affiliated with the political opposition, organised an event to commemorate the victims of the SWAPO purge in Mboroma (Zambia) in 1975/1976.[234] The commemoration, which I attended, was remarkable for bringing together a range of actors with very different political agendas, yet a shared dedication to counter Swapo's heroic liberation struggle narrative. White and non-white representatives of churches, opposition parties, and genocide committees, as well as Swapo dissidents came together to stage a joint commemoration of all victims of the liberation struggle, including those who were killed in the genocide and as alleged spies in SWAPO's notorious Angolan dungeon prisons.[235]

This demonstration of unity and common purpose, so rare in the context of Namibia's fragmented political landscape, was impressive and provocative for the ruling party. In his column in the Swapo Party newspaper *Namibia Today*, editor Asser Ntinda explicitly singled out white civil society activist Carola Engelbrecht for making herself a "puppet [...of] an assortment of uppity whites, neo-liberal academics and former Swapo Party defectors",[236] bent on defaming Swapo. He further accused her of pointing out Swapo's human rights abuses, while being silent about "the Oshikuku and Cassinga massacres" – regardless of the fact, that the event was dedicated to commemorate all victims, including those of Cassinga.[237]

Ntinda's ferocious critique, brought forth in a style and language for which he was infamous as an editor, focused on Engelbrecht as a white Namibian and reflected a deep-seated preoccupation of certain Swapo functionaries to spot 'imperialists' and 'counter-revolutionaries'. Yet it ignored the fact that the Mboroma commemoration, despite its undeniable critical stance towards the Swapo government, actually did manage to provide an inclusive framework for commemorating diverse categories of people who died in the liberation struggle. These included not only those who were outcast and killed by SWAPO as spies and traitors in exile, but also those Namibians who fought and died on the side of South Africa. This latter point is particularly controversial in the context of Cassinga memory. For despite President Geingob's conciliatory words, cited above, and Swapo's

[234] Back then, PLAN combatants in Zambia protested against the liberation movement's military strategy, corruption, and adverse living and combat conditions. They were supported by radical cadre of the SPYL who had arrived in 1974 from Namibia, as well as SWAPO's Secretary of Information Andreas Shipanga. Due to his prominence, Shipanga was – inaccurately, but conveniently – identified as the instigator of the rebellion. SWAPO clamped down on the protesters with the assistance of the Zambian army. The numbers are still sketchy: depending on the source, between several hundred and 1,000–2,000 combatants were detained, several dozen apparently executed (Kornes 2013: 6). The event has been covered widely in research as an example for SWAPO's authoritarian turn in exile; see Williams 2009: 73–118; Hunter 2008: 80–92; Dobell 1998: 47–-56; and Leys /Saul 1994. For accounts of people who were involved and victimised by SWAPO; see Nathanael 2002; Shipanga /Armstrong 1989; and the account of Hizipo Moses Shikondombolo, "Mboroma Killing Commemorated", *The Namibian*, 7 August 2012.

[235] The purging, torture, and large-scale 'disappearing' of alleged spies and traitors within SWAPO in Angola in the 1980s is another, more commonly known example of SWAPO's authoritarian turn in exile; see Kornes 2013: 6–7, 2010a; Williams 2009: 119–156; Hunter 2008: 92–115; Leys /Saul 2003; and Saul /Leys 1995.

[236] "Lubango dungeons", <http://www.swapoparty.org /zoom_in_85.html> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[237] I already mentioned the tragic fact that a large number of those killed in Cassinga were transferred from Mboroma to undergo 'reeducation' after their detention had ended.

careful policy of “silent reconciliation” (Kornes 2013) regarding its former detainees, there is one red line that so far remains unnegotiable for the Swapo government: Namibians, who – voluntarily or involuntarily – fought and died on the side of South Africa’s security forces, are neither acknowledged as veterans nor publicly mourned.

In 2012, the debate about the official recognition of Namibian citizens as war veterans, who served as combatants in South African security forces, was very prominent in the national conversation. This was due to renewed attempts of Koevoet and South West African Territory Force (SWATF) veterans to organise themselves and to lobby for inclusion in the national war veteran pension’s scheme. This was accompanied by media reports about the dire living conditions of Namibia’s Koevoet and SWATF veterans, who are often caught in a vicious circle of social exclusion, alcoholism, and abject poverty.[238] The activities of the veterans prompted many Swapo members and government representatives to openly reject their calls for compensation, with more or less explicit reference to the brutality, South Africa’s military unleashed upon Namibians. Koevoet and SWATF veterans are eligible for the regular old age pension like every citizen; war veteran status and corresponding material and monetary benefits, however, are limited to those who verifiably fought for Namibia’s independence. In his Cassinga Day address in 2012, President Pohamba reiterated the stance of his government in this regard forcefully.

Pohamba, who has a noted reputation as a rather calm and laid-back speaker, diverted several times from his prepared manuscript, accompanied by unusually emotional outbursts. At one point, he commented on recent criticism of Namibia’s ongoing solidarity with Cuba in national newspapers, offering a lengthy diversion of twelve minutes into the history of Cuba’s contribution to Namibia’s liberation struggle. With this he specifically addressed the young people in the audience. When he returned to his manuscript, it didn’t take long for another diversion, this time about the significance of solidarity with the frontline states, which fought together against South Africa’s oppression and apartheid rule. Namibians, he told the audience, had introduced a policy of national reconciliation, yet would never forget, “what they have done to us”. He then referred to the demands of the former Koevoet and SWATF combatants to be granted veteran status, making his position unmistakably clear: “Over my dead body!” He repeated this several times, in a loud and emotional voice, while he let his gaze wander through the audience and repeatedly sought eye contact with visitors. It was an impressive performance of authority and dedication. To the enthusiastic applause of the audience, he then turned back to the manuscript.

His speech and “over my dead body” remark featured prominently in the media discourse after Cassinga Day. In *Republikein*, Namibia’s most important Afrikaans-language newspaper, the Cassinga Day commemoration was criticised for ‘opening old wounds’, referring especially to

[238] See “Former fighters want acceptance”, *New Era*, 7 February 2012; “Ex-Koevoet demands recognition”, *Namibian Sun*, 15 May 2012; “Is reconciliation myth?”, *Namibian Sun*, 6 July 2012; “Open File”, *NBC Television*, 29 July 2012; “Koevoet soldiers treated like aliens, Kaura”, *The Namibian*, 8 November 2012; “’Fake war veterans registered’”, *Namibian Sun*, 23 November 2012.

Pohamba's 'tumultuous eruption'. His speech proved that national reconciliation was still 'an idealistic dream' and national days would rather divide than unite the nation.[239] Ndeunyema Frans Jabulani, Executive Director of the Namibia War Veterans' Trust, emphasised that "[b]eing ex-Koevoet or SWATF does not make us less Namibian, or less war veterans than PLAN fighters".[240] His organisation, which at the time claimed to represent 10,550 Namibians who served in South African military units, threatened to take their demands to court in case government would not revise the veteran's act to include their members.

Some weeks later, NBC dedicated an edition of its popular political affairs magazine *Open File* to cover the controversy. A team of reporters visited and interviewed former Koevoet and SWATF veterans in Katutura's Single Quarter area, portraying them as destitute, impoverished, and ravished by alcoholism. In remarkably honest and unbiased reporting, Pohamba's statement was contrasted with the veteran's dire social situation, ending with an appeal of the journalists, for government to help these men.[241] The feature, with its shocking images of former soldiers drunk senseless at 11 a.m. or scavenging for food in garbage heaps, led to a lively debate in the digital media about the politics of veterans' affairs and national reconciliation. Inadvertently, Cassinga Day had thus invigorated a debate about national inclusivity based on the exclusivity of the Swapo government's politics of liberation and national commemoration.

While Cassinga Day is criticised as being exclusive, divisive, or partisan by people who are not affiliated with the ruling party or who have sympathies with the political opposition, there is also criticism from 'within'. This refers to the continuing grievances of those who are directly concerned, in one way or the other – as survivors, relatives, or descendants – by the events of 1978 and its aftermath. Ongoing suffering and trauma is one example, which Agnes Kafula also emphasised when she called on government to provide psychological counselling for Cassinga survivors.[242] More directly related to Cassinga memory was the palpable indignation among survivors when they learned about the neglect of the mass grave at Cassinga. This had become public knowledge after a group of journalists visited the site in 2015 and reported about its state of deterioration. In 2016, government organised a trip for a group of 32 survivors to Cassinga to hold the commemoration on site, which led to emotional responses. Seeing the sorry state of the mass grave, one survivor was quoted: "I am too disappointed for words. I do not know what to say", seconded by another: "All that we are asking is that the government must at least put up a fence around the area where our comrades are resting. They must also put up proper graves. Even if we have to collect money ourselves we will. But this is not good".[243] After facing the survivors' criticism, government promised to upgrade the site with the help of the National Heritage Council and 'to erect a

[239] "Dít is nie versoening", *Republikein*, 9 May 2012; my own translations from Afrikaans. See also "Wonde nog rou oor Cassinga", *Republikein*, 7 May 2012.
[240] "Ex-Koevoet demands recognition", *Namibian Sun*, 15 May 2012.
[241] "Open File", *NBC Television*, 29 July 2012.
[242] "Cassinga survivors need counselling, Kafula", *Namibian Sun*, 5 May 2014.
[243] "Remembering Cassinga Day", *New Era*, 3 May 2016.

permanent and more respectful memorial on that site in the near future'.[244] At the time of writing, the monument, with a budget of N$60 Mio and contracted to a Chinese company, still has to be finished.[245]

Another group with close biographical connection to the Cassinga attack, the so called struggle kids, also voiced their discontent with the politics of Cassinga memory. In 2016, they boycotted the government's Cassinga Day event and staged their own commemoration at a farm north of Windhoek, which is owned by the Ndilimani music group. Close to 240 struggle kids staged a parade, sang liberation songs, and remembered the parents and relatives of those among them who were killed at Cassinga. According to the group's spokesperson Tunelago ya Toivo, their individual commemoration was a protest for being excluded from the official Cassinga Day commemoration that took place in Angola that year. Another participant cited disenchantment with the government's efforts to offer employment for young people.[246]

The examples show the degree to which Cassinga memory, as organised and mediated by the government is contested over questions of inclusion and exclusion within the wider context of postcolonial liberation politics in Namibia. Contestation is not necessarily limited to those outside of Swapo, but also affects those most intimately tied to the history of Cassinga: the survivors of the attack, their relatives and descendants. In this context, the struggle kids represent the generational and historical complexity of Cassinga memory. Both survivors and struggle kids are caught in a dilemma that on the one hand the Swapo government is appropriating their memory for its political agenda, while on the other hand they are depending on the government to address their demands for recognition.

As Shigwedha has convincingly argued, there is a stark incongruence between the ritualised "hollowness" (Shigwedha 2011: 11) of the representation of violence in state-sponsored Cassinga Day commemoration and the unresolved traumatic experiences of survivors and families; a suffering, which cannot be eased. In this, together with the red lines of exclusion drawn against the enemy, Cassinga Day thus clearly shows the limits of 'multidirectional memory' and *lieux de memoir* to accommodate different, even antagonising mnemonic communities. Ultimately, the dominant discourse on historical 'truth' and whether Cassinga was a military and/or civilian camp misses this social dimension of Cassinga memory. Trauma is unresolved and layered in complex and at times conflictive generational, regional, and biographical points of reference. To negotiate this unsettled history with the manifold contradictions of a post-apartheid society and the fragile state of reconciliation is the challenge of Cassinga Day. In the end it again boils down to the question who is a survivor and who isn't.

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[244] "Calls for a genocide commemoration day", *Windhoek Observer*, 5 May 2017; see also "Remembering Cassinga Day", *New Era*, 3 May 2016.

[245] "N$60m Cassinga monument fails to take off", *The Namibian*, 2 May 2018. The Angolan government in the meantime promised to erect an additional monument to commemorate those who died in the attacks on Cassinga and Tchetequera; see "New Cassinga monuments planned", *Namibian Sun*, 6 May 2018.

[246] "Namibia: Struggle Kids Feel Left Out of Cassinga Day Commemorations", *The Namibian*, 4 May 2016.

4. The Aim was Independence: 26 August and the Politics of Hero Commemoration

> 26 August is a day of commemoration for our people. One of our early uprisings against the Germans took place on this date and ever since the date has been remembered. On 26 August this year it is two years since we, the people of Namibia, entered a new phase in our fight against the racist white minority by launching our armed struggle. Until then we fought by non-violent means, but this brought us nothing but increased violence and brutality from our enemy. When we saw there was no way out – the last straw was the let-down by the world community in The Hague – we took up arms (SWAPO 1968)[247]

Like most other days of Namibia's commemorative calendar, Heroes' Day has firm roots in the history of SWAPO's liberation struggle. With its repeated references to "we, the people" and the collective of Namibians, SWAPO's statement above underlines the proto-national character of commemoration before independence and in exile. The question of who, in retrospect, is the "our" in "our people" and which history of resistance is told, enacted, performed, and officially rendered as national liberation history, is a central issue in the context of Heroes' Day commemoration.

Heroes' Day commemorates the militant encounter of one of SWAPO's very first guerrilla commandos with South African police forces near the village of Ongulumbashe on 26 August 1966.[248] In Swapo's nationalist historiography, the shoot-out is construed as the liberation movement's "first" (Katjavivi 1989: 60) armed confrontation with South Africa, marking the official "launch" (Nujoma 2001: 129) of its armed liberation struggle. 26 August, however, was neither the first armed clash of SWAPO and South African security forces, nor was it victorious. Rather, the battle ended with defeat, two fatalities, and the arrest of eight combatants (Gowases 2009; Nujoma 2001: 162–168; Kaukungwa, in: Nandjaa 1997).[249]

While the strategic importance of the skirmish was rather limited, the liberation movement timely moulded 26 August into a powerful *lieu de mémoire*, marking "one of the turning points in the country's history" (Shilamba /Gowases 1997: 18). Next to Independence Day and Cassinga Day, it forms one of the pillars of Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation and serves as an occasion to valorise armed resistance and to honour national heroes, late and alive. As such, the commemoration of Ongulumbashe is at the heart of Swapo's liberation memory, both by means of memorialisation in form of monuments, museums, and historic representations of the struggle, as well as regarding the official recognition and subsequent bureaucratisation of the category of 'hero'.

[247] Editorial of SWAPO's publication *Namibia News*, June /July 1968 (in: de Braganca /Wallerstein 1982: 5–6).
[248] In Otjiherero, the name translates to "Giraffe's leg". Several semi-official dictions exist, including Ongulumbashe, Omugulu-Gwombashe, Omugulu-gwOombashe, Omugulugwombashe or Omgulumbashe. In government publications like presidential speeches on public holidays, the version Omugulu-gwOombashe tends to be preferred. Road signs, however, read Ongulumbashe; a version, which also features prominently in news reporting and which I will continue to use in the following.
[249] Akapeke Hipangelua and Jonas Nakale were killed during the attack. Their bodies were taken to Windhoek by South African authorities and buried in plain plots on Katutura's central cemetery.

26 August 1966, Ongulumbashe

The site where the guerrilla group had established its training base is located 22 kilometres west of Tsandi in the Omusati region, which is ca. one hundred kilometres west of Namibia's northern metropolitan centre Oshakati. The group was under the command of John Otto "Koshiwanda" Nankudhu, who was deputised by Simeon "Kambo Kanambwale" Shixungileni. Other members in this group were James "Shoonyeka" Hamukwaya, Patrick "Lungada" Iyambo, Nelson "Sadrag" Kavela and Viktor "Shixwanga" Namwandi. According to Nankudhu, who was also instrumental in setting up SWAPO's first training camp in exile in Kongwa (Tanzania) in 1964, the group trained 92 people at Ongulumbashe. Apparently, 17 fighters were in the camp during the attack.[250]

The group that had set up the camp was one of four guerrilla units deployed in northern Namibia, following SWAPO's official declaration to engage in armed resistance in 1966. This happened after the joint appeal of Ethiopia and Liberia at the International Court of Justice to declare South Africa's occupation of Namibia illegal, was turned down in July 1966.[251] On 18 July 1966, SWAPO issued a statement regarding the decision: "We have no alternative but to rise in arms and bring about our own liberation. The supreme test must be faced and we must at once begin to cross the many rivers of blood on our march towards freedom" (Katjavivi 1989: 59). Seen from this angle and narrated by SWAPO's own canonical historian Peter Katjavivi, Ongulumbashe indeed appears as a bold and daring reaction to South Africa's occupation.

Even though Katjavivi described Ongulumbashe as the first battle of SWAPO's liberation struggle, he nevertheless contextualised it with the unfolding scenario of escalating armed anticolonial resistance in Southern Africa since the early 1960s (Katjavivi 1989: 58–60). In similar terms, Nujoma linked 26 August to SWAPO's ongoing efforts to prepare for armed struggle: first, by securing a small batch of Russian-made submachine guns and pistols from Algeria in 1963, which were later used in Ongulumbashe (Nujoma 2001: 129; Kaukungwa, in: Nandjaa 1997: 31); second, by training SWAPO cadre in guerrilla tactics in allied countries like Algeria, Egypt, or Ghana as early as 1962 and infiltrating them into northern Namibia to operate behind enemy lines (Nujoma 2001: 129–131, 162–173; see also Katjavivi 1989: 59). In light of this, Ongulumbashe obviously appears less as a defeat than as an example of agency: the zeal of a people, willing to resist oppression.

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[250] Referenced as involved in the fighting on 26 August are Thomas Haimbodi, Akapeke Hipangelua, Lameck "Kagwaanduka" Ithete, Sakeus Philipus Itika, Jonas Nakale, Rehabeam Nambinga, Petrus Simon Niilenge, Shinima "Harakatyi" Niilenge, Ndjaula "Mankono" Shaningua, Immanuel Shifidi, Julius "Kashuku" Shilongo and Phillemon Shitilifa; see "John ya Otto Nankudhu: Commander of the heroes of Omugulugwambashe", *New Era*, 24 August 2012; Tribute by His Excellency, Dr. Sam Nujoma, Founding President and Father of the Namibian Nation, on the Occasion of the Memorial and Funeral Services in Honour of the Late Comrade Joanna Ndayelelwa Iiyambo, 15 December 2017, Elim, Omutunda GwaMbala, Omusati Region; Nujoma (2001: 164).

[251] South-West Africa Cases (Ethiopia v. South Africa; Liberia v. South Africa); Second Phase, International Court of Justice (ICJ), 18 July 1966; see <https://www.refworld.org/cases,ICJ,4023a9414.html> [accessed 15 October 2022].

The point, that the decision to engage in armed resistance was made much earlier, is also raised by prominent veterans like John ya Otto and Helao Shityuwete:

> The beginning of armed struggle did not come as a total surprise. I had known for several years that many of the young people I had helped to flee abroad were getting military instruction. But in 1965, when I received a note from Hermann Ja-Toivo in Ondangwa saying that six guerrillas had slipped into the country, the sudden realization of what we were getting into caused me a great deal of anguish. Within SWAPO we had discussed the question of violent struggle as early as 1963, inconclusively (ya Otto 1982: 79).

> Though the decision to embark upon an armed struggle was made in the early 1960s and SWAPO had trained guerrillas as early as 1962, it did not immediately execute the option but continued to pursue the path of peaceful political struggle, hoping against hope that the system would eventually come to its senses. [...] SWAPO did not therefore see the military option as an end in itself, but a means of contributing to the solution of the Namibian problem (Shityuwete 1990: 96).

The recollection of the two veterans is supported by SWAPO's own account of its liberation struggle history, which dates the decision to engage in armed warfare to 1961 (SWAPO 1987: 176). Given its symbolic importance as the starting point of the liberation war, the actual history of Ongulumbashe has not received much attention in written accounts of the struggle by either scholars or veterans, apart from the already mentioned quasi-official versions of SWAPO's history.

Helao Shityuwete belongs to the first generation of SWAPO cadres, who received guerrilla training in Ghana and were involved in the operations of 1966. With his autobiography, *Never Follow the Wolf* (1990), he has produced an authoritative account about the early days of the armed struggle, which still is one of only few published memoirs of former combatants. In great detail, he describes the venturous journey from exile to infiltrate northern Namibia in times of ever-increasing security, the first armed encounters before August 1966, and the events that led to his arrest within a week (Shityuwete 1990: 103–128). At the same time, his book is a literary monument to those Namibians who were arrested, detained, and tortured by South African authorities on Robben Island, "the Golgatha to black South African freedom fighters" (Shityuwete 1990: 128). Today, *Tate* Shityuwete is one of Namibia's most revered liberation struggle heroes and also the chairman of the association of former Robben Island prisoners.

In his book, he explained that Ongulumbashe base was attacked after the commander of his commando, Leonard Philemon "Castro" Nangolo, who then was Deputy Commander of SWAPO's military wing, leaked information to South African authorities, apparently after intense torture. He was then sent back to Namibia to infiltrate SWAPO's clandestine structures in northern Namibia. It was his information, allegedly, which led to the attack on Ongulumbashe (Shityuwete 1990: 141–145). In an interview, which Fousy Kambombo and I did with *Tate* Shityuwete for the National

Museum in 2012, he elaborated on that. According to him, Leonard Nangolo was tortured incessantly, his screams audible for everyone else. He wouldn't know whether it was the torture or Leonard Nangolo had been collaborating already before, but soon after, he was trying to convince his comrades to confess.[252]

Tate Shityuwete made it clear that he himself never surrendered, even though undergoing intense torture himself. In his narrative about the events, both in the interview and his book, he identified "Castro" as the one who betrayed his comrades. However, there also was a certain sense of understanding discernible that Leonard Nangolo broke under the torture. Nangolo was granted political asylum in Norway in 1986, where he lived until his death. He has published his own, yet hardly accessible account of events, trying to clear his name from treason charges (Williams 2011: 83–84, Williams 2009: 130, 229). As a topic, the betrayal of "Castro" is closely interwoven with the heroic narrative of Ongulumbashe – in the authoritative account of the Founding Father (Nujoma 2001: 162–180) and in popular discourse about the events of 1966 (see chapter six).

The only written account so far, which deals exclusively with Ongulumbashe is the report of a South African veteran (Els 2007), who however was not personally involved in the attack and who does not consider any Namibian perspectives. Instead, Els presents the history of Ongulumbashe as a praise song to the South African police force, which heroically stood its ground next to the military in fighting "terrorists or so-called freedom fighters" (Els 2007: n.p.). He does not conceal his excitement about the way, in which South Africa broke international law in conducting the attack by disguising its soldiers as police officers (Els 2007: 30).[253]

While the scholarly value of the book is limited due to its selective and biased representation, it nevertheless offers information on the security context of the attack in August 1966. According to Els, who had access to South African police and military sources, police forces were informed about the infiltration of SWAPO combatants into northern Namibia as early as March 1966 and again in May, resulting in weekly reconnaissance flights (Els 2007: 57–59). On 26 August, finally, a joint contingent of South African air force, police, and military attacked the base with a fleet of helicopter gunships. The operation, dubbed *Operasie Blouwildebees,* was commanded by Jan Breytenbach, who twelve years later also commanded the attack on Cassinga (Alexander 2003: 74). According to Lord (2012: 46), an informer left the SWAPO camp the night before the attack to join a South African reconnaissance team led by Theuns Swanepoel stationed nearby, which was disguised as a road construction outfit. The informer supposedly also accompanied Swanepoel's team on one of the helicopters during the attack. This seems to confirm the accusations levelled against "Castro" by Nujoma and others, even though Leonard Philemon Nangolo maintained his innocence (Els 2007:

[252] Interview with Helao Shityuwete, Windhoek, 27 June 2012. I interviewed him earlier on 2 September 2010 about his role in the planning process of the Heroes' Acre (see chapter seven).
[253] For another detailed, yet even more biased account; see Lord 2012: 44–47.

260–265).[254] The effectiveness of South African intelligence, however, in the context of a tightly monitored security regime in settler-colonial Southern Africa, where combatants could move freely only under great difficulties, does put the treason claims against “Castro”, which is a central tenet of SWAPO’s Ongulumbashe narrative, into perspective. At the same time, the existence of the camp apparently was an open secret among the rural population (Namhila 2009: 43–44, 2005: 67).

Noteworthy, but beyond the scope of my analysis, is the fact that both Els’ and Lord’s rendition of the attack highlight the existence of a heroic narrative among South African veterans, which construes *Operasie Blouwildebees* as the starting point of the equally highly mythologised *bosoorlog* (“bush war”) – reproducing a framing of the conflict in primarily military terms mirroring that of SWAPO. As Hayes (2010a: 10) points out, the problems of representing the conflict already start with naming it appropriately. South African-centred terms like *bosoorlog*, “border war”, or “border problem” reproduce a colonial perspective, which negates Namibia’s legitimate demands for national independence, since the ‘border’ referred to is the one that Namibia shares with Angola. Likewise, Namibian terms like “war of liberation” or *ekondjo ye manguluko* put the focus on armed liberation, which is at odds with the importance of international diplomacy and the central role of the UN for bringing about Namibian independence (Melber 2014: 161–163; O’ Linn 2003).

While the perspectives of those who fought for SWAPO in Ongulumbashe and later on were tortured and imprisoned in Pretoria and Robben Island are missing in Els’ account, and more broadly also in scholarly historiography, they feature prominently in oral history on Namibia’s liberation struggle. During Heroes’ Day ceremonies, veteran’s funerals, and acts of state, their memories are routinely evoked and transmitted through public media like state broadcasting and newspapers. The publishing of veterans’ biographies in the state-owned *New Era* newspaper is an established genre of veneration. So is the broadcasting of documentaries like *SWAPO in Exile* (1990) or *The Aim Was Independence* (1990), with its iconic imagery of PLAN combatants in action and Ongulumbashe veterans bestowed with honours, or the cinematic adaption of Nujoma’s autobiography, *Namibia: The Struggle for Freedom* (2007).[255]

One of the most prolific researchers into the oral history of the struggle-era is the former director of the NAN Ellen Namhila. She has published several monographs focusing especially on the experiences of women (2013, 2009) and the rural population (2009, 2005) during the struggle, as well as an autobiographical account of her own exile experience (1997). For her polyphonic reconstruction of the life of Eliaser “Kaxumba KaNdola” Tuhadeleni (Namhila 2005), one of

[254] In his book, Els included a statement, which Nangolo made at a press conference organised by the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) in Windhoek on 28 February 2002. It was published on the NSHR’s website, but is not accessible anymore. This is one of the few sources where “Castro” comments on the allegations.

[255] *SWAPO in Exile* (Director: George Shikongo; Producer: Swapo Media Unit; VHS Pal, 22min, colour, 1990); *Their Aim Was Independence* (Director: George Shikongo; Producer: New Dawn Video; VHS Pal, 27min, color, 1990); *Namibia: The Struggle for Freedom* (Director: Charles Burnett; Producer: Namibian Film Commission & Pan Afrikan Center of Namibia; DVD, 161min, 2007). In Burnett’s film, Sam Nujoma is played by the renowned US-American actor Danny Glover.

SWAPO's most important organisers on the ground in Owambo, she traced veterans and eyewitnesses of the attack. One of Tuhadeleni's daughters recalls her father narrating the attack, based on the memories of commander Nankudhu, who was one of the combatants who escaped the battle and who had been hiding earlier at the family's homestead (Namhila 2005: 67–68). Johannes Silas recalls the airborne attack, followed by South African police forces searching houses and homesteads in Tsandi in pursuit of SWAPO combatants. His reminiscing suggests that the presence of the *eendume domomufitu* ("children of the forest", i.e. guerrilla fighters) near the village was well known within the close-knit rural community (Namhila 2005: 67). Tuhadeleni himself elaborates on how the locals supported the fighters with food and supplies, but maybe also the South Africans with information (Namhila 2005: 63–64). Both Tuhadeleni's wife, *Meme* Priskila, and Silas recall the repression and violence unleashed upon the rural population by the South African police in the wake of the battle (Namhila 2005: 68–69, see also Namhila 2009: 16–19, 44–52).

As retaliation for Ongulumbashe, SWAPO led a string of attacks on colonial authorities, infrastructure and collaborating chiefs in Owambo. The most spectacular was the attack on the Oshikango border post on 27 September 1966, spearheaded by the Second-in-Command at Ongulumbashe Simeon Shixungileni, together with Patrick Iyambo, Festus Iita and Nelson Kavela. As a result, South African authorities cracked down on SWAPO structures throughout Namibia, arresting most of its internal leadership, including Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, John ya Otto, Nathanael Maxuilili and Jason Mutumbulua, together with close to 200 rank-and-file members.

Many of them were taken to South Africa, severely tortured, charged under the retroactively enacted Terrorism Act, and imprisoned in Pretoria and Robben Island (Wallace 2011: 270; Herbstein /Evenson 1989: 16–19; Katjavivi 1989: 60–62). Simeon Shixungileni was arrested near Oshakati in 1967 and spent 18 years on Robben Island.[256] On 18 May 1967, allegedly also due to information provided by "Castro", SWAPO's military commander Tobias Hainyeko was killed near Katima Mulilo while crossing the Zambezi River into Zambia. Because of the tumultuous events of 1966, SWAPO suffered heavy losses and was forced to reconsider its strategies (Nujoma 2001: 180). At the same time and by means of Namibia Day, the liberation movement quickly turned Ongulumbashe into an emblematic symbol of SWAPO's bravery and endurance in the struggle for national independence.

Commemorating 26 August: Namibia Day, pre-1990

26 August has a long and momentous history as a day of political mobilisation for Namibia's independence. Already in 1967, the liberation movement boldly wrote the battle of Ongulumbashe into its history of the Namibian liberation struggle and commemorated it as "the day we took a

[256] "Linekela Kambo Shixungileni: The Commander of the 1966 Oshikango Attack (1934 …)", *New Era*, 15. November 2013.

supreme decision and said: ‘we shall cross many rivers of blood on our march to freedom and independence’”.[257]

Commemoration in Exile

As of 1968, the commemoration of Ongulumbashe became a central feature of SWAPO’s liberation politics in exile (SWAPO 1982: 5–6), which led to formal acknowledgement in 1973, when 26 August was officially declared Namibia Day by the UN.[258] In his speech on the occasion at the UN’s Council for Namibia, Theo-Ben Gurirab reiterated SWAPO’s narrative of Ongulumbashe as a historic watershed in the liberation struggle: “It was on this day seven years ago that SWAPO FREEDOM FIGHTERS fired the shots which have heralded a new decisive phase in our long struggle for freedom and independence for Namibia”.[259] In addition, he emphasised the necessity and legitimacy of SWAPO’s armed struggle as “the only effective way to bring about the liberation of Namibia”, thus inscribing Ongulumbashe with highly symbolic meaning. He further contextualised the date with the wider history of anticolonial resistance by referring to August as the month when “Germans raised their flag in Namibia” in 1884. He also mentioned the commemoration of Chief Maharero, without, however, framing the latter as an Ovaherero institution. Instead, he spoke of “our people” and “the death of our national heroes and martyrs”.

The close relationship between the UN and SWAPO was further deepened by the establishment of the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN), based in Lusaka, Zambia. UNIN was the most important educational institute for exiled Namibians, training them in administrative tasks necessary for self-governance, come independence (Rogerson 1980). Namibia’s current President Hage Geingob was UNIN’s director from 1976–1989 (Herbstein /Evenson 1989: 38, 48). Significantly, UNIN was inaugurated by Zambia’s President Kenneth Kaunda on Namibia Day 1976 (Rogerson 1980: 676).

Namibia Day soon became one of the most important platforms for political mobilisation to protest against South Africa’s apartheid rule and to demand national independence. The day was regularly observed at UN bodies invested in the case of Namibia, like UNIN or the Council for

[257] “Namibia in arms”, *Namibia Today* 1 (7&8), 1967, p. 2. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009: 956) on Zanu-Pf’s commemoration of the *Battle of Sinoia* (28 April 1966) as a comparative case, where a specific battle was inscribed with symbolic meaning to represent the armed struggle.

[258] UN Declaration 3111 of 1973. The same declaration, amended in 1976, declared SWAPO to be the “sole and authentic representation of the Namibian people”.

[259] SWAPO Statement before the United Nations Council for Namibia, Commemorating August 26, Read by Theo-Ben Gurirab, August 24, 1973; emphasis in the original.

Namibia.[260] Already in 1981, with all the boldness of an internationally recognised national liberation movement, SWAPO spoke of Namibia Day as a genuine "national holiday".[261]

Largely forgotten, however, is the fact that next to Namibia Day there also was a *Heroes' Day* proper, commemorating the death of PLAN commander Tobias Hainyeko, who was killed by South African police forces on 18 May 1967 (Nujoma 2001: 172). This particular Heroes' Day, which fell into the string of commemorative events of May, was popular mostly among PLAN combatants in exile and also produced a particular iconography of Hainyeko as a struggle icon, e.g. depicted on political posters (Miescher /Henrichsen 2001: 7). In an article in *The Combatant*, dedicated to the commemoration of Heroes' Day 1982, SWAPO emphasised that "on the occassion [sic!] of observance of […] the Namibian Heroes' Day, we do not mourn our heroes and martyrs, but do rather draw inspiration from them to redouble our political, diplomatic and military efforts" in the struggle against South Africa.[262] However, 18 May has not been transitioned into the commemorative calendar of independent Namibia, but rather merged with 26 August.

As a political organisation, SWAPO used Namibia Day as a platform to convey its liberation politics in the context of international diplomacy. For the exile community in SWAPO's camps in Southern Africa it was primarily a day to remember fallen comrades, for political education, and for ascertaining the collective will to liberate Namibia. Oiva Angula, who served as a political instructor in SWAPO's Tobias Hainyeko Training Centre in Angola in 1980, narrates how combat trainees were taking part in discussion groups in the run-up to 26 August, to prepare them for battle (Angula 2011: 73). According to Lush (1993: 301) the SADF frequently attacked SWAPO's exile camps on the 26th to disturb the ceremonies, which often led to postponements. At the same time, this created a heightened sense of existential threat and dedication to resist among the exile community.

This is expressed by Lydia Shaketange, who was part of a group of Namibian teenagers, who were sent to Sierra Leone to attend school. In her memoir, she recalls how she was briefed on Heroes' Day 1978 about the attack on Cassinga: "this news about Kassinga was a keen reminder that we were in school so far away from home for a reason. We were there to learn and be educated so that we could fight so that Kassinga never happened again" (Shaketange 2008: 89). It also informs, in a more drastic fashion, PLAN combatant Peter Ekandjo's memoir. He proudly narrates how his commando launched an attack on Onhumba near Okongo in northern Namibia in 1979, "as part of the commemoration of 26 August" (Ekandjo 2011: 111).[263] This sense of resilience and militancy, which draws its power from the heroic memory of Ongulumbashe but also from the martyrium of Cassinga, is one of the central characteristics of Heroes' Day.

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[260] NAN photo collection, nos. 15605, 15619, 15654; see also the events of 1979, 1982 and 1987 documented at <https://dam.media.un.org/CS.aspx?VP3=DamView&VBID=2AM94S6E9OX57&SMLS=1&RW=1880&RH=949> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[261] *The Combatant* 3 (2), 1981, p. 10.

[262] *The Combatant* 3 (11), 1982, p. 8.

[263] For a detailed description of the battle; see Ekandjo 2011: 111–124.

Commemoration inside Namibia

The commemoration of Namibia Day inside Namibia commenced after 1973, even though references for this era remain scant.[264] In later years and with an intensifying struggle, Namibia Day became a platform for political mobilisation and mass rallies in the larger cities, which often turned violent. *The Namibian*, which published its first issue just after Namibia Day on 30 August 1985, reported in detail about the protests, clashes, and police violence in the course of the events. In 1985, a Namibia Day commemoration by SWAPO in Katutura was forcefully suppressed by the police before it began, with most of the organisers arrested right off the stage, condemned by the UN. Protests and violent clashes ensued in the following days, both in Katutura and central Windhoek, leaving "Kaiser Street in chaos".[265]

For Namibia Day 1986, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle, about 6,000 people took to the streets in a powerful display of civil resistance against South African rule (Lubowski /van der Vyver 1992: 83). This time, the commemoration of Namibia Day took place largely unhindered. Representative of internal SWAPO Nathaniel Maxuilili delivered a speech on behalf of Sam Nujoma, in which the President of SWAPO threatened authorities with a nation-wide strike. At the same time, he called for "unity" among Namibians in their struggle for independence. Speakers during the event also acknowledged that anticolonial resistance in Namibia had a long tradition with ties to many different communities, thus rejecting claims that SWAPO was a partisan or tribalist organisation.[266]

On its title page of 29 August 1986, *The Namibian* featured an impressive photograph of the rally, following the Namibia Day commemoration in Katutura. The picture was again taken by John Liebenberg, whose photographic documentation of the protests in the second half of the 1980s is inseparably interwoven with the iconography of the anti-apartheid struggle. His photos of SWAPO rallies capture the intense atmosphere of these events, the brutality of the regime, and the dedication of the Namibian people to resist against all odds. We see demonstrators hunted down and beaten up by South African security forces during Namibia Day in 1985, SWAPO supporters arrested by the police in Katutura, people dispersed by clouds of tear gas and rubber bullets (Liebenberg /Hayes 2010: 154, 165).

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[264] A Namibia Day commemoration in 1977 is referenced in Peter Katjavivi's personal archive at UNAM's library; a photo, captioned "Namibia Day Commemoration Windhoek 1970s", featuring prominent anti-apartheid activist Bience Gawanas, is included in the August edition of *Namibia Review* 2002, p. 25, without specifying the year. The photo also depicts a Namibia Day poster.

[265] See "Focus on Namibia Day", "UN Council reacts", "Demonstrators and Police", "Arrested", *The Namibian*, 30 August 1985. *The Namibian* also printed regular lists of political activists, which were held in detention without trial.

[266] See "A call for a national strike", *The Namibian*, 29 August 1986. The issue also includes a report on Namibia Day commemoration at UNIN in Lusaka; see "UN Institute and Namibia Day". The event was chaired by Sam Nujoma and attended by Namibian activists like Anton Lubowski or Christo Lombard as well as representatives of the OAU and regional frontline states.

Another interesting aspect of the Namibia Day rallies and commemorative events is the omnipresence of political symbols among demonstrators, especially in the form of SWAPO colours and T-Shirts with slogans and motives related to the liberation struggle. Designs for posters and T-Shirts were made specifically to commemorate Namibia Day and Cassinga Day (Hayes 2010a: 14; Miescher /Henrichsen 2009). As Vögeli notes, struggle-era posters often have become "symbolic sites" (Vögeli 2009: 162) that link individual and collective experiences of the past, and just like T-Shirts they have become cherished individual memorabilia or part of history exhibitions in the National Museum or the Outapi War Museum.[267] In her comment on Liebenberg's photography, Hayes has noted the importance of visual culture, such as posters, T-Shirts, banners, photographs, as a central feature of Namibia's liberation struggle (Hayes 2010b: 117).

In 1987, the Namibia Day commemoration in Katutura again took place in face of police repression and arbitrary detentions of participants. In his speech, SWAPO's Secretary for Education Joshua Hoebeb emphasised that the armed struggle was forced upon Namibians by South Africa. It was a decision, not taken lightly by the liberation movement: "We are gathered here not to glorify the armed struggle. We know that once you direct a gun at someone else, it results in the spilling of blood. We are Christians and we are not insensitive to human life, but we also have a duty to liberate our country".[268] His address was complemented by a fierier speech of SWAPO's Youth Secretary Jerry Ekandjo, who stressed South Africa's 'dismal failure' to beat SWAPO militarily and underlined the 'unbreakable resolve' of the Namibian people to fight for independence. As part of the commemoration, workers at Consolidated Diamond Mines in Oranjemund held a political rally in solidarity with the 'oppressed masses' in Namibia.[269] Namibia Day 1988 happened against the background of South Africa's withdrawal from Angola and the impending implementation of UN Resolution 435, which mobilised 8,000 people to attend SWAPO's Katutura rally and to celebrate the 'cautious song of hope' for an end of the war. Speaking at the event, trade unionist and former Robben Island prisoner Ben Ulenga reiterated SWAPO's willingness to lay down arms whenever South Africa was ready to 'grant independence' to Namibia.[270]

Namibia Day 1989, finally, took place roughly two and a half months before Namibia's first free elections for the Constituent Assembly. It was a climate of intense political mobilisation, overshadowed by heavy fighting between PLAN and South African paramilitary forces. In breach of the ceasefire agreement, SWAPO had sent large contingents of fighters across the Angolan border into Namibia on 1 April 1989 to officially hand over their weapons at UN reception centres. South

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[267] The museum is run and managed by an ex-PLAN combatant, who bought a former South African military base and turned it into a hotel and private museum. He gave me a personal tour of the exhibition and the remains of the military base, which includes the site of a mass grave, where South African soldiers buried PLAN fighters, who were killed in April 1989. In the museum shop, a collection of T-Shirts with struggle era motifs were on sale as reprints. I stayed at the museum/hotel twice during 2012 and 2013.

[268] "Unbreakable resolve to fight for our freedom", "Oranjemund celebrates Namibia Day", *The Namibian*, 4 September 1987.

[269] "Oranjemund celebrates Namibia Day", *The Namibian*, 4 September 1987.

[270] "Cautious song of hope", *The Namibian*, 2 September 1988.

Africa deployed its paramilitary units Koevoet and 32 Battalion, which were officially grounded. In the ensuing fighting, hundreds of PLAN combatants, who were looking forward to demobilise and return to their families, were killed.[271] In the wake of the events, the nerves of the nation were on edge. The South African-backed opposition of the DTA used the occasion of Namibia Day to stage its own rally in Katutura, what the liberation movement criticised as "hijacking of this important date on the political calendar of Namibia's anti-colonial struggle".[272] In the run-up to Namibia Day, supporters of DTA and SWAPO repeatedly clashed both in Windhoek and in northern Namibia.[273] As a result, SWAPO postponed its Namibia Day rally and shifted the focus of commemorations to northern Namibia.

In a powerful display of SWAPO's support in the region, a crowd of 15,000 people attended a ceremony at Omungwelume. The small village is located about ten kilometres from the Angolan border and near Endola, which was a central hub of resistance, but also close to Ondeshifiilwa, where some of the heaviest fighting took place in April 1989. SWAPO stalwart Nahas Angula addressed the crowd, emphasising the importance of the armed struggle for independence to come: "August 26, 1966 is the midwife of Resolution 435 and that of the struggle for self-determination which is about to be entered with the November election".[274] The day, he continued, was 'a reality for the Namibian people' and 'a fine example of patriotism', even though the leadership of SWAPO "detested" the war. Speakers at the event, among them Simon "Mzee" Kaukungwa, called on SWAPO supporters not to give in to violent provocations by the DTA and for Namibians to unite, while also thanking the rural population and especially women for their support to the liberation struggle.[275]

The main event, postponed to evade conflicts with the DTA, took place in Katima Mulilo, near the border to Botswana and Zambia. Hage Geingob, director of UNIN and member of SWAPO's Central Committee, was the main speaker. He criticised the climate of intimidation ahead of the elections and emphasised the need for unity. When he asked the crowd if they wanted to see Sam Nujoma come home, he "received a roar of approval in reply".[276] To the sound of Ndilimani, the crowd celebrated the return of the exiles and the advent of independence, while commemorating the thousands of Namibians, named and unnamed, who had perished in the struggle.

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[271] Whether SWAPO's leadership wanted to display a show of force with its incursion or rather completely misread the security situation on the ground, is still a contested issue (Kornes 2013: 7). In 2013, retired Lieutenant-General Martin Shalli, who is a respected former PLAN commander, summarised the events as "a technical mistake" and a result of communication deficiencies between diplomats and the military leadership; see *Windhoek Observer*, 25 January 2013. Many of the killed PLAN combatants are buried in mass graves in the border region.

[272] "Namibia Day hijacked", *The Namibian*, 28 August 1989.

[273] "Spate of incidents in Katutura and north", *The Namibian*, 25 August 1989.

[274] "Tribute to fallen", *The Namibian*, 28 August 1989.

[275] "Omungwelume rally: come back to the nation", *The Namibian*, 28 August 1989.

[276] "Festive atmosphere at Katima rally", *The Namibian*, 28 August 1989. Geingob also used the occasion to talk about the issue of the SWAPO detainees, which back then was heavily exploited by South African-backed opposition parties, and issued an apology. On Geingob's role in the detainee issue; see Kornes 2013: 19.

Commemorating Heroes' Day since 1990

With the adoption of the Public Holidays Act on 20 December 1990, Namibia Day was officially instituted as Heroes' Day. Just like the celebration of independence in March 1990, the first commemoration of Heroes' Day in independent Namibia, then still as Namibia Day, constituted a model for the event in years to come. This involves the commemoration of the armed liberation struggle and its veterans, dead and alive, with military parades, re-enactments of the battle of Ongulumbashe, the bestowal of decorations on selected national heroes, state funerals and reburials. In order to conceptualise the importance of 26 August as a *lieu de mémoire* within Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation, I will provide an overview of Heroes' Day commemoration since independence. My overview is structured both as a chronology and along five characteristic aspects of the event: first, the focus on veterans as the communicative memory of the struggle; second, the utilisation of Heroes' Day as a stage to demonstrate the resilience of the independent nation-state both through speeches and displays of a contained militancy; third, the transformation of liberation memory and its increasing memorialisation; fourth, the inherent ambivalence of hero status as seen from the perspective of those embodying it as veterans; fifth, the recent shift to a more inclusive and accommodative approach regarding other mnemonic communities.

'The aim was independence': Heroes' Day and the Communicative Memory of Veterans

Namibia Day in 1990 took place on site in Ongulumbashe with thousands of visitors in attendance (Lush 1993: 299), while commemorative events were organised in all major regional capitals as well. Compared to Independence Day five months earlier, which was an international event based on an established model of ceremonial transitioning for nation-states, 26 August was a different kind of event. As Gwen Lister, editor of *The Namibian* perceptively noted in advance, for the majority of Namibians who lived in the northern parts of the country and who bore the brunt of the struggle, Heroes' Day at Ongulumbashe heralded the "real celebration of independence".[277]

In a way, despite its magnitude, the event appears as intimate and introspective, with a focus on the community of SWAPO combatants, returned exiles, and former political prisoners, as well as the *ovakalimo*, i.e. the large group of relatives and supporters who had stayed at home. Despite receiving less media coverage, elements of the ceremony have become iconic for the representation of Heroes' Day and the mediation of liberation memory at large. This concerns especially the presence of the Ongulumbashe veterans, some of them already old and dignified men, who were decorated with the Ongulumbashe Medal by Namibia's first President Sam Nujoma. This historic moment has been captured at length in the already mentioned documentary *The Aim Was Independence*, which is regularly broadcast on national television on Heroes' Day.

[277] "Political Perspective", *The Namibian*, 24 August 1990.

By editing footage of the struggle days and of 26 August 1990, the film interweaves the commemorative event at Ongulumbashe with the history of SWAPO's armed liberation struggle, emphasising the resilience and sacrifice of the combatants. At the beginning of the film, Eliaser Tuhadeleni is narrating how he and fellow combatants were trained in guerrilla warfare at Ongulumbashe and how the group engaged in combat during the attack. His story is contrasted with footage of heavily armed PLAN combatants and South African combat operations, involving helicopter gunships and the rescue of wounded soldiers, giving the impression of a fully-fledged war situation. The film's narrative then leads over to the ceremony of 26 August. In re-enactment of guerrilla tactics, the Ongulumbashe veterans are moving in line through the bushes, dressed in their uniforms and shouldering their guns. Again commanded by John Nankudhu, they parade at the site and come to stand at attention in front of the dais, mounted by Sam Nujoma. Saluting him, Nankudhu affirms their presence and asks to excuse those fighters, who are too old to be present; Nujoma is visibly touched. Then the President inspects the veterans' parade.

At this moment, dressed with a scarf in his party's colours, Nujoma enacts several roles: as President of Namibia, as Commander-in-Chief of both PLAN and the NDF, and as President of Swapo. The seasoned veterans, embodying the living heritage of the struggle, then are accompanied by a group of SWAPO pioneers, the liberation movement's organisation for children aged 6–8 years, which was established in exile in Kwanza-Sul in 1980 (Nghiwete 2010: 66–68). A small boy calls out loud to honour the veterans and to commemorate the fallen heroes of the struggle, answered by a chorus of the pioneers, who collectively salute the veterans. Then the children mount the dais to tie red scarfs, their distinctive mark, around the necks of the guests of honour, including Nujoma. This is followed by a speech by Nankudhu on the significance of Ongulumbashe as the starting point of the armed liberation struggle and a speech of Nujoma on the important contribution of the veterans. He then calls the individual veterans up to the dais to award them the Ongulumbashe Medal – a badge of honour, which was introduced on Heroes' Day 1985 and constitutes "SWAPO's highest honour for bravery […], to be awarded to commanders and combatants who had distinguished themselves through bravery in battle" (SWAPO 1996). The medal bears the symbol of the Russian-made Pistolet-pulemet Shpagina ("Ppsh") submachine gun, which was used by the Ongulumbashe veterans during the battle.

In the next sequence, we see the guests of honour moving around the site, led by Nankudhu, who shows Nujoma, the audience in attendance, as well as the nation in front of the television, some of the places where the battle took place. Finally, a monument dedicated to the memory of 26 August, covered in SWAPO flags, is unveiled by Nujoma, who is the first to lay down a wreath. The monument, which is a slim black marble obelisk, has a depiction of SWAPO's iconic torch symbol *onyeka* engraved; added underneath are the words: "26 August 1966. The torch of the armed struggle was lit and the path to freedom was illuminated", machine guns are engraved on the side panels. The stele stands on a pedestal of brown marble, which bears the slogan "Independence Was Their Aim", inspiring the film's title and the formation of liberation memory alike.

Fig. 14: Ongulumbashe monument of 1990. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

In this teleological reading, Ongulumbashe becomes both the starting point of the struggle and its logical conclusion. Hardly any symbolism could be more powerful to imbue date and place with meaning than Nujoma inspecting the parade of the Ongulumbashe veterans, who embody struggle credentials in its purest form. The old guard of the struggle and the future of independent Namibia represented by the veterans and the SWAPO pioneers, respectively, ceremoniously bond in affirming the legitimacy of the armed struggle for liberation and national independence. They do so under the watch, in the double sense of the word, of Sam Nujoma in his symbolic role as Founding Father of the Namibian nation.

While in 1990, the first commemoration of Heroes' Day took place with a centralised and highly symbolic event in Ongulumbashe, commemorative events in 1991 were staged throughout the country, with a focus on activities in the northern regional capitals. In Ondangwa, several thousand people listened to speeches of former PLAN commander and first Minister of Defence Peter Mweshihange, as well as veteran Eliaser Tuhadeleni, the latter narrating the history of

Ongulumbashe.[278] Veterans also took centre stage in 1993, when former PLAN combatants paraded and re-enacted battles of the liberation struggle at the Heroes' Day commemoration in Katutura.[279] In the run-up to Heroes' Day 1994, the history department of the State Museum organised public talks with war veterans at the *Alte Feste* display centre. The talks formed part of an oral history project to record the life stories of veterans of the liberation struggle and were accompanied by a temporary exhibition, called "Our Namibian Heroes", which opened on 23 August. The talks were supposed to foster "history awareness of the general public and younger generation through this exclusive opportunity to meet the participants of the liberation struggle of Namibia".[280]

A few years into independence, this underlines the importance of the veterans' communicative memory for the construction of a national liberation memory, based on values of heroism and sacrifice. At the same time, the official state-sponsored valorisation of veterans cannot be detached from the rising discontent among Swapo's rank-and-file ex-combatants during that time. Veterans took to the streets in protest several times in the 1990s, lamenting economic hardships and unemployment, and demanding compensation from the state (Metsola 2010: 592–593). In August 1998, close to 1,500 ex-combatants, war widows, and orphans squatted in protest in Windhoek's Zoo Park. When several hundred of them used the occasion of Heroes' Day to voice their demands, they were threatened with deportation to the north by the authorities in a bizarre echo of the apartheid era.[281]

The veterans' protests reflect a growing disenchantment in the course of the 1990s, when the euphoria of independence slowly started to wane. Pressing issues like poverty, unemployment, corruption, increasing crime, tribalism, and the predicaments of reconciliation gradually began to dominate the public discourse. As a topic, this *independence blues* is discernible in the memoirs of former exiles,[282] as well as in political commentary (du Pisani 1997; Kaure 1993: 5) and scholarly assessments of the era (Weiland 2010; Melber 2003c; Kössler /Melber 2001; du Pisani 1991). A particularly descriptive account is provided by Auguste "Mukwahepo" Immanuel, who was the first woman in SWAPO who underwent military training in exile. In an interview with historian Ellen Namhila, she recalls the ambivalence of being honoured on Heroes' Day:

> In 1995, SWAPO sent me an invitation to attend the celebration of Heroes' Day at Omugulugwoombashe, where I was presented with a medal of honour. I felt good and I was proud. At this celebration, I met many comrades who were together with me in exile. I was very happy, and wished that the day and the ceremony would go on forever. However, as of

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[278] "The North honours Namibia's heroes", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1991.
[279] "Battles relived", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1993.
[280] State Museum: Public Forums /Talks with Veterans of the Liberation Struggle, 15 August 1994. Public talks took place each day 13–14h, with the following veterans: Eliaser Tuhadeleni (22nd), Mzee Keniatta [most likely referring to Mzee Kaukungwa] (23rd), Andimba Toivo ya Toivo (24th), and Lazarus Zachariah (25th).
[281] "Heroes Day dampener for war disadvantaged", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1998.
[282] See for instance Kambombo 2014: 69–70; Mukwahepo, in Namhila 2013: 133–134; Amathila 2012: 131–170; Nghiwete 2010: 93–104; Shaketange 2008: 120–126; and Namhila 2005: 189–199.

> course nothing lasts forever, the day came to an end and people departed for their homes. I too returned home to Onengali yaKaluvi with my medal of honour. My heart and soul was filled with the pride of recognition. Upon my return to my village, my fellow community members congratulated me for the recognition bestowed upon me by our SWAPO government. People greeted me with admiration and respect, saying 'Mukwahepo, you are a hero of our struggle.' But when I got back to my container, although my children looked at me with joy – for their *meme* had been awarded a heroic medal – they were hungry and expected their hero to have brought them food. I had returned home with a shiny medal, but I still did not have anything to cook for my children. I was a recognised national hero with an empty stomach (in: Namhila 2013: 133–134)

Her narrative, which reads like a parable, is significant for the pairing of pride, she feels for the recognition of her contribution to the struggle, and disillusionment about the reality of independence. This was a sentiment that I encountered time and again in my conversations with veterans of the liberation struggle.

On the occasion of Heroes' Day in 2010, I interviewed Ellen Namhila, a war veteran herself, about this topic of disenchantment which is so omnipresent in veterans' memoirs, not least her own (Namhila 2005: 189–199). She explained to me at length how the experience of returning from exile was profoundly "shocking" for herself and many Namibians. Having spent a lot of years, even decades, in a communitarian revolutionary environment, the reality of Namibia's transition into a capitalist free-market democracy after independence was averse to the ideals, she and others fought for. In retrospect, however, she also reflected critically on her own disenchantment: "When you are in a revolution, there [are] a lot of things you take for granted. Just say 'Viva! Go for it!', as a mass movement. And we were children, also; we didn't question a lot of things, so I think now the country has come of age; but we as individuals, we have also aged".[283]

Namhila describes a difficult and ambivalent process of coming to terms with the realities of independence, which affected all veterans, albeit differently. Some, like Namhila, were able to pursue prestigious careers in the public service. Others, like *Meme* "Mukwahepo" and a large number of ex-combatants, returned to their rural communities to live modest and quite often destitute lives, received their annual honours, and occasionally reminded the government to live up to its promises.

Heroes' Day and the Authoritarian Turn in Namibian Memory Politics

While the first Heroes' Day commemorations had a strong focus on the veneration of the veterans as the communicative memory of the struggle, over time the event became a focal point for political contestation over national reconciliation and the history of the liberation struggle. In 1993, amidst an

[283] Interview with Ellen Namhila, Windhoek, 19 August 2010.

increasing salience of politicised ethnicity and ethnic tension in different regions (Akuupa /Kornes 2013: 40–42; Diener 2001a; Malan 1995: 5–11), the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and respected liberation theologist Zephania Kameeta used Heroes' Day to warn of tribalism. He emphatically reminded the crowd that their freedom was a 'result of the thousands who had died in the past' for Namibia's independence.[284] Signs of rising societal discontent were also mirrored in the Heroes' Day address of Nahas Angula in 1994. Then in his capacity as Minister of Education and Culture, he voiced his concern over the resurgence of tribalism, referring to events in Rwanda and Yugoslavia and the persistence of racism in some segments of society: "It is regrettable that among us there are those who want to take us back to the dark days when a sister fought sister, brother against brother", adding that "the scars are still there and the wounds of Koevoet are still there and they can become bad if allowed to fester".[285]

As I outlined in the previous chapters with regard to the issue of white Namibians 'shunning' national days and the controversies tied to Koevoet and SWATF veterans, state-sponsored commemorative days quite often become a platform for revealing existing fault-lines and fissures in the 'Namibian house' (Geingob). For Heroes' Day, this manifests itself especially regarding the question who is to be considered a hero and who isn't. From the very beginning, debate on this question has become a characteristic epiphenomenon of Heroes' Day commemoration. It erupted, for the first time with lasting effects, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary commemoration of 26 August in 1996.

The jubilee was again celebrated in Ongulumbashe. The ceremony mirrored the one six years earlier. In the presence of international guests of honour, a number of veterans, and a large audience, the veneration of the ex-combatants took centre stage. Ongulumbashe veterans Julius Shilongo, Phillemon Shitilifa and Eliaser Tuhadeleni narrated their memories of the attack, while Tuhadeleni emphasised the role of "Castro" in betraying the comrades (Shilamba /Gowases 1997: 19–20). Nujoma again decorated war veterans with the Ongulumbashe Medal and was handed sizable donations for the ex-combatants' social integration fund. Current Deputy Prime Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, then in her capacity as Director-General for Women's Affairs in the Office of the President, gave a speech on the significance of Ongulumbashe, in which she reminded the audience that "generation after generation of Namibians will have to be taught the history of the country and how their forefathers and mothers died trying to liberate it" (Shilamba /Gowases 1997: 19–20). The protocol included a minute of silence, a 21-gun salute, and the hoisting of a Swapo flag.

The ceremony also had an elaborate entertainment programme. Swapo's cultural group Bazooka performed a re-enactment of the battle, wearing old PLAN uniforms and carrying makeshift guns. Poems in honour of the veterans were read and eleven year-old Petrus Ntaagona of Oshikoto region sang a song dedicated to Ongulumbashe, accompanied by Kakuva Kembale on

[284] "Kameeta warns on tribalism", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1993.
[285] "'Reconciliation threatened'", *The Namibian*, 29 August 1994.

guitar. Ndilimani performed liberation struggle songs, while cultural groups from the northern regions provided music and dance. Among the audience, people waved banners with slogans like "National Reconciliation", "We will never forget Kassinga" and "Forgive but not forget". The jubilee of Ongulumbashe again turned out to be a powerful performative reaffirmation of a Swapo communitas, crystallising around the communicative memory of the war veterans.

What gave Heroes' Day in 1996 a special meaning, however, was the fact that Swapo used the occasion to officially launch the report, *Their Blood Waters Our Freedom*. The book, whose title is based on a passage of the Namibian national anthem, has the Ongulumbashe Medal imprinted on its cover, again underlining the significance of 26 August. The book was the first systematic attempt of Swapo to account for all its members who died in the liberation struggle. The publication had been anticipated for years and must be seen in the context of a controversial debate about SWAPO's violations of human rights in exile, i.e. the systematic detainment, torture, and in many cases 'disappearing' of real or perceived spies, traitors, and dissidents. The violations, which are known as Swapo's 'detainee issue', were public knowledge at least since the days of demobilisation and repatriation in 1989, but had already made international headlines in the mid-1980s (Kornes 2013, 2010a; Hunter 2008). In 1996, however, the publication of a book with survivors' testimonies by Siegfried Groth, a German pastor who was working among the Namibian exile community, stirred an enormous controversy in Namibia. It was accompanied by the launching of Breaking the Wall of Silence, a Namibian human rights organisation which campaigned for transitional justice and accountability (Hunter 2008: 175–207). Against the backdrop of this debate, the publication of Swapo's report, which was already announced as near completion on Heroes' Day 1990,[286] can be seen as a reaction to these accusations.

In his foreword to the report, Nujoma reiterates the violence and bloodshed, which was brought upon the people of Namibia by South Africa, underlining that Swapo's dedication to reconciliation was not unconditional:

> That is why the Namibian state was born with the words 'peace and reconciliation' on its lips. These twin concepts are the core of Namibia's domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, the Government of Namibia takes a very grim view of anyone inclined to fomenting conditions of civil strife or agitating to drive nations towards war. But, no one should make the mistake to interpret this principled policy position of our government as a sign of weakness; for, the Namibian people's iron will, valour and staunchness in defence of their motherland is a matter of record (SWAPO 1996)

[286] "'The supreme price' listed", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1990.

This read like a barely veiled threat, prominently placed in a document dedicated to the memory of those who died in the armed struggle for national independence and published on Heroes' Day.[287]

As such it is a prominent example of the authoritarian turn in Namibia's political culture, which took place during the second and third terms of Nujoma's presidency (Melber 2015: 53–55). At the same time and in retrospect, the report and the discussion following it are indicative of Swapo's ambivalent policy of national reconciliation, with its focus on closure and "silent reconciliation" (Kornes 2013) regarding its own members who were victimised by the liberation movement in exile. This is in marked distinction to the open exclusion and vilification of former Koevoet and SWATF members, pleading for official recognition as war veterans, or of those who left Swapo to form rivalling political parties.[288]

In 1999, Heroes' Day was again overshadowed by political contestation over national belonging; this time, however, with drastic consequences. Next to Swapo's approach regarding its ex-detainees, another oft-cited example for the authoritarian turn during Nujoma's last two terms of office is the way, his government dealt with cases of political unrest in the Kavango and Caprivi regions during the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s. This refers to insurgencies along the Angolan border involving UNITA rebels and especially the armed secessionist coup carried out by the Caprivi Liberation Front on 2 August 1999. The coup, which was the result of long lasting secessionist sentiments in some quarters of the region's political elite (Kangumu 2011: 237–252) was suppressed with excessive violence by the Namibian army and paramilitary forces, resulting in serious human rights violations (Melber 2014: 70–78, 2009; Kornes 2013: 7–9; Hunter 2008: 154).

It was against this background of the secession attempt that Heroes' Day was commemorated in Ondeshifiilwa in central northern Namibia. The small village in Ohangwena region has a sad prominence for being one of the deadliest battlegrounds during the fighting of April 1989. 21 PLAN combatants had been killed by South African forces and were buried in a mass grave. The community of Ondeshifiilwa, including Ongulumbashe veteran Eliaser Tuhadeleni, collected funds to organise a proper burial. On the occasion of Heroes' Day, a memorial was unveiled to honour the fallen soldiers.[289] In his speech, at least in its published version, President Nujoma did not mention

[287] The report was criticised for numerous flaws and inconsistencies, raising more questions than providing answers; see Kornes 2013: 15, 2010a: 55; and Hunter 2008: 181–184. Later in 1996, a parliamentary debate followed on the issue of the detainees, which allowed for more nuanced positions (Kornes 2013: 14).

[288] A case in point is the trajectory of Hidipo Hamutenya's struggle credentials. Hamutenya was one of the party's stalwarts in exile, awarded with cabinet positions after independence, yet fell from grace with Nujoma and the party leadership during the presidential election in 2004. He then formed his own party, the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), which for some years had an impact as an oppositional party but gradually declined into insignificance, too closely tied to Hamutenya's political idiosyncrasy. For breaking with Swapo, Hamutenya and his followers were ostracised as traitors and political rallies often led to violent clashes between supporters of the two parties. Eventually, severely ill and 'lost in the political wilderness', as Namibians like to call it, Hamutenya rejoined Swapo. After his death in 2016, he was rehabilitated and heaped with praises for his political achievements. Significantly, President Geingob even publicly apologised for the wrong that was done to him; see "Hamutenya deserves a heroes' funeral-Hage Geingob", *NBC*, 7 October 2016.

[289] "Tombstone unveiled in the North", *The Namibian*, 30 August 1999.

the events in Caprivi. Instead, he focussed on the "bravery" of the "gallant combatants" and "fallen heroes" that died on this site in April 1989 as a result of "betrayal".[290] It was their sacrifice, which demanded to be remembered in order to "uphold the ideals of solidarity, unity, tolerance and peace that they stood and died for". For this, he announced, government had decided to build a national heroes' acre and memorial museum in Windhoek, as a burial site for all of Namibia's heroes and heroines.

Implicitly, his speech resonated with the security situation, in pairing independence and unity with the sacrifice of those who died as martyrs for the nation, their death caused by unspecified "traitors". While the events in Caprivi have to be seen in the wider context of the region's colonial and political history, they nevertheless epitomise the surge of politicised ethnicity and tribalism that flourished during the 1990s. At the same time, the military's reaction quite tangibly reflects the 'Namibian people's iron will, valour and staunchness in defence of their motherland', which Nujoma invoked in *Their Blood Waters Our Freedom*. Against this background, the ceremonial invocation of liberation memory on Heroes' Day became a medium to underline the dedication of the post-colonial state to 'order the nation' (Williams 2009) and to defend the political status quo by whatever means necessary. The state of emergency officially ended on 26 August 1999.[291]

The authoritarian turn in Namibia's political culture in the second half of the 1990s is usually attributed to Nujoma's presidency (Melber 2015: 53–55; Hunter 2008: 147–155). His successor, Hifikepunye Pohamba, tends to be characterised differently in retrospect. His prevailing image was that of a dedicated, modest, considerate civil servant and 'man of the people' (Melber 2015: 56), more accommodative than his predecessor. However, when it came to being steadfast in defending the authority of Swapo's liberation struggle narrative, he usually demonstrated continuity. This became quite evident on the occasion of the Heroes' Day commemoration in 2007.

The event in Eenhana in central northern Namibia centred on the inauguration of one of the more prestigious memorial sites to commemorate the liberation struggle, built since independence. The so called Eenhana Shrine, designed by Namibian architects Marley & Tjitjo and built by a Chinese company, contains human remains which were discovered in the region in 2005 (Becker 2011: 533; see also Lentz /Lowe 2018: 145–147).[292] The dead, who were most likely killed during the fighting of April 1989 and buried by South African forces in mass graves, were ceremoniously reburied and given the status of national heroes. As Becker remarks, the monument not only memorialises Swapo's armed resistance, but also acknowledges the important contribution of the

[290] For this and the following quotes; see Nujoma 2000: 537.
[291] To provide a more nuanced picture: at a parallel Heroes' Day ceremony in Katutura, Deputy Minister of Prisons and Correctional Services Michaela Hübschle delivered a speech on national reconciliation and the importance of remembering the sacrifice of those who died for liberating the country: "We recognise the contributions made by the legendary leaders such as Hendrick Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, Mandume Ndemufayo and those heroes who fell gallantly for their beloved country". Saying these words as a white Namibian of German descent and a high ranking representative of the state obviously carried a special symbolic significance; see "Past crucial to the present", *The Namibian*, 30 August 1999.
[292] "Main Heroes' Day event at Eenhana", *The Namibian*, 24 August 2007.

rural civilian population, especially regarding women, in supporting the liberation struggle (Becker 2011: 533–534).[293]

Heroes' Day in 2007, with its focus on Namibians killed in the liberation struggle, took place against the background of a rekindling debate about Swapo's human rights violations, committed in exile and after independence in Kavango and Caprivi. What fuelled the debate immensely was the fact that the National Society for Human Rights had submitted a plea to the International Criminal Court to investigate the violations. Especially the fact that the Namibian NGO had named Sam Nujoma as one of the people directly responsible caused a public outcry (Kornes 2013: 5–9, 2010a: 86–88; Hunter 2008: 122–123, 189–190).[294]

Heroes' Day thus again became an occasion for intense contestation and a stage for the Swapo government to draw clear-cut lines of demarcation. In his speech, President Pohamba warned that "some misguided individuals and organisations", who "are attacking and vilifying Comrade Nujoma are engaging in a dangerous game that can take our country down a very slippery slope and plunge Namibia into the dark depths of instability and mistrust", calling for "unity above all else".[295] Commemorating the heroes, who died in the struggle for independence, he said, also meant respecting those who dedicated their lives to liberation and were still alive, like Nujoma. In his defence of 'Comrade Nujoma', President Pohamba made it clear that the public image of the Founding Father as personified liberation memory was sacrosanct.

Heroes' Day and Memorialisation

As the examples of Ongulumbashe, Ondeshifiilwa and Eenhana already indicate, Heroes' Day is a prominent occasion to inaugurate monuments, dedicated to the liberation struggle. The national monument, which President Nujoma had announced at the Heroes' Day commemoration in 1999, was finally inaugurated on 26 August 2002. The Heroes' Acre in Windhoek is a memorial site and burial ground for national heroes, built by North Korea's Mansudae Company and based on models in Harare and Pyongyang (Kornes 2019a; van der Hoog 2019). Cast in concrete and bronze, it paradigmatically embodies Swapo's heroic narrative of armed national liberation, as it was popularised by the government especially during the presidency of Sam Nujoma (Becker 2018, 2011; Melber 2014: 23–86, 2005a; Kössler 2007: 369–372, 2003: 107). Since 2014, the monument is complemented by the Independence Memorial Museum in Windhoek. As a dual structure, both constitute the central sites of state-sponsored liberation memory in independent Namibia.

[293] The reburial in Eenhana also has to be seen in a larger context of the struggle over recognition of suffering and hardships, which the civilian population in Owambo endured during the liberation war, as well as communal practices of commemorating those killed and/or disappeared by South Africa's security forces. As Becker (2011: 533–534, 2008b) and Shigwedha (2011: 200–202) have analysed, this process is rife with contestation and ambivalence.

[294] "NSHR wants April 1989 victims named", *The Namibian*, 24 August 2007.

[295] "President warns of 'havoc' as heroes laid to rest at Eenhana", *The Namibian*, 28 August 2007.

As can be gathered from various publications and news reports covering the event, thousands of visitors attended.[296] In photographs one can see scores of people crowding the paths between the graves and the flight of stairs which ascends to the statue of the Unknown Soldier. The ceremony included the proper protocol for an act of state with the arrival of dignitaries and guests of honour, a quarter guard salute for President Nujoma, the singing of the anthems of Namibia and the AU, a fly-past, a minute of silence framed by two gun salutes, welcoming remarks by the Prime Minister, prayer, various speeches, and the presidential address.

In his speech, Nujoma first reiterated the purpose of Heroes' Day, "as a national holiday for the remembrance of our heroes and heroines". He then contextualised the day with the inauguration of the Heroes' Acre, which was created "to provide a dedicated place for all of us, as Namibians, to pay homage and to give solemn and due tribute, honour and respect to the heroes and heroines of our soil, 'whose blood waters our freedom'".[297] His reference to soil had a special significance, since the protocol also included the ceremonial reburial of soil which was taken from Cassinga. Nujoma further acknowledged that the process of planning and constructing the Heroes' Acre was accompanied by public criticism, which, however, he accepted as "people's freedoms and rights to express themselves". He proposed to see the Heroes' Acre "as one of those tangible expressions of our policy of national reconciliation, statehood and unity as a nation".

He then provided a lengthy explanation of the process by which heroes and heroines were to be chosen for inclusion into this national pantheon. This included a historical overview and appraisal of the first nine national heroes and heroines, who were accorded a symbolic memorial grave. These were Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi, Jakob Marenga, Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva, Chief Samuel Maharero, Chief Nehale Iya Mpingana, Chief Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Chief Iipumbu ya Tshilongo, Chief Hosea Komombumbi Kutako, i.e. male traditional authorities and leaders of the 'early resistance' against German colonialism; Kutako marking the historical connection to the era of the nation liberation struggle. Only one woman was among the nine: Kakurukaze Mungunda, who was killed by the South African police during the Old Location protests in December 1959, after she allegedly had set fire to the car of the mayor of Windhoek.

After Nujoma had finished his speech, he ignited the eternal flame and then proceeded to unveil the statue of the Unknown Soldier. This was followed by the laying of wreaths at the monument, which included representatives of oppositional parties like Ben Ulenga for the Congress of Democrats (CoD) and Katuutire Kaura for the DTA. Then, the military brass band played *Last*

[296] I mostly rely on the organising committee's special publication for the event; see Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002, as well as the special edition of *Namibia Review* 11 (2) of August 2002, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. See also articles in *The Namibian*: "'Sacred soil' arrives on Sunday", 22 August 2002; "9 heroes honoured", 23 August 2002; "Thousands witness Heroes Acre inauguration", 27 August 2002; as well as "Heldenacker eröffnet", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 August 2002. I will provide a detailed analysis of the Heroes' Acre and its planning process in chapter seven.

[297] Statement by His Excellency President Sam Nujoma on the Occasion of the Official Inauguration of the Heroes' Acre; see Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison (2002: 10–13).

Post, after which the President bestowed national orders on selected Namibians who had contributed to national liberation, including anti-apartheid lawyer Hartmut Ruppel and Loini Nakathile, who was shot in April 1988 by South African troops. The ceremony ended with closing remarks by the Prime Minister, the singing of the anthems, and a joint tour of the monument site. Since its inauguration, the Heroes' Acre is the focus of unceasing debates on the criteria that determine hero status, as I will analyse in chapter seven. In the context of Heroes' Day, the monument site continues to be used as a venue for commemoration, albeit seldom and mostly in combination with the burial of recognised national heroes.

Fittingly, the last Heroes' Day of Sam Nujoma's presidency in 2004 was again commemorated at Ongulumbashe.[298] On the occasion, the President, who was dressed in camouflage, unveiled a second monument to honour the site's official declaration as a national heritage site.[299] The monument is mounted on two levels of marble tiles and consists of a triangular granite stone, bearing the words: "This memorial shrine was unveiled by His Excellency Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia, on 26 August 2004, to mark the declaration of this site as a National Monument in honour of the Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle". Behind the stone is a large marble mural, depicting an assembly of archetypal PLAN combatants; men only, with uniforms and machine-guns. Both stone and mural are mounted on a granite slab, with the words "Independence From Colonialism Was Our Aim" etched into it. A history narrative is engraved in the back of the mural slab:

> OMUGULUGWOMBASHE. THE HISTORY. At dawn the 26th of August 1966, the Racist Regime of South Africa's Security Forces launched a helicopter-borne assault against the base of SWAPO's armed wing, here at Tunama Omugulgwombashe. This date in 1966 marks the first clash between members of SWAPO's armed wing under the leadership of John Otto Nankudhu and the South African Security Forces. The Memorial symbolizes the beginning of the Armed Liberation Struggle, which culminated in the Liberation of Namibian [sic!] on the 21st March 1990

[298] See the detailed account by Vilho Shigwedha, "Omugulugwoombashe: the place where identity is still myth", *The Namibian Weekender*, 3 September 2004.

[299] National Heritage Act, No. 27 of 2004, proclaimed 15 August 2004. Plans to upgrade Ongulumbashe and officially declare it a national monument were already mentioned in 2002, involving stakeholders such as the NMC, the Ministry of Lands, the Omusati Regional Council and the SPYL. The process was to be supervised by a cabinet sub-committee; see NMC, "Annual Report of 2002".

Fig. 15: Ongulumbashe monument of 2004. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

Fig. 16: Ongulumbashe monument of 2004. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

Through its official recognition and memorialisation as the starting point of the liberation struggle, Ongulumbashe is transformed into a "holy shrine" of the nation, as one speaker called it

during the ceremony.[300] In recent years, new monuments have been added, including a statue of Sam Nujoma depicted as a guerrilla fighter (2013) and a monument in honour of the original Ongulumbashe guerrilla commando (2014). In addition, the site has become a burial site for war veterans, including some of the erstwhile Ongulumbashe combatants. It is also undergoing an expansion of infrastructure to accommodate visitors. These developments underline and reinforce the symbolic importance of 26 August 1966 as one of the most central *lieux de mémoire* in Swapo's liberation memory. As I will explain in more detail in chapter six, this development has turned Ongulumbashe into a remarkable memorial landscape, which mirrors the emergence of monumental nationalist memorial sites in the capital.

Veterans' Affairs: Heroes' Day and the Recalcitrance of Heroes

Swapo's heroic narrative of 26 August has of course been criticised from various angles. For historian Chris Saunders, Nujoma's description of the battle as a military success story amounts to "patent nonsense" (Saunders 2003: 92). Melber has used the example of Heroes' Day 2013 and especially the Nujoma statue as a case in point to critically highlight Swapo's authoritarian political culture (Melber 2014: 28, 36). In comparison to other Heroes' Day commemorations before, the event of 2013 received a particularly high degree of criticism in the liberal media. Not only for the veneration of Nujoma at a historical site to which he has no direct biographical connection, but also for the prominence of Swapo insignia at the ceremony and the conflation of national history and party-politics.[301] A high-ranking official at the Ministry of Culture, which is responsible for managing national heritage sites, already told me in February 2013 about the government's plans to put up the Nujoma statue at Ongulumbashe. When we talked about the significance of this decision, the public servant was visibly appalled and called it inconsiderate towards those veterans, who actually fought on the frontline and who were not honoured with statues.[302]

Criticism of Swapo's memory politics also came from former war veterans themselves, who voiced their disenchantment over the representation of 26 August. For Jackson Mwalundange and Samson Ndeikwila, Ongulumbashe marks not the "launch" of the armed struggle, but military defeat: "Oshikango, and not Ongulumbashe, was the place where the guerrillas had planned and fired their first shots at the enemy".[303] While the two ex-combatants have a known reputation of being vocal critics of their liberation movement, Swapo's utilisation of 26 August was also dismissed by another veteran, with quite a different status of struggle credentials.

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[300] According to Vilho Shigwedha, "Omugulugwoombashe: the place where identity is still myth", *The Namibian Weekender*, 3 September 2004.

[301] For instance, the revised Swapo Party constitution was officially launched at the event; see "Senegalese President to Visit Namibia", *The Namibian*, 7 August 2013. See also "Swapo Politicise National Events – Swanu", *The Namibian* 29 August 2013; "We are all heroes and heroines", *New Era*, 23 August 2013; "When villains outnumber heroes", *Namibian Sun*, 27 August 2013; "Swanu pays tribute to nation's heroes", *New Era*, 29 August 2013; "Youth unmoved by Heroes' Day", *Windhoek Observer*, 29 August 2013.

[302] Informal conversation, Windhoek, February 2013.

[303] Jackson Mwalundange and Samson Ndeikwila, "Telling History As It Is", *The Namibian*, 23 August 2013.

For in 2013, none less than Simeon "Kambo" Shixungileni, who then was the highest ranking Ongulumbashe veteran still alive, made headlines by refusing to attend the Heroes' Day commemoration. In his rejection of the invitation, he voiced his frustration:

> Like previous years during this time, I receive letters inviting me to attend Heroes' Day and give testimony of the liberation struggle against South African colonialism. I am only remembered during this time of the year to be displayed like a soccer ball in front of people who don't know about my contribution to the struggle[304]

He was "tired" of this, he said, and referred to his living conditions: "coming from poverty to dine for several hours at an event just to return to poverty again does not make sense to me". He further criticised the neglect of war veterans by the government and spoke for others who were ill and destitute. Two days before Heroes' Day, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, late Nickey Iyambo, and the Governor of Oshikoto region Penda ya Ndakolo had paid Shixungileni a courtesy call, where they learned about the bad health and dire living conditions of the veteran, who fed a family of seven from his N$2,200 monthly veterans' pension. Even though they donated money and food to his support, he could not be convinced to attend. His wife, *Meme* Teopolina, also voiced her grievances: "He is forgotten. Our leaders know of his existence, they are simply ignorant. They were comrades during the struggle but they enjoy the fruits of an independent Namibia alone".

I had the privilege of meeting Simeon Shixungileni at his homestead in King Kauluma in June 2012, when I was part of a team of the National Museum of Namibia, doing interviews with former political prisoners for the permanent exhibition of the IMM.[305] Back then, he already let us know that he was tired of being visited and interviewed by the government and only accepted our request for an interview, when he learned that he was acquainted with the family of one of our team members. Where Simeon Shixungileni was slightly reserved, other war veterans were outright disgruntled about the way, they felt treated by the government. A lot of the veterans we interviewed were living as subsistence farmers, quite often in modest, sometimes even destitute conditions. Some of them were sick, like Jacob Nghidinua and Simeon Shixungileni, who died of cancer in 2014. Quite a number of them were frail, yet despite their old age still tending their homesteads largely on their own. Some were visibly marked by alcoholism. While most of them lived in traditional homesteads, some also had additional prefabricated houses, which they had received for free from the government as part of their veterans' benefits.[306] The houses underline the importance

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[304] "Ongulumbashe commander snubs Swapo", *Confidenté*, 29 August 2013.

[305] We interviewed and video-taped male and female veterans of the liberation movement who were imprisoned and tortured in South African prisons in Robben Island and Kroonstad. See chapter eight for a list of the interviewees. More interviews were done without my participation later on in 2012 and 2013.

[306] These include a monthly pension of N$2,200, a lump-sum payment of N$50,000, and also specific perks like stipends or grants for starting enterprises; see <https://veterans.gov.na/registration> [last accessed 15 October 2022]. The legislative basis is the Veterans Act of 2008. Of the veterans we interviewed and who lived in traditional homesteads, several also had an additional veterans' house.

that the Swapo government has attached to rewarding war veterans for their contribution. At the same time, however, they are also a symbol for the ambivalence of Swapo's veterans' politics.

When we visited the veterans, they usually showed us their homesteads and houses. As we soon learned, a lot of the houses had dysfunctional appliances and installations. Solar-panels to provide electricity were not working, water and electricity was only available sporadically. In some cases, houses were either unoccupied or used as storage space for tools and crops. Repeatedly, veterans voiced their grievance that no one was available to provide maintenance for the houses. Several of them accused a particular official at the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, who apparently was responsible for overseeing the provision of houses, of being corrupt and incompetent; one veteran called him a "criminal". The veterans shared a sentiment of collective frustration. In their perception, no one was looking after their well-being and those who were sick would not receive the necessary medical attention. As one of them summarised it: "government has forgotten us".

We made our interviews with the veterans according to plan, gathered their stories as oral history, to be presented as authoritative accounts of resistance, suffering, and perseverance in the IMM's narrative of the liberation struggle. A lot of the veterans had written notes, which they used to refresh their memories, some even preferred to read their accounts on camera. Together with an array of documents, like birth certificates, ID cards, personal letters, newspaper clippings, these notes were mnemonic devices for the veterans, some of whom were of very old age. It also illustrated that many of them had been interviewed before, by journalists, historians, representatives of the government; that this was a situation, they were familiar with and for which they were prepared. At the same time, the documents also had a function as material evidence, as a kind of authority, which demonstrated their struggle credentials to us. Documents were supplemented by SWAPO memorabilia, historic photos, and heroes' medals, with which many of them decorated their homes. A lot had put up images of Sam Nujoma, while hardly anyone had a photograph, historic or recent, of Hifikepunye Pohamba on the wall.

Our interviews gave us privileged access to the fascinating and often arduous life stories of some of Namibia's most respected war veterans and national heroes, among them many former Robben Island prisoners. Their stories, by means of the interviews we conducted, have entered national memory via the IMM and the National Archives. However, when our interviews were finished and the recording stopped, our encounters always became very personal and allowed for different, more nuanced perspectives on liberation memory in Namibia. We learned that veterans were disenchanted with their government, which they blamed for neglect, corruption, and disrespect towards the struggle generation. *Tate* Shixungileni made that point very explicit, when he refused to attend the Heroes' Day commemoration in 2013. Since he identified us, rightfully, as government, he also made us understand his estrangement. Still, despite their frustration, he and all other veterans agreed to tell their stories, once again, for the prospect of being honoured and remembered in the new museum. The ambivalence of demanding recognition on the one hand and not wanting to be exploited on the other hand characterised many of our meetings with the veterans. While they were

critical of the Swapo government, they remained steadfast in their relationship to the liberation movement. Only one veteran was very clear in his condemnation of Swapo as a movement, which had betrayed its "socialist ideals" and turned "corrupt". Most of them, however, still demonstrated their allegiance to the party. As one female veteran put it, after listing a number of grievances that affected her and others: "there is no alternative to Swapo".

It seemed that as national heroes and icons of resistance, the veterans were at the same time positioned at the centre of state-sponsored liberation memory and its periphery. In their capacity as communicative memory of the liberation struggle, they embody the very foundation of Ongulumbashe as a *lieu de mémoire*. Still, as the above cited examples show, where the political mythology of national liberation memory and the social reality of the veterans intersect, this relationship becomes fragile and conflictive. The emerging memorial landscape at Ongulumbashe, with its monuments and heroes' graves appears to stabilise the memory of 26 August, yet at closer look, it also reflects its inherent ambiguities. For the grave of Simeon Shixungileni, Second-in-Command and national hero, is not in Ongulumbashe, next to his fellow combatants Joseph Uushona, Joseph Hipangelwa, Lamek Ithete and Isak Shoome. Simeon Shixungileni refused to be buried at either Ongulumbashe or Heroes' Acre. Instead, he was accorded a heroes' funeral and laid to rest at his homestead at King Kauluma.[307]

The veterans' dissatisfaction results from the inherent contradiction between the symbolic meaning that hero status has acquired in state-sponsored liberation memory and the material reality connected to it. In their case, status as Ongulumbashe veterans translates into one of the highest forms of struggle credentials available. Still, as symbolic capital it is dependent on the economy of entitlement, put into place by the liberation movement in power and therefore limited in its convertibility to economic benefits. However, within the nation-state's bureaucratised hierarchy of war veterans, those with ties to Ongulumbashe are clearly in a favourable position. Others, as individuals or collectives, have to go to considerable lengths in getting struggle credentials acknowledged in the first place. The result is a competition for the recognition of individual or collective contributions to the liberation struggle. Due to the symbolic importance that hero status has acquired as a national virtue, which is validated by the economy of entitlement, Heroes' Day has become a prominent arena for the negotiation of such claims. As I will outline in the final section and the following chapter, this has become especially relevant during the tenure of President Pohamba.

Continuity and Change: Commemorating Heroes' Day during Pohamba's Presidency

As one of the old guard, Hifikepunye Pohamba maintained, throughout his presidency and in line with his predecessor, the primacy of SWAPO's armed liberation struggle as the foundation of Namibia's independence. He showed continuity, too, when it came to reinforcing Swapo's heroic

[307] "Shixungileni buried at King Kauluma", *The Namibian*, 13 October 2014.

narrative on Heroes' Day (Melber 2014: 28) and also by expressing "increasingly radical views" (Melber 2015: 57) regarding policy decisions in his last years of office. At the same time, it was largely during his tenure that a major shift towards the memorialisation of the liberation struggle has been taking place. In this, Pohamba continued projects started by his predecessor like the IMM, while also adding a more personal touch, for instance in his policy towards German-era colonial monuments. However, it was the commemoration of Heroes' Day where Pohamba has left an individual imprint that affects the state-sponsored mediation of liberation memory until today.

First of all, he introduced rotating Heroes' Day commemorations at the onset of his presidency in 2005. Since then, the central event 'travels' through the republic – to regional capitals, but also smaller towns with significance for the history of national liberation. This practice has been continued during the tenure of Hage Geingob.[308] When Heroes' Day takes place in Windhoek, it usually is accompanied by acts of state for the ceremonial burial of designated liberation struggle heroes at the Heroes' Acre.[309] Likewise, commemorations in regional towns also occasionally include reburials of human remains which are connected to the liberation struggle, as it happened in Eenhana (2007) and Lüderitz (2010). Especially the latter example is instructive for another aspect, which has been attributed to Pohamba's presidency, namely an increased awareness for and recognition of other histories and traditions of resistance – that is, within the nationalist paradigm (Kössler 2015: 310–311; Becker 2011: 535).

An instructive example for this has been described by Kössler, who observed the attendance of President Pohamba at a communal memory event of the !Gamiǂnûn traditional authority in Warmbad in October 2008. The main attraction of the festival was the inauguration of a memorial stone to commemorate Jacob Marengo, who was one of the resistance leaders in the wars against German colonial rule. As Kössler observed, when a local historian narrated the history of the !Gamiǂnûn, Pohamba was visibly touched to a degree that he apologised to those present for his lack of knowledge about the community's history of anticolonial resistance (Kössler 2010a: 371–372). On other occasions, too, President Pohamba demonstrated comparable gestures of recognition, especially to those communities who were affected by the genocide. For this, the rotating Heroes' Day commemoration repeatedly was a preferred medium.

In 2010, Heroes' Day was commemorated in the south-western coastal town of Lüderitz in the ǁKaras region. Despite its peripheral geographic status, Lüderitz has a special significance in Namibia's history as one of the first sites, where German colonial expansion took hold in 1883/1884. In the context of the genocide, Lüderitz acquired notoriety for the concentration camp located on Shark Island. The Namibian government had chosen Lüderitz as a venue for Heroes' Day

[308] Main events were held in Opuwo (2005), Katima Mulilo (2006), Eenhana (2007), Rundu (2008), Ongulumbashe (2009), Lüderitz (2010), Gobabis (2011), Omuthiya (2012), Ongulumbashe (2013), Windhoek (2014), Windhoek (2015), Walvis Bay (2016), Oshakati (2017), Nkurenkuru (2018), and Otjiwarongo (2019).

[309] Noteworthy ones being Peter Nanyemba and Putuse Appolus in 2014, and Peter Mweshihange, Moses ǁGaroëb and Anton Lubowski in 2015; see "Seven heroes reburied", *The Namibian*, 27 August 2014 and "Govt to search for heroes buried elsewhere", *The Namibian*, 27 August 2015.

to rebury human remains, which had been discovered in the adjacent desert during the 1990s and were partly attributed to the genocide. The Heroes' Day in 2010 included a reburial ceremony, which is analysed in the next chapter.

The protocol of Heroes' Day closely resembles the one of Independence Day. Like the central national day, Heroes' Day includes a military parade, the arrival of the president by motorcade, his inspection of the parade, prayer, a welcoming speech by the regional governor, and a presidential address. Often, this is followed by the ceremonial conferring of national honours. At the event in the Lüderitz sport stadium, audience and state representatives/guests of honour were separated by the length of the playing field.[310] The latter were accommodated by two tents and a seating area, protected from the sun by a large canvas cover. Since there is no grand stand in Lüderitz, the audience was standing at the other end of the field, behind a mesh-wire fence. Some canvas covers had been put up, too, but most people were standing in the sun, at a distance from the other side, which made it difficult to see details. Speakers were installed at the corners of the field, so people could at least listen to events. Before President Pohamba arrived, Ndilimani's music was played on the PA system. As usual, some people in the audience sported Swapo colours, especially as hats and shirts; a group of women next to me wore traditional ondhelela dresses in the party's distinctive colours. Still, the party insignia blended with the rich variety of signifiers present, especially the colourful dresses and head-scarves of women designating their affiliation to various traditional Nama communities. In this, the audience visibly reflected regional categories of belonging, resulting from demography, of course, but also the special significance of this year's Heroes' Day.

In his speech, Pohamba first acknowledged the presence of Sam Nujoma and John Otto Nankudhu, who was introduced as "war veteran and commander of Omugulu-gwombashe battle".[311] After a minute of silence, he explained the reason for bringing Heroes' Day to Lüderitz and the historic context of the human remains, reburied earlier that day. At length, he dwelt on the contribution, made by the people of southern Namibia for national liberation and the suffering, they endured during the genocide. His speech was significant for the emphasis he laid on recognising southern liberation memory and for contextualising it with the canonised narrative of SWAPO's armed national liberation struggle. Consequently, his speech also included an appraisal of the Ongulumbashe veterans, some of whom were present. He ended with an appeal to unity and reconciliation, and the announcing of the subsequent award ceremony, "to recognise individuals who have contributed in [sic!] special way to the struggle for national liberation and the development of our country, either socially, economically or in other important ways".

As during Independence Day, the bestowal of national orders is an established format of Heroes' Day. During Pohamba's speech, four female soldiers had been standing at attention, who now prepared to assist the President with the awarding. On a table, the honours were arranged. They

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[310] This and the following observations based on my field notes, 26 August 2010.
[311] Statement by His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, on the Occasion of Heroes Day Commemoration, Lüderitz, Karas Region, 26 August 2010.

consisted of a folder, containing a personalised document, and a box with the respective medal. The boxes were available in red, blue, and green, which could be interpreted as national and/or Swapo colours. Then the President conferred the honours to selected individuals, inter alia, Prime Minister Nahas Angula and late Mvula ya Nangolo, Namibia's revered national poet. Also decorated were the Chief of the Hai-ǀkhauan traditional authority of Berseba, Stephanus Goliath, and Ida Jimmy, a female veteran anti-apartheid activist. With Stephanus and Jimmy, two people with recognised struggle credentials from southern Namibia were honoured, which further underlined the general theme of acknowledging the history of southern resistance.

The reburial of 2010 took place in the context of an intensifying public discourse on the history of the genocide, which became even more fervid in 2011 when Namibian human remains from the colonial era were repatriated from Germany (Kössler 2015: 273–315). In that year, Heroes' Day was commemorated in Gobabis, the capital of Omaheke region where in 1904 the German genocide campaign against the Ovaherero had its gravest impact. In the presence of Ghana's President John Atta Mills who attended as guest of honour and an audience of 6,000–7,000 people, President Pohamba reiterated his dedication to commemorate the genocide. After he had thanked Mr. Mills for Ghana's important contribution to Namibia's independence, he spoke at length about the historical significance of the location. Omaheke, he explained, was the site where "gruesome atrocities and war crimes were committed against our people", who nonetheless "fought heroically" against the Germans. He then announced the upcoming repatriation of human remains and their intended storage at the future IMM, where they would "serve to remind the future generations about the atrocities that were committed against our people".[312] His speech continued with an appeal to national unity, after which he devoted himself to domestic and economic policy matters.

As I will analyse in the subsequent chapters, Pohamba's repeated references to southern histories of anticolonial resistance and the genocide have found a lasting expression in Namibia's memorial culture. In 2014, the IMM in Windhoek was finally opened, which features a graphic display of the genocide. It was complemented by a genocide memorial, which is the first state-sponsored monument proper since independence, dedicated to commemorating the genocide. Significantly, both structures replaced the so called *Reiterdenkmal* (equestrian monument), the most important and controversial monument of the German colonial era. This emerging awareness for the history of German colonialism highlights, once again, the complex and complicated relationship between the Swapo government and those communities, which see themselves as the custodians of genocide memory. Since liberation memory is the arena where this relationship intersects most tangibly, it makes sense to take a closer look at the reburial which took place in Lüderitz in 2010.

[312] Statement by His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, on the occasion of Heroes' Day Commemoration, Gobabis, 26 August 2011.

5. Entangled Bones, Unsettled History: Liberation Memory and the Politics of the Dead in Southern Namibia

Simonides of Keos (557–467) is frequently referred to as the inventor of the art of mnemonics (Assmann 2007: 29; Assmann 2003: 27, 35–38). As ancient myth has handed down, or, more precisely, Cicero's rendition of it, Simonides followed an invitation to honour the famous boxer Skopas with a praise poem at a feast at Skopas' estate. After he had delivered his speech, Simonides was asked to come to the door where two strangers demanded to speak to him. When he went outside, looking in vain for his visitors, the building collapsed and buried all guests under its ruins; all, but Simonides. Next to the tragedy of the death of Skopas and all his guests, this brought with it a serious spiritual predicament. Because the dead were shattered by the rubble and mangled beyond recognition, obligatory funerary rites could not be performed. It was at this point that Simonides' special gift as a poet and praise singer came to bear, since he had memorised the seating order of the guests. Through his mnemonic ability, the dead could be identified and properly buried. The symbolism of the legend is captivating: Simonides' *ars memoriae* restored the spiritual order and saved the community from harm. The dead must be buried and laid to rest, or else they will disturb the peace of the living and endanger the well-being of society (Assmann 2003: 38). Let us keep this in mind, when we travel through time and space to another continent and a different burial.

For a weekend in August 2010, national attention in Namibia focused on Lüderitz. The otherwise rather sleepy coastal town in the southwestern periphery of the country had been selected as the venue for Heroes' Day. An armada of politicians, civil servants, security personnel, and media representatives had travelled to Lüderitz and turned the small town into a beehive of activity, giving the local hotel and catering industry a rare and most welcome turnover. Limousines with green government license plates had taken over the streets; travel and subsistence budgets were spent in bars and restaurants. A surprised anthropologist shared his hostel with a group of heavily armed and rather raucuous soldiers, who still accurately represented the republic at five o'clock in the morning. However, despite the mundane routines of the nation-state's bureaucratic machinery, which could be observed in these miniatures, not everything about this Heroes' Day was business as usual. The ceremonial highlight of the event was the solemn reburial of the mortal remains of about 460 people, whose bones had been discovered near Lüderitz in a mass grave in the desert. The bones supposedly originated from the era of the genocide, even though the exact provenance could not be established conclusively – a fact with repercussions that I am going to elaborate on in the following.

Commemorative Liminality: Liberation Memory and the Politics of the Dead

As described in the previous chapter, Heroes' Day is a prominent occasion for funerary ceremonies of national significance. In the case of Lüderitz, the reburial stands out due to the fact that the

respective human remains are said to originate from the German colonial era. In the past, reburials have taken place mostly in northern Namibia to bury PLAN combatants who died during the fighting of April 1989, e.g. in Ondeshifiilwa (1999) and Eenhana (2007). With the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek, a cemetery for national heroes has been established, which includes both symbolic graves of early anticolonial resistance leaders and actual gravesites for veterans of the national liberation struggle. Likewise, the emerging memorial landscape at Ongulumbashe is also used as a burial site for war veterans. At both sites, heroes' funerals have become one of the most important commemorative formats to utilise the monuments, often, but not exclusively, in the context of Heroes' Day. Plans to establish regional Heroes' Acres, based on the model in Zimbabwe, are discussed repeatedly but continue to be stalled due to budgetary constraints.[313]

This commitment regarding the dead and their mortal remains by the Swapo government is significant for various reasons. First of all, there is the obvious aspect of temporality. The dwindling of the community of contemporary witnesses from the struggle era leads to a transformation of communicative memory. With this comes an increase of the symbolic importance of the social category of the 'hero' as an integral part of Swapo's memory politics. This finds a tangible expression in the format of the heroes' funerals. At the same time, this remarkable shift of emphasis on burials and reburials also reflects an increasing public criticism of government policy in this regard. This includes the frustration of Cassinga survivors over the neglect of the mass grave in Angola (Shigwedha 2011: 180–185), the lack of attention paid to the numerous individual sites in northern Namibia, where known and unknown PLAN combatants lie buried and which often are taken care of only by the rural population (Becker 2003: 18–25), or the discontent of a veteran like Simeon Shixungileni, who even refused to be buried at Heroes' Acre or Ongulumbashe. In addition, a major concern especially among Otjiherero- and Nama-speaking Namibians is the question of the status of human remains from the era of anticolonial liberation struggles against German rule and the significance of the genocide in state-sponsored liberation memory. This last point was of central importance in the context of Heroes' Day in 2010.

The reburial in Lüderitz took place against the backdrop of preparations for the repatriation of twenty human skulls by the Charité Berlin in September 2011. Some of the human remains were taken from Namibians who perished during the genocidal war in the central and southern parts of the country and brought to imperial Germany for racist anatomical studies (Kössler 2015: 273–315; Zimmermann 2003). While the actual restitution only took place one year later, the reburial on Heroes' Day in 2010 was affected on various levels by the violent history and absent materiality of the human remains in Germany. The demands for the restitution of human remains and artefacts,

[313] In 2010, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, which is responsible for maintaining heritage sites, told me that his government is indeed considering the establishment of regional Heroes' Acres, since the capacity of the sites in Windhoek and Eenhana is limited. Implementation, however, would need input and action from the regional councils; see interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010; see also "Presidency slams minority-only benefits", *Namibian Sun*, 18 January 2013; "War veterans get tombstones", *The Namibian*, 13 December 2013; "War veterans want 14 regional heroes acres", *The Namibian*, 29 June 2018.

kept in German museum collections and research institutions, were and continue to be a central feature of liberation memory in southern Namibia.[314] Traditional authorities, as custodians of the memory of the genocide, play a central role in commemorating the war of resistance and representing the unsettled claims of its victims. Human remains, in this context, have become a key site and medium of liberation memory.

In her analysis of the "political lives of dead bodies", Verdery (1999) has underlined the importance of reburials to signify political transformation and the re-evaluation of historical events or personae. The dead have a specific potential to animate politics and it is especially the combination of their dismal materiality as evidence and their ambiguous voicelessness, which makes them powerful and sought-after as objects of appropriation. Especially where communities lay claim to biographies of the dead and identify with their life stories and histories, the agency of dead people becomes apparent (Verdery 1999: 28–29). They turn into "unusually ambiguous, protean symbols [with] histories, often deep ones, that further multiply the associations they provide as resources for creating meaning and legitimacy in moments of political contention" (Verdery 1999: 52). In the case of Namibia, the political transformation obviously relates to the end of South African foreign rule and national independence. The significant increase of reburials in recent years, however, suggests that there are also other factors at play, related to the memory politics of Southern African liberation struggles.

In his studies on the "politics of the dead" in Zimbabwe, Fontein (2010, 2009) has explored the close relation of postcolonial liberation memory with human remains and spirituality, by drawing on Latour to emphasise the agency of dead bodies. He has made a convincing argument to show how national commemoration in Zimbabwe is continuously challenged by the unceasing emergence of mass graves with bodies from the era of *chimurenga* struggles, referring to the armed resistance against British and later Rhodesian colonial rule. Likewise, veterans are haunted by the spirits of dead comrades, who are buried in other countries and want to return home (Fontein 2010: 426, see also 2009 and Kriger 1995). A result of this spiritual unsettledness is the frequent occurrence of exhumations and reburials, which quite often happen to be organised single-handedly by veterans' organisations, village communities, or traditional authorities. For the postcolonial state, which uses national commemoration and heritage policy as "normalizing processes" (Fontein 2010: 429), the agency of the dead can pose a threat to its authority about the past: "The resurfacing bones haunting Zimbabwe's postcolonial milieu are active in the way they retort silenced pasts back to the present […]; spirit subjects which continue to make demands upon society" (Fontein 2010: 431). In their "emotive materiality" and "affective presence" (Fontein 2010: 431), the dead are haunting the living and especially the state, demanding settlement and peace.

[314] The recent repatriation of Hendrik Witbooi's bible and whip by Stuttgart's Linden-Museum to Namibia is a case in point (Kössler 2019). During my research in southern Namibia, I was repeatedly asked about the bible and its whereabouts, also by members of the Witbooi family. It has a multi-layered significance as a Witbooi family heirloom, a token of Nama identity related to the genocide, and a national symbol.

As Fontein has highlighted in great detail, the material and ritual dimension of reburials thus offers profound insights on how categories are made and unmade, how bodies are transformed to bones, and how bones become heroes, martyrs, and comrades. By analysing the reburial in Lüderitz as politics of the dead, it will be possible to understand the importance of turning dead people into political symbols and the influence they wield on the negotiation of national belonging in postcolonial Namibia. At the same time, the materiality of the dead and their "ambivalent agency as both 'persons' and 'objects'" (Fontein 2009: 18) exceeds the confines of mere semiotics. The dead who are waiting to be buried are caught in a state of commemorative liminality, haunting the living as reminders of a past unsettled. As such, they constitute an 'absent presence' (Dunker 2003: 12) from the era of the liberation struggle and the genocide. Not surprisingly due to its inherent polysemy, it was on the occasion of Heroes' Day that the living laid claims on the dead and the dead forced the living to negotiate the social categories of belonging in the nation-state.

Bones of Contention, Part 1: Heroes' Day in Lüderitz

The decision of the Namibian government to stage the 2010 Heroes' Day in Lüderitz carried symbolic weight for various reasons. In the year of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence, any choice of location other than Ongulumbashe obviously imbued the commemoration with special significance. For despite its peripheral regional status, in terms of history Lüderitz is a place of enormous importance. It was here where in 1883 German merchants and colonial agents Adolf Lüderitz and Heinrich Vogelsang first purchased land from Chief Joseph Frederick of the !Aman community seated in Bethanie. The purchase was based on fraudulent terms (Wallace 2011: 116–117) and effectively enabled German colonial authorities to issue protection treaties. Lüderitz thus became the entry point of successive colonial conquest and the establishment of German settler colonialism (Wallace 2011: 115–154).

Moreover, the name and place of Lüderitz is associated with the Shark Island prison camp, where the German Schutztruppe interned insurgent Namibians during the colonial wars, mostly Ovaherero, Nama, and Damara.[315] As a result of forced labour, executions, exposure and neglect, about three quarters of the prisoners lost their lives (Erichsen 2008a, 2005: 71–145; Zimmerer 2008). In his pioneering study, Erichsen has established that 3,000–4,000 prisoners died during the camp's existence 1905–1907; in railway construction alone, the death rate among forced labourers amounted to 60–70% (Erichsen 2005: 133). Next to Shark Island, several other prison camps existed

[315] The role of Damara in the wars and the genocide still is a historiographical blank space, also resulting from the long durée of colonial ethnography, which tended to characterise Damara as a distinct ethnicity where in reality social boundaries among Khoekhoegowab-speakers were highly fluid (Wallace 2011: 160–161, 178; Erichsen 2008: 15–20; Gaseb 2000; Lau 1995: 10–15). In recent years, Namibians who identify as ethnic Damara have increased their lobby work to be acknowledged as victims of the genocide and to be represented in the political process of negotiating reparations with Germany (Kössler 2015: 227, 268, 2008: 331).

throughout the colony, e.g. in Swakopmund (Zeller 2008; Gaydish 2000), Okahandja and Windhoek (Erichsen 2005: 42–49), which were characterised by similar conditions of cruelty and mass death.

An Absent Presence: Shark Island as a Traumatic Site of Genocide

The anticolonial wars of resistance are important points of reference for liberation memory, both for the postcolonial nation-state and the traditional communities, which see themselves as the custodians of this past. For them, liberation memory centres not only on communal histories of resistance, but also on the experience of genocide, disappropriation, and disenfranchisement. While the heroic aspects of the anticolonial wars have largely been canonised by national liberation memory – illustrated by the ubiquitous evocation of male resistance leaders: "the Witboois, the Mahareros, the ya Tshilongos" – in political discourse, the status of the former concentration camps is still precarious and ambivalent. In this context it makes sense to conceptualise Shark Island as a 'traumatic site', defined by Aleida Assmann as 'a place which retains the virulence of an event as a past, which does not go by nor recede into the distance'.[316]

In Swakopmund, a town characterised by its German colonial architecture and a nostalgic tourism adhering to it, the remains of the concentration camp have been removed from the public cityscape. The only visible remnant is a vast site of unmarked graves outside the boundaries of the official, public cemetery, bordering the desert, where hundreds of former camp inmates have been buried. A wall had to be erected to protect the site from tourists using quad bikes in the desert dunes, damaging the graves. In 2007, a monument was erected by the Ovaherero-Ovambanderu Genocide and Reparation Coastal Committee, to commemorate those who died in the camp.[317]

While in Swakopmund, the memory of the concentration camp is rendered void by an absence of markers, in the case of the Windhoek camp absence is characterised by a profusion of ambiguous markers: first by the erection of the German colonial *Reiterdenkmal* on the site of the former camp in 1912, then by the monument's relocation and removal in 2009 and 2013, respectively; finally, by the construction of the IMM in its place. It was only in 2014, that the postcolonial government inaugurated the first official state-sponsored memorial to commemorate the genocide, built next to the *Alte Feste* military fort and the new museum.

[316] My own translation from German: "Der traumatische Ort hält die Virulenz eines Ereignisses als Vergangenheit fest, die nicht vergeht, die nicht in die Distanz zurückzutreten vermag" (Assmann 2003: 329).
[317] "Memorial Stone Unveiled to Mark Ovaherero Genocide", *New Era*, 3 April 2007.

Fig. 17: Genocide memorial, Swapomund, inaug. in 2007; note the burial heaps in the background. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

In Lüderitz, memory is comparably elusive and ambiguous, especially in light of the central role the Shark Island concentration camp has played in the genocide. Largely devoid of vegetation and exposed to the harsh climate of the Atlantic, Shark Island gives the visitor an impression of the extreme conditions under which the prisoners were exposed to the elements. It is noteworthy that there is a state-run campsite on Shark Island (now a peninsula), but no official monument to commemorate the suffering on the island, not even an information board to educate visitors about the people who died in this place.[318] Instead, like a palimpsest, Shark Island is dominated by an abundance of colonial monuments that overwrite the genocidal history of the place with imperial grandeur. The ensemble of colonial monuments consists of a monument for German Schutztruppe soldiers who died during the colonial wars, another one dedicated to German residents of Lüderitz whose mortal remains were reburied on the island in 1976, as well as memorial plates dedicated to

[318] At least that was the status quo when I last visited the island in September 2012. Since then, to my knowledge and at the time of writing, this has not changed.

Adolf Lüderitz, Heinrich Vogelsang, and Amry Klink, a Brazilian adventurer who was the first person to row across the Atlantic from Lüderitz to Salvador (Brazil) in 1984.

The !Aman of Bethanie are one of the Nama communities who were almost in their entirety deported to Shark Island, together with the Veldschoendragers and Witboois. After Chief Cornelius Frederick surrendered to German forces following the !Aman's defeat at Gochas in January 1906, by March 235 men and 176 women followed their Chief into captivity on Shark Island (Wallace 2011: 170). The majority of them perished in the concentration camp (Wallace 2011: 178), including Cornelius Frederick, who died on 16 February 1907 (Erichsen 2005: 126). In the present, the preservation of the memory of the Shark Island camp and its role in the genocide has been spearheaded by the !Aman traditional authority under late Chief David Frederick (1932–2018). The activities of the traditional authority and the Frederick family include national and international political lobby work, in order to hold Germany accountable and repatriate human remains, the organising of commemorative events on Shark Island and other places in the region, as well as efforts to memorialise the history of the camp and the genocide. One of the most tangible expressions of this commitment was the erection of a monument on Shark Island in 2005 to commemorate the resistance and demise of Cornelius Frederick and his clan in German captivity.

The monument, which is an obvious and intended intervention into the colonial memorial landscape on the island, was financed and constructed single-handedly by the traditional authority and the clan, without participation from the government. The memorial slab, like most of its kind in Namibia, is made of precious Karibib marble. The slogan, "We Commemorate Our Heroes", is etched on top. Below, a heroic depiction of Cornelius Frederick with a smoking rifle takes centre stage, followed by the inscription:

Captain Cornelius Fredericks
1864–1907
With 167 men 97 women 66 children
Sons Daughters and Children of !Ama Community
Bethanie – Namibia

As I was told by Brigitte Frederick, a grand-daughter of late Chief Frederick, the stone was placed on the island in 2005 first in a horizontal position. Later, on the occasion of the centenary commemoration of Cornelius Frederick's death in 2007, Brigitte and several other members of the clan moved the monument into an upright position.[319] According to !Aman traditional councillor Manfred Anderson, who was also involved in setting up the monument, the purpose to place the stone upright was to take care that it towers above the memorial of Adolf Lüderitz: "it has been lying flat, and we as the younger generation felt that it was adding insult to injury […]. We thought

[319] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012. Brigitte is actively involved in the clan's cultural and political activities. At the time of my research, she was an elected representative of Swapo in the Lüderitz Town Council and has since been elected Deputy Mayor of Lüderitz.

that you have all the oppressors in higher positions, and that's the reason why we moved it from there and put it on the highest point. And if someone comes and put a German plaque up there, we raise it even higher".[320] Since then, the Frederick memorial is the first monument, visitors encounter when they enter Shark Island. At the time of writing, it also remains the only explicit reminder of the history of the genocide and the concentration camp on Shark Island.

Fig. 18: Genocide memorial, Shark Island, Lüderitz, inaug. in 2005. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

I discussed this striking lack of recognition of the history of Shark Island with numerous people from the region during my research stay. For many, whether !Aman or not, this absence was an expression of a deep-rooted marginalisation of the country's South, in terms of political representation, economic development, and the acknowledgement of the contribution of southern communities to liberation. Against this background, the !Aman's 'symbolic re-appropriation' (Kössler 2015: 269) of Shark Island by means of the monument and the 2007 centenary commemoration puts a spotlight on some of the major fault lines of liberation memory in

[320] Interview with Manfred Anderson, Shark Island, 27 August 2010.

independent Namibia. First of all, there still is a continuing dominance of colonial memorial culture, in particular of the German era, which is only gradually reconfiguring. Second, the representation of localised memory often intersects and conflicts with the memory politics of the nation-state. Third, the Frederick monument mediates memory in a primarily group-based way, which does not mention other communities who died on Shark Island. These complexities and contestations manifested themselves in the reburial of human remains in Lüderitz on the occasion of Heroes' Day 2010.

The Context of the Reburial

The human remains to be reburied were discovered in the so called Sperrgebiet, a section of the desert bordering Lüderitz sealed off for commercial diamond mining. According to Manfred Anderson, who had access to the area as an officer of the Protected Resources Unit of the Namibian police, it was "[m]yself and a group of my investigators […] that stumbled upon and eventually sort of discovered those skeleton human remains in 1995".[321] The site that Manfred and his colleagues had found turned out to be a mass grave from the late nineteenth, early twentieth century: entangled bones in shallow sand, unsettled history. Due to erosion and wild animals, bones were scattered all over the place. To seal off the site, Namdeb, the parastatal diamond company managing the area, erected a protective fence.[322] Ever since the discovery of the bones, the !Aman traditional authority had been actively lobbying for the local and central government to support a dignified reburial of the bones, preferably on Shark Island to uplift the status of the historical site.

In 2005, President Pohamba mandated the Ministry of Youth, National Services, Sport and Culture to look into the matter, under the supervision of Permanent Secretary Peingeondjabi Shipoh, since his ministry is responsible for heritage matters. As the late Mr. Shipoh told me, he conducted an on-site inspection on 1 April 2006, after which he recommended to have the human remains removed and reburied. The President accepted his recommendation and tasked him to organise the reburial.[323] Initially, Shark Island was discussed as a possible location to erect a sepulchral shrine for the human remains, also following consultations with the traditional authority.[324] However, since the burial should take place as an act of state on Heroes' Day as ordered by the President and Shark Island did not provide enough space for such a ceremony, the idea was rejected.

Another site that was inspected, but equally dismissed for logistical reasons according to PS Shipoh, was the Lüderitz laguna, where also some of the victims of the Shark Island concentration camp are said to be buried. At the time of our interview, public discourse on human remains in Lüderitz mostly focused on the bones found in the Sperrgebiet. The existence of a large number of

[321] Interview with Manfred Anderson, Shark Island, 27 August 2010; see also Erichsen 2008b: 25–28.
[322] "Struggle remains to be reburied", *New Era*, 25 August 2010. As several people told me, the fence dilapidated rather quickly due to extremely harsh climate conditions.
[323] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010. Even though PS Shipoh studied in Germany and speaks fluent German, we still conducted our interviews in English.
[324] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010. This was confirmed by my interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.

graves near the laguna, originating from the time of the genocide, was a well-known fact for members of the traditional authority and local residents, but not really public knowledge in the rest of the country.[325] Instead, the decision was made to rebury the dead on the municipal cemetery, where enough space was available to have a military parade and a state-ceremony.[326] During our follow-up interview, PS Shipoh added that technical reasons played a role in the decision against Shark Island and the laguna, too. According to him, it would not have been possible on Shark Island to use a crane for lifting the slabs, while at the laguna site "we discovered there was no place to put a grave there".[327]

The Permanent Secretary's explanation, regarding the decision against Shark Island as a place for creating a memorial shrine, is noteworthy, given the site's symbolic importance. According to Hardmut Frederick, a son of the late Chief, the government's decision to build the memorial shrine on the ground of the public cemetery was condoned by the Chief and also supported by the Mayor of Lüderitz Emilia Amupewa.[328] Another factor that might have had an impact on the decision, not mentioned by the PS, but Brigitte Frederick, was an apparent struggle for competence over Shark Island between state-owned Namibia Wildlife Resorts, responsible for managing the camp site on the island, and the local authority. According to Brigitte, on the occasion of her attendance at the 2007 centenary genocide commemoration on Shark Island, then Prime Minister Libertina Amathila promised the clan to establish a memorial site on Shark Island. So far, however, nothing had happened. "If the local authority will get it", she added, "there is a possibility that we might go as stakeholders, but [...] I don't think that we will ever be able to declare it as [national] heritage".[329] Discussions over the uplifting of the official status of Shark Island had been going on for more than a decade, to little avail. It was only in April 2018 that the NHC apparently submitted a recommendation to the line ministry to declare Shark Island a national heritage site.[330] The motion was finally accepted in March 2019.[331]

For Brigitte and her family, Shark Island obviously has a special significance, which highlights intersecting affiliations: between family, clan, and nation as overlapping mnemonic communities; between traditional authority and state, with often diverging interests; and in Brigitte's case also in terms of her political identity as a Swapo member, vis-à-vis her party's memory politics. The planning process of the reburial and ultimately also its ceremonial procedure reflected these intersecting and conflicting positionalities along the lines of three major issues of concern: the origin

[325] The government's position regarding the laguna graves was a cause for conflict with the traditional authority, as I will explore further below.
[326] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010.
[327] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010. This is quite remarkable, since this is where the traditional authority erected a shrine by its own (see below).
[328] Informal conversation with Hardmut Frederick, Lüderitz, 30 October 2012.
[329] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012. At that time, Shark Island did not lie within the bounds of the local council's administrative authority.
[330] Application according to Section 30 (4) of the National Heritage Act (Act 27 of 2004); see "Shark Island could become heritage site", *The Namibian*, 25 April 2018.
[331] "Shark island declared heritage site", *The Namibian*, 11 March 2019.

of the dead, their categorisation as 'national martyrs', and the recognition of traditional authority and southern identity.

Contested Bones: The Origin of the Dead

The origin of the human remains was an issue of contestation throughout the whole reburial process. According to PS Shipoh, the reburial was organised both in consultation with the regional government and the local traditional authority. The latter, because

> the belief is that most of the people that were buried there, the majority, might have come from the area, that means the Namas, although we can have also traces of the Hereros, the Owambos, and other tribes, because of the link to the diamond mining. So there could be also some people that died and were buried there from this and that, but the majority comes from the ǁKaras region and therefore we consulted the traditional authority as well[332]

At the same time, the PS emphasised that he and government were aware that different theories made the rounds regarding the origin of the bones. In addition to the above mentioned, i.e. local Nama, and Northerners working in the diamond mines, these referred to people who might have died because of an influenza epidemic in 1915, different graves merged together in the course of the mining activities, or PLAN combatants, killed by the South African army and disposed of in the desert, since some bodies apparently contained relics of military uniforms. His team had been doing interviews with local people and a final report was being prepared.[333]

PS Shipoh made it clear that the government believes the dead to be predominantly Nama, but that the provenance of the human remains had not been conclusively established. A thorough forensic investigation of the human remains was not conducted prior to the reburial, even though PS Shipoh did not rule out DNA testing, conducted at a later stage.[334] In 2012, Brigitte Frederick recalled that government officials approached her grandfather to help facilitating forensic tests and even 'asked for teeth' from unburied human remains, yet the family was not notified about possible results.[335] The dead remained officially unidentified and their bones became an object of contested ownership.

For most of my non-Oshiwambo-speaking interlocutors in Lüderitz and Bethanie it was obvious that the dead were victims of Shark Island and Nama, in particular. For Manfred, who found the bones in the desert and who, as a traditional councillor, also spoke as a custodian of local tradition and oral history, there was nothing to debate about their Nama origin: "those bones that were scattered in the area, [it] was not by their own volition that they were buried there, they would

[332] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010.
[333] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010. In a follow-up interview in November 2011, PS Shipoh considered a report on the provenance of the human remains still pending. I could not establish whether it has eventually been released; see also "The Stories of Shark Island", *New Era*, 31 August 2009.
[334] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.
[335] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.

have liked to be moved back to Aus and Bethanie. And how do the Nama feel about all of this? We feel sad, we feel angry!"[336] For a local representative of the political opposition, the origin of the bones was also without question: "Now these are Nama bones, bones of the Nama that was either slaughtered by the Germans during the Nama-Herero uprising of those times […], or they succumbed to some kind of epidemic or whatever that we do not know about."[337] During my interview with Brigitte, she repeatedly emphasised that it was "our remains", optionally referring to her family, her clan, and the Nama people in general.[338] In more official guise and on the eve of Heroes' Day, the Mayor of Lüderitz explained during an interview with NBC's eight o' clock news that the human remains originate from the victims of Shark Island. Since they had fought for the country's liberation, they deserved a "decent burial".[339]

The reburial of the bones, together with the contemporary debate about the restitution of Namibian human remains in German museum collections and institutional archives, had great meaning for many people in Bethanie and Lüderitz. Not least due to the fate of Kaptein Cornelius Frederick, since it is a common topos in local oral history that he was posthumously decapitated and his skull sent to Germany for anatomical studies (Biwa 2012: 145–146). Even though Kössler (2015: 282) points out that accounts of oral and academic history differ regarding this particular case, the issue of skulls, taken from decapitated chiefs and sent to Germany strongly affected the Namibian discourse on the issue of human remains in German collections (Förster 2010: 350–351).[340] Liberation memory in Namibia, especially among communities affected by the genocide, is closely interwoven with narratives of stolen bones and body parts (Biwa 2012: 144–146).[341]

For many years, Nama traditional authorities in southern Namibia have been active in making the issue of colonial-era human remains, both at home and in Germany, a political matter (Kössler 2015: 273–315). In this, David Frederick played a central role not only as Chief of the !Aman but also as long standing chairperson of the Nama Traditional Leaders Association. Speaking with the authority of these offices and his clan's close connection to the history of Shark Island, he became one of the most noticeable voices in the Namibian discourse on genocide (Kössler 2015: 269–271).[342] Consequently, in September 2011 he was part of the Namibian delegation which travelled to Berlin to repatriate the first consignment of Namibian human remains. With the intended reburial in Lüderitz, the efforts of the Chief, his family, and the !Aman traditional authority to make the

[336] Interview with Manfred Anderson, Shark Island, 27 August 2010.
[337] Interview with Phyllicia Hercules, Lüderitz, 27 August 2010. She was one of several RDP members; I talked to in the run-up to Heroes' Day to get an impression on the perspectives of the political opposition regarding national ceremonies.
[338] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.
[339] Field notes, 25 August 2010.
[340] See also "Herero and Nama petition Govt for return of ancestral skulls", *The Namibian*, 2 October 2009.
[341] A prominent case is Manasse !Noreseb (1840–1905), Chief of the Kai-ǁKhaun of Hoachanas, who was killed in battle against German troops and purportedly decapitated (Biwa 2012: 146). Another example is the recurring debate on the whereabouts of the head of Kwanyama Chief Mandume ya Ndemufayo (1894–1917), who died fighting South African forces (Shiweda 2005: 33–56; Hillebrecht 1993: 26).
[342] See also "Tribute to Chief David Frederick", *New Era*, 26 January 2018.

history of Shark Island and the unsolved problem of genocide-era human remains a national matter, finally seemed to bear fruits.

Fig. 19: The late Chiefs P.S.M. Kooper (centre) and David Frederick (right) at the restitution ceremony in Berlin, 29 September 2011. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2011).

Activities of the Lüderitz town council also reflected this national significance in the run-up to the reburial. Efforts were made to identify and upgrade genocide-related heritage, including plans to restore further burial sites from the era of the colonial wars, to collect oral history about the genocide, and to have Shark Island recognised as a world heritage site. It was even discussed, initially, to bury the human remains from Germany alongside those of the Sperrgebiet.[343] The genocide of the Nama people at the hands of German colonisers and the traumatic history of Shark Island were supposed to become a national issue after all. Heroes' Day, as a national institution with a southern focus on the genocide, promised important symbolic capital in the protracted negotiations of the Nama traditional authorities with Germany for restitution and reparations. This, however, came at odds with the debate on the origin of the dead, which were to be reburied in Lüderitz.

While PS Shipoh had situated the human remains more or less in the context of regional and Nama history, not overemphasising anticolonial resistance, a slightly different perspective was offered by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana. As chairman of the sub-committee for information and publicity during Namibia's twentieth independence jubilee, he was responsible for the government's public relations regarding the reburial, especially for state-owned media like NBC, the Namibian Press Agency and

[343] "The Stories of Shark Island", *New Era*, 31 August 2009. Due to repeated delays in the restitution process, the human remains were only handed over to a Namibian delegation in September 2011.

New Era. When I interviewed him a week after the ceremony on the significance of the reburial, he explained:

> Notwithstanding whether [the human remains] arose from the German genocide against some of our communities or they are remnants and outcome of the apartheid war in Namibia, of some liberation combatants, freedom fighters. The fact of the matter is that they are human remains and could not just [be] left scattering all over the place, and this is part of the 20th anniversary because since 1990 we have been discovering human remains here and there, we have been raising shrines in various regions, that is the policy that government has taken, that where human remains are discovered there should be a commemorative shrine, so that the people of the region can have a place that they can go to and gather in homage to the fallen heroes and heroines. So, the southern region has their place that they can go to and remember the blood that waters our freedom[344]

PS Ua-Ndjarakana mentioned the unclear provenance of the dead, too, yet underlined the significance of the human remains as symbols of national liberation memory. He also referred to "liberation combatants, freedom fighters", meaning PLAN combatants. This possibility, that SWAPO fighters were among the dead, eventually entered the public discourse in the run-up to the reburial, to some extent also fuelled by the government's speech policy.

A day before Heroes' Day, one could read in state-owned *New Era*, which reported frequently on the reburial and the history of Shark Island, that "[t]hose being reburied [are] believed to be former freedom fighters of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN)",[345] i.e. SWAPO combatants. This interpretation, whenever mentioned by me in interviews and informal conversations with Nama-speaking Namibians from the region, often led to disbelief, sarcasm, or outright indignation. As I will demonstrate later on, the way the human remains were buried and the ceremony was handled, invigorated such a view. The fact that no forensic testing was done, also gave rise to fears of a different kind. In a letter to the editor, historian and genocide activist Festus Muundjua expressed his concern that government might bury the 'wrong' people as heroes. He advised his fellow Namibians, "to stay the burial", until it was proven that the bones rightfully deserved heroes' status:

> Would our government or our President, for that matter, be happy or not be embarrassed if one day it turns out that the very bones being commemorated with all the officialdom on the 26th August 2010 are the bones of the likes of the Van Riebeecks, Vasco da Gamas, Bartholomeuz Diaz? […] Would such be deserving or qualify to be accorded such an honour as 'heroes' or 'heroines', which they are not?[346]

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344 Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 1 September 2010.
345 "Struggle remains to be reburied", *New Era*, 25 August 2010.
346 "Let's stay the burial", *New Era*, 20 August 2010.

As PS Shipoh had explained, and given the broad range of possible origins of the human remains, it could not be ruled out that some of the bones belonged to people of European descent who fell victim to a flu epidemic or whose remains somehow got lost in the course of successive relocations of gravesites.

The fears of spiritual contamination with colonialism voiced by Muundjua are reminiscent of what Fontein (2010, 2009) described for Zimbabwe, where human remains play an equally important role in the politics of postcolonial nation-building and liberation memory. Mass graves from the era of the armed liberation struggle continue to surface, often containing the bones of fighters of different liberation movements and soldiers of the Rhodesian colonial army alike. Since reburials are a well-established format of liberation memory in Zimbabwe, too, a lot of people felt uneasy with the prospect of 'colonial contamination'. Late Robert Mugabe himself, as the country's foremost "historian" (Ranger 2004: 221), once poignantly explained this challenge: "How do you distinguish the good bones from the bad bones? The heroic ones from the fascist ones and so on?" (in: Kriger 1995: 144). He seemingly advocated for funerary pragmatism in the name of nation-building, just like the Namibian government did not invest much effort in identifying the dead of Lüderitz. Their identity remained deliberately open to interpretation, whether by volition, contingency, or lack of resources, or a combination of all. Again, in PS Shipoh's words:

> the reburial had to take place in Lüderitz because that's where the human remains were found. And again, there is an issue of identity. These are human remains, there were no faces and there is no historical record, written or oral, that suggests who they could be. So we are all speculating. And that's why we are conducting research as to who these people could be. But that will only be useful then, just to aid us in the records and not again to be used during the reburial, because that had to take place. You couldn't just allow the human remains to be there where they are […] while we are finishing the research[347]

Whatever the results of an eventual forensic investigation may or may not bring to light, the organisers of the reburial made sure that the dead, (re-)buried in Lüderitz on Heroes' Day 2010, entered national memory not as 'Namas' or 'victims of genocide', but 'national martyrs'.

Nationalising Human Remains

The memorial shrine for the reburial was erected on a vacant lot on the southern edge of the Lüderitz cemetery, technically outside of the cemetery grounds. It consists of six large burial chambers, sealed by plain black granite slabs. The chambers bear coffins, which were specially designed to store the human remains. Initially, the Ministry of Culture estimated that about 30–50 skeletons were to be buried and accordingly planned compartments. More detailed investigation of

[347] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.

the mass grave revealed, however, that it contained remains of up to 474 people, and so the number of burial chambers and coffins was doubled.[348]

Each of the tomb slabs carries an engraving of a quiver tree (*Aloe dichotoma*), which is a characteristic symbol for representing Namibia's South. It gives the ǁKaras region its name and also carries meaning as a national symbol. The design of the tree was done by Joseph Madisia (*1954), one of Namibia's most renowned contemporary visual artists, who at the time was also the Director of the National Art Gallery. According to PS Shipoh, the motif of the quiver tree was suggested by the local community, which was consulted by his ministry in order to adequately represent 'the identity of the people' in the South.[349]

Fig. 20: National martyrs' monument, Lüderitz, the day before the inauguration on 26 August 2010. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

On the two central plates, which cover the burial chambers, the date of the inauguration ("Unveiled on 26 August 2010 By Hifikepunye Pohamba H.E. President of the Republic of Namibia") and a dedication are engraved: "Herein rest the remains of over 460 Martyrs of Anti-Colonial Struggle, may their souls rest in Eternal Peace". This combination of date and dedication, which according to PS Shipoh was worded by his technical committee and approved by the Prime Minister, clearly imbues the monument with national significance. Despite the unclear provenance of the human remains, a categorical shift from 'anonymous dead' to 'martyrs of the liberation

[348] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 17 August 2010.
[349] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.

struggle' had taken place: the dead were elevated to national symbols. This semiotic transformation of the dead into martyrs of the nation was ritually validated by an act of state at the cemetery.[350]

Fig. 21: National martyrs' monument, Lüderitz, after the inauguration on 26 August 2010. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

The ceremony took place early in the morning and preceded the event of Heroes' Day proper at the Lüderitz stadium. Protocol commenced with a military parade on the dirt road which connects the cemetery with the main road. The parade included all units of the NDF, i.e. guard of honour, air force, navy, and infantry, led by the military brass band. Behind the marching parade, a white army pick-up truck followed, which was escorted by four soldiers. The car's bed contained a wooden coffin, decorated with the Namibian flag. The car passed the crowd of maybe 100–150 people, who waited lined-up along the track. The crowd was dotted with occasional Swapo colours, scarfs mostly, and the traditional attire of Nama women, while most people wore dark dresses and suits.

The car stopped next to a red carpet, which was laid out between a VIP-tent, accommodating seated guests of honour, and the memorial tomb. Then a group of nine soldiers stepped forward and prepared to act as pallbearers. They carried the coffin, which was seemingly heavy, to the open vault. A detail of thirteen soldiers stood at attention, lined up behind the tomb, while the coffin was prepared to be lowered into the vault. In the meantime, a second army car arrived, this time without an escort, with a second flag-clad coffin on its bed. The pallbearers returned and carried this coffin

[350] As explained in the introduction, I was forcibly removed from the cemetery by the military police shortly before the ceremony began. The following description of the act of state is a condensed summary of the official television broadcast, which I acquired at NBC, media reporting, interviews and informal conversations with several people who either attended the event or watched it on television, as well as the official programme.

to the tomb as well, placing it next to the first one. A higher-ranking soldier readjusted the flags, which had shifted a bit due to the heavy Lüderitz wind.

Next, the master of ceremonies Stephanus Goliath of the ǀHai-ǀkhauan traditional authority of Berseba announced the national anthem, which was played by the brass band. This was followed by a prayer, delivered by Pastor Andreas Biwa of Vaalgras. With the prayer still going on, the 13 soldiers turned and presented their arms. A higher-ranking soldier inspected their formation and demonstrated the correct foot positioning. Then, to the lowering of the coffins into the vault, the soldiers performed the three volley salute. After this, in correct military protocol a soldier of the honour guard played *Taps* and *Last Post* on the trumpet. Pastor Biwa concluded his prayer with a blessing for the dead.

Finally, the wreath-laying ceremony took place. Members of the honour guard stood at attention next to the edge of the red carpet, where the wreaths were draped on the floor. President Pohamba was the first to pay his respects. When he stepped forward, three soldiers of the honour guard joined him and moved ahead of him in step, the first moving in front, saluting, while the other two carried the wreath to the tomb and placed it on a pedestal. The President stepped in front of the wreath, re-arranged the banner, paused in silent devotion for a moment, and then bowed his head to honour the dead. He was followed by Sam Nujoma, announced as the "Founding President", who was also accompanied by three honour guard soldiers, to repeat the same ceremony.

After Nujoma, the following guests of honour continued the wreath-laying, now only accompanied by one soldier who carried their respective wreath: Prime Minister Nahas Angula, Speaker of the National Assembly Theo-Ben Gurirab, Chairman of the National Council Asser Kapere, Chief Justice Peter Shivute, Ambassador of the Republic of Angola and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Manuel Alexandre Duarte Rodrigues, King of the Ondonga Royal House and Chairman of the Council of Traditional Leaders Immanuel Kauluma, Acting Chief of the NDF Major-General Petrus Kagadhinwa Nambundunga, and finally, Ongulumbashe veteran John Otto Nankudhu in uniform. With the singing of the hymns of the AU and Namibia, the reburial ceremony came to an end, and the dignitaries, soldiers, journalists, and spectators relocated to the Lüderitz sports stadium for the Heroes' Day main event.

The reburial ceremony followed the protocol of a military funeral, which accorded the nameless dead the honour to be recognised as soldiers who died for the nation. All organs of state, including the military, traditional authority, and the Founding Father, paid the dead their respects. By means of the ceremony and the memorial shrine, the dead were transformed into national martyrs. Despite their heterogeneous backgrounds, they were collectively re-categorised and officially written into the ever-expanding heroic narrative of the struggle for national liberation and independence. In his Heroes' Day keynote address at the Lüderitz stadium, President Pohamba commented on the contested issue of provenance and reiterated the position of his government regarding the human remains:

> Common decency demands that we treat the departed with dignity, even our enemies. […] I wish to state that, as a Government, we are fully aware that the deaths of persons whose remains we buried today may have different causes that may have occurred at different time periods. Some may originate from the war of 1904 to 1908, yet others may come from latter periods and events, such as the years of the diamond mining rush […] and indeed the national armed liberation struggle when the remains of some PLAN combatants and civilians who went missing without trace may have been disposed of in these areas by the agents of apartheid. […] Be that as it may, they all deserve a decent burial which they may not have received after their deaths. Hence, we decided that we will not be deterred in our duty to pay respect to them regardless of what the cause of their deaths might have been.[351]

Apart from this quite pragmatic stance, which also implied that it was possible for former enemies to be included into the community of national martyrs, Pohamba also addressed the regional aspects of the reburial.

As mentioned before, the decision to stage Heroes' Day in Lüderitz in the year of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence already carried symbolic weight. This was underlined by the then Minister of Justice and Secretary-General of Swapo Party Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana, who explained two weeks before the ceremony that this decision was "a remembrance of the massacre of innocent lives by German colonial forces in the Southern parts of Namibia".[352] In his speech, the President equally emphasised the important history of anticolonial resistance in southern Namibia:

> Cabinet considered the long history of resistance waged by our brave forebearers against the forces of colonialism. […] With their blood and their suffering, they paved the road towards nationhood and independence of our country and her people. Their gallantry inspired the latter generations of freedom fighters to wage the national liberation struggle until final victory was achieved when the flag of nationhood was hoisted on 21st March 1990. In this part of the country, brave warriors such as Hendrik Witbooi, Commandant Jakob Marengo and many others waged fierce battles against colonial forces in defence of our Motherland.[353]

The characteristic rhetoric of Swapo's heroic nationalism was still unmistakably emanating from his words. Still, the President incorporated the history of southern resistance into the narrative of national liberation by acknowledging historical freedom fighters such as Hendrik Witbooi and Jakob Morenga. Throughout his speech, he referred to the people in southern Namibia who resisted German colonialism, who fought, suffered, and died on Shark Island as "our people"; the ethnonym

[351] Statement by His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, on the Occasion of Heroes' Day Commemoration, Lüderitz, 26 August 2010.
[352] "Lüderitz chosen as venue for Heroes' Day commemorations", *Windhoek Observer*, 14 August 2010.
[353] Statement by His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, on the Occasion of Heroes' Day Commemoration, Lüderitz, 26 August 2010.

‘Nama’ was not mentioned once. Southern resistance was acknowledged, without being framed in terms of ethnicity.

This was also illustrated by the awarding of medals to selected Nama-speaking authorities. Joel Stephanus, Chief of the Vaalgras traditional authority; Stephanus Goliath, acting Chief of the ǀHai-ǀkhauan traditional authority of Berseba; Hendrik Frederick, former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Namibia, all received orders for their contribution to the national liberation struggle. Posthumously awarded was Hendrik Witbooi (1934–2009), the great-grandson of the famous resistance leader Hendrik Witbooi (!Nanseb ǁGabemab).[354] Witbooi the younger played an important role in mobilising local resistance against apartheid rule. Together with Joel Stephanus, he was instrumental in facilitating the political alliance of several Nama traditional authorities with SWAPO in 1976. The alliance was of great strategic importance for the liberation movement to reject South Africa’s claims that SWAPO was a tribalist organisation and significantly increased SWAPO’s legitimacy as a representative of the Namibian people (Kössler 2006: 241; Williams 2004: 549; Katjavivi 1989: 99–100). As a result, it became easier for SWAPO to mobilise in the South’s major industrial centres like Lüderitz or Oranjemund, as well as in smaller communities like Vaalgras or Gibeon, where the first party offices were opened in 1975/1976.[355]

This symbolic recognition of southern anticolonial resistance is significant for various reasons. First, it shows that the history of SWAPO’s liberation struggle has, in the double sense of the word, southern chapters that tend to be overlooked. Support for SWAPO never followed a clear-cut differentiation along categories like region or ethnicity. The awards conferred on Heroes’ Day 2010 reflect this history, as they illustrate the politics of recognising struggle credentials. Second, it highlights that a simplistic separation into ‘early’ and ‘modern’ or ‘national’ resistance is misleading, especially in the context of southern Namibia. Rather, there are multiple traditions of resistance, which often show a surprising degree of continuity in interweaving different eras of anticolonial resistance with the biographies of particular clans and families. For this, the Witboois are a case in point (Kössler 2006: 6), the Fredericks yet another. Heroes’ Day in Lüderitz exemplarily reflects the increased awareness for southern liberation memory during Pohamba’s tenure as President, which I described in the previous chapter.

The Politics of Recognition

When the dust had settled in Lüderitz, I returned to the capital to conduct follow-up interviews with the representatives of the involved committees. From their perspective, Heroes’ Day was a full

[354] For Namibia, Witbooi embodies the category of national hero par excellence: he is routinely evoked as a liberation struggle icon and role model in political speeches, his portray is on the Namibian bank notes, a monument in his honour is erected in front of the parliament building, and he was awarded one of the original memorial tombs at the national Heroes’ Acre; see Hillebrecht 2015, 2004 for nuanced perspectives on Witbooi’s ambivalence as a hero figure.

[355] Interview with Willem Stephanus, Keetmanshoop, 25 August 2010. Mr. Stephanus was one of the SWAPO activists who opened the party office at Vaalgras.

success – not only regarding the reburial, but also for putting a national focus on the South in terms of development and investment opportunities.[356] For PS Shipoh, who was having a dual responsibility in supervising the reburial and chairing the independence jubilee sub-committee for entertainment, Heroes' Day was a success, too. Hard work and effort was put into it; and even though some technical "hiccups" occurred, ultimately "leaders were satisfied, the general public was satisfied".[357]

From the perspective of the state bureaucrats, a job was done, a task delivered; established routines for organising national events had once again proven to be effective. With the reburial, a ceremony was successfully conducted which was charged with an immense symbolic meaning, both on national and international levels, the latter in regard to ongoing negotiations with Germany over the genocide. According to PS Ua-Ndjarakana, the event had brought the country's South, its people, culture, and history, closer to the majority of Namibians, who hardly, if ever, travelled any further than to the regional capital Keetmanshoop.[358] Furthermore, the event maybe also offered possibilities for individual ventures into nation-building: "[O]n the 28th in the morning, I left and I went back through Bethanie, just to see, because I have never been there before, just to see how the people actually are living there and how they can be related to the condition of Lüderitz".[359] In sum, the two Permanent Secretaries presented Heroes' Day and the reburial in Lüderitz as a success story of a functioning state bureaucracy, dedicated to nation-building.

During my conversations with representatives of the !Aman traditional authority, members of the Frederick family, and Nama-speaking residents of Lüderitz and Bethanie on the issue of the human remains, people often voiced appreciation for the high priority that the government had given the reburial. Especially the involvement of the traditional authority in organising the event was seen positively. The expression of gratitude, however, usually came with a "but". What irked people, was the way the reburial was handled, especially in terms of representation, regarding the status of the traditional authority during the ceremony in particular and the recognition of the South more generally. A second matter of concern was the still unresolved issue of the human remains found in the laguna, which were also attributed to the genocide but had not received comparable attention.

Regarding the first point, a lot of people I talked to lamented the absence of Chief David Frederick and the !Aman traditional authority as active participants during the ceremony. Neither the Chief nor any traditional Nama leader was included in the wreath-laying ceremony. Seen from the angle of protocol, King Kauluma, in his capacity as Chairman of the Traditional Leaders Council, represented Namibia's traditional authorities, including the !Aman of Bethanie. However, since a veteran of Ongulumbashe – in uniform, representing the military tradition of Heroes' Day – was accorded the honour to lay a wreath, many wondered why no one of the Frederick family was

[356] Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 1 September 2010.
[357] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.
[358] Interview with Mbeuta Ua-Ndjarakana, Windhoek, 1 September 2010.
[359] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.

allowed to do so as well. Given the effort, the clan had invested to see this reburial happen, the exclusion of the traditional authority was repeatedly characterised as a lack of recognition. As someone close to the family explained it to me, even though Chief Frederick was instrumental in making the reburial happen, he had been 'forgotten' by the government.[360]

Brigitte, who was a member of the organising committee for the reburial, articulated similar sentiments. Speaking from the point of view of the family, she told me that maybe there was a 'misunderstanding' since the government held consultations with the traditional authority. That's why people thought that the !Aman will be "the main custodians of this event, but later on it turned out it was a national event".[361] In her expectation, the reburial should have been an event honouring the dead as victims of the genocide and recognising the traditional authority as the authority over their memory. Instead, the discursive framing and ceremonial protocol of the event superimposed an organisational model of the nation-state in which traditional authority was downsized, or rather, contained.[362]

When I asked PS Shipoh about the politics of invitation for the reburial ceremony, he emphasised that all traditional authorities had been invited and a number of them also attended, foremost the !Aman of Bethanie. He further maintained that the mass grave most likely contained human remains of Namibians from other regions as well and the reburial therefore was not an ethnic event: "It is just so that, since it was the region, all the chiefs of the region were invited, but it does not mean that the human remains that were found there is exclusively Nama, no. We are not suggesting that".[363] His line of reasoning reflects the government's stance to treat the reburial as a national matter and traditional authorities as an extension of the state. In doing so, the government also mitigated ethnic identification, which is a strong and divisive element in Namibia's traditional politics.

With Andreas Biwa, the important religious aspect of the ceremony was represented by a Nama-speaking Pastor, while the acting, yet at the time unrecognised Chief of the Berseba traditional authority Stephanus Goliath acted as master of ceremonies. By many people, the presence of the two men was accordingly appreciated as a gesture to include regional Nama-speaking authorities. Yet it also provoked disdain, again tied to contested issues of representation: both Biwa in Vaalgras and Goliath in Berseba were at the centre of ongoing and highly divisive struggles for succession to chieftaincy. So, even though Biwa and Goliath represented traditional

[360] Informal conversation, Lüderitz, 2012.
[361] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.
[362] This is an interesting aspect, worth following up in future research. The protocol of the reburial in Lüderitz closely resembles the one in Eenhana in 2007 (Becker 2011: 534), which was also organised under the supervision of PS Shipoh; see NHC: "Annual Report 2006/2007", p.10. This highlights the fact that national events, even where they resonate with highly localised discourses and practices, still follow the logic of a superordinate state bureaucracy. This, inevitably, produces conflicts which often result from issues of translation within these organisational processes. It makes sense to analyse this with Rottenburg (2002: 1–18) as a problem of institutional representation rather than intentional politics of discrimination or marginalisation.
[363] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.

authority and a discernible 'Nama' identity, their central position also provoked criticism because it was seen as a rewarding of traditional leaders closely affiliated with the Swapo government.

This unclear demarcation between state, nation, and Swapo' political agenda was particularly unsettling. For a number of my interlocutors who leaned towards the political opposition, the government's newly sparked interest in the South was mainly interpreted as partisan politics, given the close proximity to the regional elections in November 2010 and the fact that Swapo traditionally was less successful in the South. For them, national events like Heroes' Day primarily were publicly funded Swapo party-rallies. For one RDP member I interviewed in Keetmanshoop, the government's decision to celebrate Heroes' Day in Lüderitz had to be seen in the context of the political and economic neglect and marginalisation of the South. While he appreciated the gesture of the reburial, he criticised the magnitude of the event as a waste of money and resources. According to him, even though the government tried hard, people in the South would not be misled that easily. He then added that the memorial stone for the reburial supposedly was produced by a company owned by the Nujoma family: "It isn't even regional stone. That's typical African politics".[364]

A fellow RDP member in Lüderitz argued along a similar line: "Instead of focusing on honouring the bones of these Nama people, having the Nama community involved, and also in engaging with the chiefs of the Nama communities […], they took everything over and then made it a Swapo Party government thing again".[365] This critique is similar to that of Brigitte, in claiming Nama authority over the human remains, with strong ethnic connotations, however. The person also lamented the fact that Chief Frederick was not included in the wreath-laying, but instead a king who represented Oshiwambo-speaking Northerners. For my interlocutor and others, it was the very nationalising effect of the state-organised reburial, which was met with refusal.

For those people I talked to who were critical of Swapo, all efforts government undertook to focus attention on the South ultimately were seen as an expression of partisanship, nepotism, or clientelism. According to this view, state resources were channelled through networks of the well-connected, mostly northwards, while people in places in the South like Aus, Tses, Aussenkehr, or Tseiblaagte suffered neglect. The state was hijacked by a dominant political party, which not only controlled access to the 'gravy train' but also did so in terms perceived as tribalist, privileging Northerners. One interlocutor referred to this as 'tsotsialism', fusing the South African slang word for thug (*tsotsi*) with *socialism*, to characterise Swapo's politics. While I'm aware that my interviews can only provide a highly selective snapshot of this particular discourse about the South's marginalisation, I encountered this view time and again among the local non-Oshiwambo-speaking population, regardless of age or education.[366] It is also supported by data that indicates that socio-economic inequality is more wide-spread in the central and southern parts of Namibia, which are

[364] Interview, Keetmanshoop, August 2010.
[365] Interview, Lüderitz, August 2010.
[366] To protect my interlocutors, I abstain from naming sources. Regarding the omnipresence of tribal resentments in Namibia, see my reflection of roles and positionality in the introduction.

more severely affected by the long-term effects of settler colonialism and genocide (Kössler 2015: 39–43).

In comparing the different voices represented above, it becomes clear that there are very different perspectives available to appraise the reburial. While state bureaucrats worked toward implementing heritage policy, organisational routines, and – not necessarily with a 'Swapo agenda' on their mind – practices of national commemoration, the outcome of their work was contested by some people. This happened basically along two registers: first, the perceived side-lining of the traditional authority, and second, the status of the South as a marginalised periphery of the state. While the first point above all relates to traditional politics, which in southern Namibia quite often overlaps with the affairs of families and clans, it also reflects the complicated relationship between state and traditional authorities. The second point reflects sentiments of perceived marginalisation, widespread in the country's South. Both converged on the occasion of the reburial, which functioned as a catalyst. The way the reburial was handled by the government was perceived as an appropriation of local culture, history, and politics, and it was also interpreted through an ethnic lens. The symbolic containment of ethnic identification, which characterised the ceremony, and the re-categorisation of 'genocide bones' into 'national martyrs' created conflicts over representation and ownership. This becomes even more evident when we shift our focus away from the arena of national politics and back to the materiality of the bones.

Bones of Contention, Part 2: Heroes' Day in Bethanie

On 25 August 2012, I attended the official Heroes' Day commemoration organised by the !Aman traditional authority in Bethanie. I was invited by Ida Hoffmann, a long time Swapo member, former Member of Parliament and prominent genocide activist, who worked closely together with Chief Frederick and the Nama Traditional Leaders Association to lobby for national and international recognition of the genocide. Since she is an important actor in this field with a lot of contacts, I gladly accepted her invitation. With a friend's car which I had borrowed, I took Ida and one of her sons from Windhoek to Bethanie, where the two-day event was going to take place. Ida had announced to me that the issue of the human remains would take centre stage. She herself fulfilled that promise by delivering a speech on the status of the ongoing negotiations with the German government regarding genocide reparations. Since she spoke in English, a man translated her speech into Khoekhoegowab, who turned out to be Hardmut Frederick, a son of the Chief. Later on, Hardmut himself re-read a speech, which had been delivered by German Member of Parliament Niema Movassat (Die Linke), during a recent visit to Windhoek in support of the reparations claims of the Namibian genocide committees.

By then, I had attended regional commemorative events organised by Nama traditional authorities in Hoachanas (2011, 2012) and Vaalgras (2012) and become sort of a familiar face. Ida

made sure that I did not have a chance to sit among the audience, but rather found myself on the stage of the community hall, where tables were arranged to accommodate the invited chiefs and guests of honour. These included the Mayor of Lüderitz Susan Ndjaleka. a representative of the City Council, next to me the only *blanke* in the hall, as well as Nama Chiefs David Frederick, Petrus Simon Kooper (Kai-ǁkhaun, Hoachanas), Johannes Isaak (ǀHai-ǀkhauan, Berseba) and Seth Kooitjie (ǂAonin, Walvis Bay). The Regional Governor of ǁKaras Bernardus Swartbooi was announced but not able to attend.

The commemoration in Bethanie was remarkable for merging two important traditions of liberation memory in Namibia. First of all, the occasion was the official Heroes' Day of the national commemorative calendar, which was acknowledged by the event. In doing so, the traditional authority acted in line with its structural function as an organ of the state, representing its political legitimacy on the communal level. At the same time, however, the event also reproduced the model of the *fees*, which is an established format of celebrating cultural heritage and commemorating local heroes among Nama traditional communities (Kössler 2015: 179–219, 2010a, 2004; Biwa 2012: 161–239; Biwa 2000; Sharp /Boonzaier 1994). In some places like Gibeon, Vaalgras or Hoachanas, these festivals are important institutions of liberation memory with a focus on the history of anticolonial resistance against imperial Germany, the death of important Chiefs like Hendrik Witbooi and Manasse !Noreseb, and the traumatic experience of genocide. These festivals are a distinctive category of communal Heroes' Days which coexist with the official Heroes' Day. They usually take place on dates which are significant markers of local liberation memory, so no temporal overlap with 26 August takes place.

The Heroes' Day in Bethanie fused elements of the *fees*, which is also practiced by the !Aman traditional authority, with the medium of the public holiday Heroes' Day. Its protocol included speeches of the invited guests of honour, mostly political in tone and appealing to national and communal unity, religious service, and cultural performances. When the official part of the celebration switched to dance and festivities, I talked to Hardmut about the festival's significance. He explained to me that compared to the *fees*, the event had a reduced programme and protocol, as it was usually organised by the traditional authority. He added that the decision for celebrating the event on Heroes' Day proper was a reaction to ongoing strife within the community, which was tied to conflicts over succession to the chieftaincy.[367] The event thus also had a very particular symbolic dimension.

Because even though it already was popular knowledge at the time in Bethanie, David Frederick used the occasion of Heroes' Day to officially announce his retirement as Chief and to initiate the process of appointing a successor. For this, according to Hardmut, the national Heroes' Day was a more suitable occasion than the *fees*, with its affiliation to the traditional authority. This,

[367] Field notes, 25 August 2012; informal conversation with Hardmut Frederick, Bethanie, 25 August 2012.

he added, was supposed to defuse the potential for conflict within the community.[368] Next to this aspect of local politics, the decision to rely on a model of the nation-state and thus to nationalise a local tradition is quite significant in the context of the previous conflict over the nationalising of genocide memory in Lüderitz.

Most speakers on that day made references to the genocide and the issue of the human remains. Both Ida and Hardmut emphasised the transnational dimension of the struggle for recognition of the genocide. My own presence, which they pointed out repeatedly, highlighted the link between Germany and liberation memory in ǁKaras. Mayor Ndjaleka promised to continue her efforts to have Shark Island recognised as a national heritage site. Chief Frederick, finally, reminded the audience of the still unresolved issue of the human remains found at the Lüderitz laguna. According to him, members of the community had collected more than twenty bags of bones at the railway construction site. "Dit is ons mense", he emphasised: 'our people', waiting to be buried. He had tasked Ida to arrange for coffins; eleven of which she bought, all without assistance from the government, even though requests had been made, without being answered. It was people of his clan and family, paid from his personal account, he said, who had salvaged the bones from the rubble at the construction site 'with their bare hands'. They should be lauded, he added; yet 'some people' would not appreciate this effort, clearly addressing critics of the traditional authority. On 13 April 2012, the coffins with the human remains had been buried at the laguna. Now efforts should be made to gather funds to build a memorial shrine at the site in order to pay respect to the dead.[369]

Chief Frederick used the occasion to remind his community that under his tenure the traditional authority was dedicated to take care of the clan's heritage, represented by the unsettled bones. Through their connection to the genocide, these bones were invested with a national and international meaning, which constituted a resource in the struggle of Nama traditional authorities for restitution, reparation, and recognition of the genocide. This struggle is not fought solely against the stubborn attitude of the German government, with its avoidance of any official acknowledgement of the genocide for fear of legal repercussions (Kornes 2015b; Kössler 2015: 49–78, 233–329). It is also facing the Namibian government's often inconsistent policy regarding the genocide and the campaign of the affected communities for reparations and restitution. This last aspect became very clear to me when I followed up on what Chief Frederick had explained in his speech: for apparently, the traditional authority had single-handedly staged another reburial of human remains in Lüderitz, this time on its own terms.

As I outlined throughout this chapter, the bones reburied on Heroes' Day in Lüderitz in 2010 were the object of contestation over ownership, with the government prevailing in its effort to nationalise the dead as 'martyrs' of the liberation struggle. Already then, the issue of the human

[368] Informal conversation with Hardmut Frederick, Bethanie, 25 August 2012. The issue of contested leadership in traditional authorities is a recurrent theme which affects communal politics in many Nama communities.
[369] Field notes; speech of Chief David Frederick on the occasion of Heroes' Day, Bethanie, 25 August 2012. The Chief held his speech alternatingly in Khoekhoegowab and Afrikaans.

remains found in the laguna area in the course of railway construction work was an issue that kept reoccurring, both in my interviews with people close to the traditional authority and with government officials. In my follow-up interview in September 2010, I asked PS Shipoh whether government had any plans regarding these human remains. He explained that in this case, his ministry was contacted by the Ministry of Works, which was responsible for disturbing the gravesites. However, since it involved construction work this was "not a pure heritage thing per se", unlike the matter of the Sperrgebiet bones: "we are not just here waiting for people to discover human remains and then it becomes our responsibility". His ministry could advise people on "how to handle heritage issues", but ultimately he recommended reburying the whole of the sand with the remains without trying to isolate them.[370]

Speaking from a perspective of heritage management, for the PS it appeared to be more a question of how to solve a technical problem – removing the bones from the construction site in their entirety – than one of national or historical significance. Unlike with the human remains found in the Sperrgebiet, no national event or memorial site was planned. As he added during the same interview, ongoing investigation of the Sperrgebiet site by forensic experts continued to produce more bones. It turned out that the mass grave had not been completely cleared. For this reason, "we make provision to quietly get our things and just again rebury, you know, those bones – either we open up the grave and find space in there and just put them even where we put the coffins so that they are buried together."[371]

The fact that some human remains had remained in the mass grave and even more so at the laguna site irked traditional councillor Manfred Anderson already in 2010. Even though he was thankful that President Pohamba had made the reburial a matter of high priority, he still was disappointed: "[I]t's a shame that finally only a small portion of them are laid to rest, almost fifteen years later".[372] In similar terms, Brigitte answered my question regarding her opinion whether the clan was satisfied with the way the reburial was handled: "Yes, we do appreciate it, but for us, we still feel like we owe it to our great grandparents, to put up that shrine, or a monument, at the railway site".[373] For her, the bones at the laguna were inseparably linked to those found in the Sperrgebiet and thus connected with the genocide. Their exclusion from the reburial on Heroes' Day 2010 was seen as a wrong that needed to be rectified.[374] As the Chief explained in his Heroes' Day address and Brigitte confirmed during our interview, members of the clan had started to collect the bones at the railway construction site on their own, after their discovery in 2009. According to Brigitte, however, the human remains were rather not 'discovered' but disturbed, in gravesites known to the !Aman for a long time:

[370] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.
[371] Interview with Peingeondjabi Shipoh, Windhoek, 3 September 2010.
[372] Interview with Manfred Anderson, Shark Island, 27 August 2010.
[373] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.
[374] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.

the questions coming are: 'how do we know these are our remains?' And it's simple: because we have been commemorating at this site, the gravesite, annually, because we know that these are the remains of our forefathers, and that's why we are involved in these remains, we take ownership of these remains[375]

For her, she added, this had even been the reason to join the Lüderitz town council. The collected human remains were stored in one the council's buildings until the clan had secured enough funds to build a tomb on the site and to rebury the remains.

On 30 October 2012, Hardmut took me to the laguna in his car to show me the site. We parked next to the dirt track between the water and the rim of the desert, climbed across the embankment of the railway and started walking into the dunes. After some metres into the surreal, rocky moonscape-like landscape of the Lüderitz desert, Hardmut told me to look around. I then realised that I was standing in the midst of a field of graves, even on them, to my dismay. On second look, the area was covered with burial mounds, some more visible, some nearly flattened or washed away from the water. Some were huge; some had the size of a child. On even closer look, most graves were somehow marked with small stones. According to Hardmut, some people said it was between 100 and 150 graves, even though the number was hard to estimate. Graves were washed away by floods or strong rains, while a lot of those who perished on Shark Island were thrown directly into the sea anyway. 'Shark' Island carried its name for a reason, Hardmut added.

Fig. 22: Hardmut Frederick pointing out the graves near the laguna to the author, Lüderitz, 30 October 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

[375] Interview with Brigitte Frederick, Lüderitz, 1 November 2012.

Resembling the site of the unmarked mass burial ground in Swakopmund, which at least recently was protected with a wall to prevent erosion and vandalism, nothing here officially marked the existence of a cemetery. Like Shark Island, it was characterised by an absent presence: the unmarked history of the genocide in Lüderitz. For Hardmut, this absence was characteristic of the German community's culture of denial, Lüderitz being one of the strongholds of the German minority in Namibia. But the government, too, contributed to disrespecting the dead. For the railway construction sand was harvested on a massive scale in the dunes, which damaged a lot of the graves and exposed the mortal remains they contained. When the bones were discovered, they were just dumped with the sand on one large hump. Since government was reluctant to take measures to remove the bones or finance the clan's efforts to do so, they organised this on their own.

Hardmut then led me further to a different site, situated more closely to the railway line, where he showed me a concrete structure. It was the foundation of the memorial tomb, which the !Aman traditional authority built for the reburial of the exhumed bones.

Fig. 23: Unfinished monument/burial chamber, Lüderitz laguna, 30 October 2012.
Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

According to Hardmut, it already contained the amount of 24 bags of human remains, collected by the clan. It was unfinished, due to lack of funds. His father had contacted the Ministry of Veterans Affairs for financial support, but to no avail.[376] For Hardmut, this was further evidence of the lack of recognition of his clan's traumatic genocidal history. He emphasised, however, that the recent reburial was not entirely the project of the !Aman. Even though it was spearheaded by his

[376] Field notes, 30 October 2012. Kössler (2015: 39–43) highlights the negative impact, the precarious financial situation of traditional communities in southern Namibia has on their ability to pursue commemorative projects.

father, it was done in close collaboration with the Nama Traditional Leaders Association and the various Nama and Ovaherero genocide committees, who also represent communities whose ancestors suffered and died on Shark Island.

Hardmut then suggested that we also visit the shrine at the public cemetery. Standing in front of the memorial, the difference to the plain concrete foundation in the desert was striking. Already in 2011, the martyrs' shrine was enclosed with a white stone wall to protect it from vandalism, including a wooden gate. Three flag posts have been erected behind the wall, giving the site an official and dignified appearance. Apart from the inscription in the tomb slabs, however, no further information was added. Accidental passers-by without knowledge of the shrine's history will find a national monument, dedicated to 'Martyrs of Anti-Colonial Struggle'. We spent some time at the tomb, talking about the reburial two years ago. Sitting on the slab next to the withered wreaths of 2010, I could sense the deep-seated feeling of disappointment. Ultimately, the government had appropriated the reburial for its own ends, side-lining the traditional authority that claimed ownership over the people in that grave.

Fig. 24: Hardmut Frederick at the martyrs' monument, Lüderitz, 30 October 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

He then told me of his plans to stage a demonstration: a genocide march to the capital, starting in Shark Island and leading right to the doors of the German embassy in Windhoek. Over eight stages, the march should grow momentum along the way with all the different communities affected by the genocide joining in. It should be led by Chief Frederick; and even if the Chief with his 'old legs' would only walk one kilometer of each stage per day, it was all about the symbolism of the event. A concept

was already drafted, including measures for safety and sanitary facilities. He then added, laughingly, that the only real challenge would be to bring the Ovaherero on board, as they would always complicate matters…

Our go-along thus ended on a lighter note, despite the seriousness of the topic. Since the sun was about to set, we bought a couple of beers and drove to Agate beach, north of Lüderitz. Hardmut soon started reminiscing about the good old days, when he was staying in Cologne in the 1990s to train as a car mechanic; something, he also wished for his son to be possible. Few situations, which I experienced during my fieldwork on liberation memory, have made the complex and often bewildering history of Namibia and Germany, with its entangled bones and narratives, as comprehensible for me as enjoying a sundowner with Chief Frederick's son – gazing across Lüderitz Bay to Shark Island with its traumatic past, which does not recede nor settle. In the meantime, the memorial shrine at the laguna was inaugurated, bearing the gruesome images of human skulls as evidence of the genocide: 'I will fight your enemies, and I will save your children' (Jesaja 49:25).

Fig. 25: The memorial shrine at the laguna, Lüderitz. Photo: William Lyon (2020).

6. The Postcolonial Transformation of Memorial Landscapes

Between July and October 2008, I was staying in Windhoek to conduct research for my master's thesis on Namibia's policy of national reconciliation. At around 2 p.m. on 9 July, I was walking past *Alte Feste* on my way to town. At that time, the fort – which was built by the German administration between 1890 and 1893 to police the central region of the colony – accomodated one of the National Museum's display centres. I passed *Alte Feste* almost every day, since I rented a room in Klein Windhoek, a quiet upper middle-class suburb on the eastern outskirts of town, and used to walk to the city centre. I preferred to do this not only for physical fitness, but also because I enjoyed the daily confrontation with the memorial landscape of the postcolonial capital.

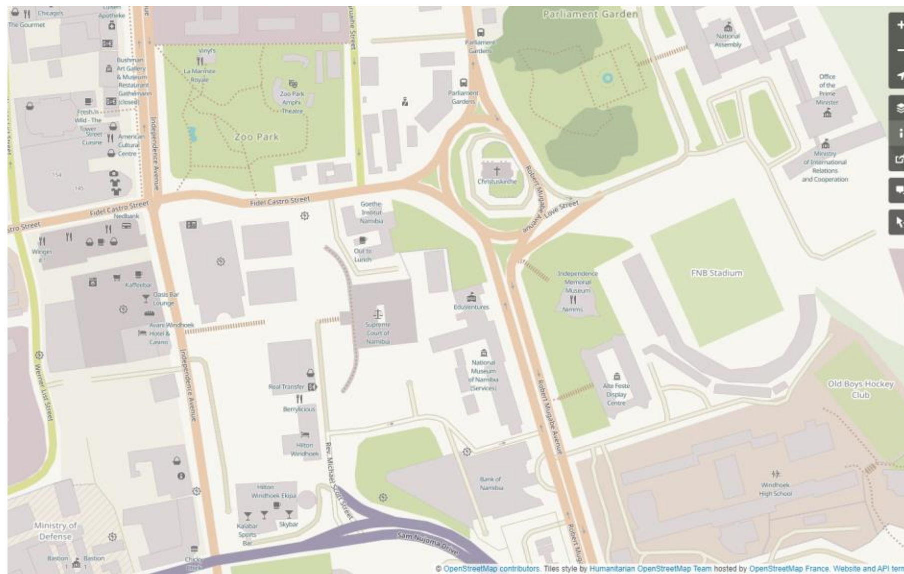

Fig. 26: Central district, Windhoek, 2023. Credit: openstreetmap.org/copyright

Upon entering Robert Mugabe Avenue where it intersects with Sam Nujoma Drive, I had the old fort to my right. To my left was the Museum ACRE, the administrative buildings of the National Museum of Namibia. The avenue, named after Zimbabwe's erstwhile dictator, leads straight to a roundabout with two junctions. One is Fidel Castro Street, which passes the Goethe Centre and leads directly to the central business district. The other is the access road to the *Tintenpalast*, a German-era colonial administration building inaugurated in 1913, which today is housing the Namibian parliament.

In the centre of the roundabout is the *Christuskirche*, towering above the city since 1910. The German-era neo-Romanic church was built to commemorate the colonial war of 1903–1908 and today accommodates the German parish of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Namibia. It contains stained glass windows donated by Emperor Wilhelm II. and a memorial to commemorate Germans who died during the colonial war. Outside the church, between the parking space and the road, an often overlooked memorial stone is dedicated to remember the loss of the German Empire's eastern provinces ("Ostdeutsche Provinzen unvergessen"). Donated by the "East Prussians in SWA-

Namibia" and erected on 4 March 1989, the stone reflects both the transience of political regimes and the longevity of an imperial mentality. Finally, located on a small knoll between *Alte Feste* and the Parliament Gardens stands – or rather, stood, as I will explain below – the *Reiterdenkmal*. The equestrian monument, which depicts a common, mounted Schutztruppe soldier, was inaugurated on 27 January 1912, Emperor Wilhelm II.'s birthday, to commemorate the German soldiers and civilians who died in the colonial war.

Fig. 27: The German equestrian monument of 1912 at its original position, with Alte Feste in the background; wooden crosses, 9 July 2008. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

I used to wander through this post/colonial assemblage with its overabundance of signifiers quite often. On that day, however, something was different. Overnight, someone had put up about fifty wooden crosses next to the equestrian monument, painted white and inscribed with names. Some of them read Gawanas, Tsoub, Kahuika, Dauseb, Hamunyela, Gameb, Garises, Sheehama, Tsowaseb, thus mostly referring to Ovaherero, Nama and Damara origin; one sign read "Bushmen 35", another had the slogan "Now just another way of slavery" written on it.[377] There was no information available on site and no other people to ask, so I took some pictures and tried to make sense of what I saw. To me, it seemed to be some kind of activist intervention to highlight the connection between the monument and the genocide, which was not commemorated or mentioned in any way at this central site of German colonial memory. As I noted in my field diary that day, I

[377] Both Becker (2018: 5) and Kössler (2015: 156) write that the crosses bear names of places connected to the genocide. While one cross had "Hamakari" written on, referring to the site of the decisive battle between Ovaherero and German troops in 1904, this was the only place name I could establish, even though I did not photograph all crosses. The majority of the crosses contained surnames.

perceived the action as “both subtle and provocative”,[378] in challenging the monument’s authority of representing the colonial war in public space.

Fig. 28: Wooden crosses between equestrian monument and Alte Feste, 9 July 2008. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Still looking for answers, I screened the newspapers. The German daily *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported the next day that its inquiries with the National Museum and the NHC had yielded no result. When asked for their opinion, passers-by suggested that the intervention was supposed to remember the victims of the genocide and referred to a lively and passionate debate over the intended removal of the monument, decided upon at the time by the cabinet.[379] According to the unnamed author of the article, the space on which the monument was built used to be a “Sammellager für Herero” during the war.[380] The next day, *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that by now it had received a written claim of responsibility, signed by an individual or group called *Eyedias*. In said letter, a copy of which I could see later on during my research at the National Museum in 2012, the author(s) raised the following concerns:

> The reason for putting up the crosses around the Reiterdenkmal are the following:
> 1) We don’t seem to contemplate our history

[378] Field notes, 9 July 2008: “subtil und gleichzeitig provozierend”.

[379] The debate was featured prominently in *The Namibian*, with numerous articles and opinion pieces between July and August 2008. Noteworthy contributions are historian Andreas Vogt’s fervent critique of the removal, “To move or not to move”, 18 July, and the pointed rebuttal by political scientist Phanuel Kaapama, “Memory Politics, the Reiterdenkmal and the De-Colonisation of the Mind”, 22 August. Debate took place in other fora too, like newspapers, national television, and radio chat shows. It was, however, largely dominated by representatives of the German-speaking community, political parties, and urban elites, all respectively claiming to speak for “the people”.

[380] “Holzkreuze am Reiterdenkmal fordern Aufmerksamkeit”, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 July 2008.

> 2) We actually don't talk about our future either
> 3) The Reiterdenkmal is such a big historical monument and we want to put a museum there which is supposed to explain to Namibians their history – so it is for the Namibian people by Namibian people – and this is what it should be.
> We don't seem to be thinking about what we are doing and how we do it, and above all what this will lead to[381]

The statement unmistakably made a connection between the equestrian monument and the IMM, designated to be built at the site of the monument between *Alte Feste* and *Christuskirche*, even though the positionality of the author(s) was difficult to assume from these words. Who was addressed, who was the "we"? Was the statement a critique of the way the monument silenced the memory of the genocide? Or was it instead critical of the intended removal of the "big historical" monument? How did the remark about "new slavery" written on one of the crosses fit into all of this? And what was the author's position regarding the planned museum? Was it a critique of the IMM as an expression of the Swapo government's memory politics, allegedly reproducing colonial silences? Or did I just read too much into this?

As it turned out, I was not the only one guessing and looking for a larger picture. On 10 July, Namibia's Minister of Culture Willem Konjore, a known supporter of the removal of the equestrian monument, had mentioned the intervention in the National Assembly. In his speech, he referred to the "painful past" and appealed to Namibians, "not [to] take the law into our own hands or try to make controversial statements on this matter".[382] Instead, Namibians should continue to observe the policy of national reconciliation. According to him, those who put up the crosses created "unnecessary panic" and "[deprived] other Namibians of an opportunity to express their sentiments in a mature manner". At the same time, he reiterated government's position on the removal of the monument: "We […] never said we shall disregard the brave sons and daughters that perished in the concentration camps, one camp having been exactly at the very spot of this monument for Herero and Nama war prisoners and around the Alte Feste between 1904 and 1908".

In his speech, Konjore contextualised the intervention with the intended removal of the equestrian monument and the construction of the IMM. Furthermore, he also addressed existing fears that the history of the genocide might find less recognition in the new museum, next to Swapo's armed liberation struggle. He explicitly mentioned the concentration camp, which German-speakers sometimes euphemistically refer to as "Sammellager", where prisoners were interned during the war. The equestrian monument had been erected on the same site as the former camp to commemorate German soldiers and settlers who were killed during the war. It thus constituted a symbolic appropriation of space, too, of a particularly triumphant kind (Kössler 2015: 148–152). Despite the intervention's unknown authorship and unclear political background, it had successfully

[381] A copy of the letter is in the author's possession.
[382] "Konjore gets on his high horse over crosses at memorial", *The Namibian*, 11 July 2008.

managed to stir a debate about history, colonialism, genocide, and the role of the designated IMM. By noon on 11 July, all crosses had been removed by the City of Windhoek.

When I experienced this episode in 2008, I did not fully realise its significance. I filed it under 'contested memory', but did not follow-up on it, since I was concerned with a different kind of contestation, regarding SWAPO's human rights abuses in exile (Kornes 2013, 2010a). Only when I shifted my focus of interest on the construction and curation of the IMM a few years later, I looked up my notes on the incident again. Later on, during my research internship at the National Museum in 2012/2013, I asked staff whether they knew who was behind *Eyedias* and responsible for the intervention. Most answered, that they didn't know, including the Deputy Director Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, who showed me *Eyedias'* confession letter.[383]

Only one employee of the museum indicated that the names behind the action were known, but since it was such an "insignificant" event, he wouldn't remember. He himself, however, made sure that I remembered our talk. The fact that in my question to him, I referred to the action in the context of my research on the aesthetics and politics of national commemoration, annoyed him to such a degree that he began to shout at me. According to him, the installation of the crosses was an art performance and there was nothing political at all about it. In his opinion, even thinking about it that way proved that I did "not have a clue at all about science". Instead, I was coming up with "stupid assumptions" about politics, "like a journalist".[384] This brief interaction made a lasting impression on me for the remarkable affective response that my question provoked. I did not follow up on him and our paths rarely crossed again, him working in the natural science department. His reaction to my cautious hypothesis, however, that an art action might indeed be political, was quite interesting. Even more significant was the connection that the intervention had rendered visible between the monument, the museum, and the particular history of the place where it happened.

When I began my research in the National Museum in April 2012, the capital's memorial landscape had changed significantly. The equestrian monument was relocated to a new site in front of *Alte Feste* in 2009 to make way for the construction of the IMM. There, just next to the staircase leading to the entrance of the fort, I passed the monument daily on my way to office. On 25 December 2013, about five months after my return to Germany the equestrian monument was relocated again, this time from outside *Alte Feste* into its inner court, followed by its de-proclamation as a national monument.[385] The triumphant symbol of German imperial rule over

[383] Informal conversation with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, NMN, Museum ACRE, 13 July 2012.
[384] Informal conversation, NMN, Museum ACRE, 13 July 2012.
[385] The equestrian monument has received a huge amount of attention in scholarly literature, both regarding its history and cultural significance, as well as the more recent debates following its relocation (Becker 2018: 4–5), in stark contrast to the history of the Windhoek concentration camp. In similar terms as Becker, I will refrain from providing a reconstruction of the monument's eventful history, which has been extensively documented elsewhere; see du Pisani 2015; Elago 2015; Kössler 2015: 147–168, 2013; Silvester 2005; Vogt 2004: 103–104; and Zeller 2004, 1999: 112–121. Rather, I will refer to the monument as an actor in its own right in my particular field. During my research in the National Museum, the monument was still standing in front of *Alte Feste* on the site of its first relocation, affecting daily interactions of staff and museum visitors, as well as the general public.

Namibians was ultimately transformed into a museum object, but not one that is on display, however, since *Alte Feste* has ceased to be used as a display centre after the IMM was opened. The monument was effectively dismounted and "decontaminated", to borrow from the title of an early conference on the ambivalent legacies of Namibia's colonial history.[386] In its place, the IMM was constructed, beginning in 2009. Since its inauguration in 2014, it is the first public museum space in Namibia dedicated entirely to the liberation struggle, including the genocide. By replacing the equestrian monument, the IMM also visibly reconfigured Windhoek's colonial-era cityscape.

Fig. 29: The Independence Memorial Museum under construction, March 2010. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2010).

Regarding the monument's de-proclamation; see the statement of the NHC on 29 August 2014: <https://www.nhc-nam.org/content/deproclamation-equestrian-statue-and-declaration-new-sites> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[386] The conference "1904–2004: Decontaminating the Namibian Past" took place at the University of Namibia, 17–21 August 2004, on the occasion of the centenary of the genocide and has had an important and lasting impact on Namibian historiography. Reading the conference papers, which were available at the National Museum's history department, helped me a lot to develop an understanding for the emergence of a distinctly postcolonial Namibian historiography since the 2000s. The fact that the conference was convened as a "commemorative conference" underlines the important connection between historiography and liberation memory in Namibia.

Fig. 30: The equestrian monument in front of Alte Feste display centre after its first relocation, June 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

Fig. 31: Christuskirche and Independence Memorial Museum, August 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

New museums, monuments, and memorial sites were inaugurated since the late 1990s, visibly transforming memorial landscapes in Windhoek and elsewhere. In the capital, IMM and Heroes' Acre were conceptualised as complementary institutions, constituting the central sites of state-sponsored liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia. They epitomise the emergence of a

distinctive nationalist memorial culture, which began during Nujoma's second term of office and gained momentum under Pohamba's administration. Like most statues and monuments commissioned by the Namibian government since independence, both IMM and Heroes' Acre have been built by Mansudae, North Korea's prolific manufacturer of memorial culture.

In the following, I will describe the transformation of memorial culture by looking at three examples, where decolonisation and nationalist memory politics tangibly intersect. The first is the equestrian monument, which I will describe both as contested colonial-era heritage and ambiguous marker of genocide memory. This is followed by a discussion of the Military Museum in Okahandja, which is one of the earliest Mansudae productions in Namibia and undoubtedly the one that is most shrouded in secrecy. My reconstruction of its planning process is contextualised with a presentation of the project by its curators at the MAN Annual General Meeting in 2012. My third example is the Ongulumbashe memorial landscape, also built by Mansudae, which I will portray based on two visits of the site. Since the importance of Mansudae is evident, I will provide a concise summary of the historical relationship between North Korea and Namibia, which I situate in a transnational post-socialist memory-scape.

Contested Grounds, Layers of History: The Equestrian Monument in Windhoek

For more than a century, Windhoek's city centre was dominated by the ensemble of German colonial buildings and monuments, which tower above town on the slopes and hills that separate the central business district from the upmarket quarters of Klein Windhoek and Ludwigsdorf.[387] Windhoek's colonial 'city crown' (Kössler 2015: 28), consisting of *Alte Feste* (1893), Christ church (1910), equestrian monument (1912) and *Tintenpalast* (1913), was built to symbolise and exercise the colonial claim to power in South West Africa (Kössler 2015: 26–31). It outlasted German rule rather quickly, though. Following the Schutztruppe's defeat against Union troops in 1915 and the transition to South African mandate rule in 1917, these sites increasingly gained importance as markers of identity for a German settler community which was trying to come to terms with changed power relations in South West Africa, now *Suidwes*. Remarkably, given the rather uneasy relationship between the two white population groups, the South Africans left all German monuments intact (Kössler 2015: 101–104; Silvester 2005, Zeller 2004: 127). This was in marked contrast to other German colonies, where after changed control following World War 1 most monuments that symbolised a distinctly German claim to power were removed by the mandate powers (Zeller 1999: 136–137).

[387] During the apartheid era, both suburbs emerged as preferred residential areas for white middle and upper-class citizens. Since independence, segregation works mainly along the lines of class, rather than race, even though both categories remain intimately intertwined. Both suburbs have become sought-after places of residence for Windhoek's bourgeoning and affluent black elite, even though a strong German influence is still noticeable, especially in Klein Windhoek with its bakeries, Waldorf School, and organic food market.

During South African rule, Windhoek's central business district turned into a bustling commercial centre with DeBeers, South African banks, and luxurious hotels as new sites of power. While this transformation also represents shifts of political and economic influence within South West Africa's white population, the German monuments still overlooked the capital as remnants of a brazen claim to power: forgone, yet self-assured. Carved in stone and bronze, future generations were called to honour the contribution and sacrifices of German colonial ardour, 'to secure and preserve this country', as the inscription on the equestrian monument reminded posterity.

The loss of political power, which the German settler community experienced under South African rule, was compensated with an increase in influence and importance of Germans in state and civic institutions dealing with culture and heritage management (Wessler 2007: 116–143; Silvester 2005: 280–281). This, together with a strong sense of *Verwurzelung* (rootedness) in the land via the German colonial frontier-myth (Kössler 2015: 101–113; Silvester 2005), fuelled a distinctly German patriotic dedication to *Südwest*. In this, a major difference existed to the white Afrikaaner society, which saw *Suidwes* and itself more as an extension and fifth province of South Africa (Silvester 2005: 278–280). At independence, when many white Afrikaaners left the country, most Germans stayed; and yet again they were allowed to keep 'their' monuments, at least for the time being. As Kössler (2015: 146–170, 2013) and others (Elago 2015; Silvester 2005; Zeller 2004) have shown in convincing detail, it is especially the equestrian monument that embodies and reflects the complex and ambiguous history of German settler colonialism in Namibia.

Up until independence and for a long time after, there was not the slightest hint which indicated the genocidal history of the place where the monument was built. According to Erichsen in his seminal study on German concentration camps in Namibia, the camp next to *Alte Feste* held an average of 5,000 prisoners during the war, the majority of them women and children. This was twice the size of Windhoek's population at the time and made the camp the largest in the colony (Erichsen 2005: 43–49, 59). A second, smaller camp was located behind the central train station at the crossing of today's Harvey Street and Hosea Kutako Drive. In one of the earliest scholarly accounts on the Windhoek camps, Hillebrecht writes that next to this smaller camp, hundreds of deceased prisoners were buried, yet no traces of the cemetery have survived (Hillebrecht 1993: 25). Both camps were instrumental for 'concentrating' prisoners of war from the different regions and to distribute inmates to other camps or designated locations for forced labour (Erichsen 2005: 43).

As of mid-1905, the colonial administration began to provide prisoners as slave labourers for local companies. According to Erichsen, "[t]o rent a Witbooi, it would cost a Windhoek citizen 5 or 3 Marks for men and woman [sic!] respectively" (Erichsen 2005: 106). Since the majority of the camp population was female, cases of sexualised violence were frequent (Erichsen 2005: 47). Equally high was mortality, due to conditions of exploitation and neglect. In September 1906 alone, 252 prisoners were recorded dead (Erichsen 2005: 49; see also Lau 1993: 13–14). According to Namibian historian Lau, despite the sheer size of the camp and its social and economic impact, contemporary sources like the town administration were silent about it, as if it never existed (Lau

1995: 45). Yet for those who suffered and perished in the camp, including members of the Kai-ǁkhaun community sent there in June 1906 after the death of Kaptein Manasse !Noreseb (Erichsen 2005: 104), its existence was very much real, as it is for the descendants of the victims.[388]

It took until 1994 that the equestrian monument's spatial authority over the representation of the war was challenged. Then an initiative of some members of the German community came up with a proposal to put up a complementary memorial stone at the monument, to explicitly commemorate all victims of the war.[389] The adding of new elements to existing monuments, as "symbolic accretion" (Dwyer 2004), is an established format in heritage management to allow for the commemoration of contested histories. The NMC, however, turned down the proposal with the argument that no alterations were supposed to be made to recognised national heritage sites (Kössler 2015: 154; Melber 2005a: 110–111; Zeller 2004: 127). According to some people I talked to and especially Kössler (2015: 154), the initiative was stalled or even sabotaged by the German leadership of the commission, which saw the dedication's implicit critique of German colonial rule as too divisive for the German community. According to Zeller (2004: 127), the commission did accept the proposal with alterations, but stalled its implementation due to the intended relocation of the equestrian monument for the construction of the IMM. This, however, only became an issue in 2001. According to Åfreds, who analysed the minutes of the National Assembly and NMC for 1990–2000, the council was supportive of the initiative, but had not reached a decision in 2000. She also mentions a counter-initiative, which proposed to leave the monument intact and rather create additional monuments instead. Remarkably, at the time of her study most politicians, of ruling party and opposition alike, advocated for the equestrian monument to remain (Åfreds 2000: 58). I could not establish which narrative is closer to the truth.

As a monument with "several complex layers of meaning" (Elago 2015: 277) tied to German cultural identity and settler colonialism, but also the war of 1903–1908, the equestrian monument also marked the officially unmarked genocidal history. In the absence of a monument to commemorate the genocide or any information at all at the site of the former concentration camp, the equestrian monument became a point of reference for the descendants of the communities affected by the genocide. As Elago writes,

> when the Ovawambo people talk about the City of Windhoek they refer to it as *'koshilando shoka kambe komusamane kalondoloka'* meaning 'the town of a man who never got off his horse'. The Ovaherero and Nama people also have a personal attachment with the Equestrian

[388] Chief Manasse !Noreseb died in battle against German troops in Gubuoms on 1 December 1905. The commemoration of his death is one of the central elements of the annual Heroes' Day, which is organised by the Kai-ǁkhaun traditional authority in Hoachanas usually on the first weekend in December. I attended the event in 2011 and 2012. Next to Chief !Noreseb and the colonial war, the memory of genocide and communal resistance against apartheid are important aspects of commemoration, too.

[389] The initiative was spearheaded by Eberhard Hofmann, Reinhard Keding, Henning Melber, Herbert Schneider, Dieter Springer, Hans-Erik Staby, and Dieter Voigts. A copy of the statement, dated 24 August 1994, is in the author's possession.

> monument because it was their ancestors who died at the camps, including the one in Windhoek at the site where the monument used to stand. The Ovaherero people refer to the monument as *'ongoro nomundu'* which means 'the man and the horse' (Elago 2015: 284)

As an inherently contested memorial, the equestrian monument paradigmatically reflects the complexities of liberation memory in a postcolonial and post-apartheid society. This also finds an expression in the performative appropriation of the monument.

In recent years, the monument has repeatedly become the object of a broad range of artistic and activist interventions (Becker 2018: 5; Elago 2015: 284–285; Kössler 2015: 154–157; Zeller 2004: 135–137), of which the *Eyedias* intervention in 2008 was just a very elaborate variation. The monument was decorated and it was vandalised. In *Rider without a Horse* (2009), a short film by Namibian director Tim Hübschle, the animated Schutztruppe soldier gets off his horse to take a stroll through postcolonial Windhoek. Another famous example is the mural at the Bank Windhoek Theatre School, which depicts the monument deconstructed and disassembled, and the soldier replaced by a white rabbit.[390]

Fig. 32: Mural created by Natasha Beukes and Klaus Klinger in 2001, Bank Windhoek Theatre School. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

A different form of appropriation happened when a group of geography students of UNAM visited *Alte Feste* during my fieldwork in August 2012. The students were given a guided tour of the display centre by the director of the museum's history department, Gerhardt Gurirab. I followed suit to see the students' reactions and talk with them about their impressions of the exhibition. The tour

[390] On the mural's creation; see <http://www.farbfieber.de/UNIQ155678338529392/doc187A.html> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

ended in front of the equestrian monument, at the time still standing in front of *Alte Feste's* main entrance. The students immediately appropriated the monument, mounting and staging it for extensive photo sessions.

Fig. 33: Student group at the equestrian monument, August 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

While for most of them, posing in front of a famous landmark of the capital was obviously a playful thing; some students started discussing its symbolism with us. When Gerhardt mentioned that the monument depicted a common, Unknown Soldier, one student interjected that it was a German soldier, emphasising the settler-colonial context. This was met with the reply of another student, who remarked that even if he was German, he still was "one of us", as Germans were also Namibians.[391] Since I spent a lot of time of my research at *Alte Feste*, talking with visitors, and observing their interactions with the display and the monument, I experienced similar appropriations repeatedly, especially when it involved school children.

[391] Field notes, 16 August 2012, 2–3 p.m.

At the same time, until its ultimate removal the monument was routinely utilised by German cultural groups and veterans' organisations as a site of commemoration (Kössler 2015: 158–159; Elago 2015: 283). A wreath-laying ceremony on Remembrance Day in November 2012, for instance, included contributions made by Kriegsgräberfürsorge Namibia, Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen e.V., Kameradschaft Deutscher Soldaten, and Volkstanzkreis Windhuk.[392]

Fig. 34: Commemorative wreaths at the equestrian monument, 13 November 2012. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

The morning after, I inspected the decorated monument together with some of my non-German speaking colleagues at the museum. For them, trying to decipher the inscriptions which did not include an English translation, this was clearly a 'German thing'. In this case, commemoration on the occasion of Remembrance Day appeared in the framework of ethnicity, rather than national or transnational group affiliation. A more inclusive commemoration took place just five hundred metres away at the War Memorial in Windhoek's Zoo Park. There, representatives of the German and British embassies, the Memorable Order of Tin Hats, the Kameradschaft Deutscher Soldaten, as well as the NDF, also laid wreaths to honour soldiers who have died in the line of duty.[393]

Remarkably, this happened at a colonial German memorial, too, inaugurated in 1897 to commemorate the Schutztruppe soldiers who died in a military campaign against Hendrik Witbooi. While set and setting in this context is quite significant, the German-centric commemoration at the

[392] Note the German spelling of Windhoek. The following is based on my field notes, 12 November 2012.
[393] "Gedenken am Reiterdenkmal und Gefallenenkreuz am Volkstrauertag", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 November 2012. The occasion was not, as the title indicates, Volkstrauertag (18 November in 2012), but Remembrance Day (11 November).

equestrian monument reflects its central importance for the ceremonial reaffirmation of the settler-colonial *Südwester* identity, highlighted by Silvester (2005: 275). This activity and the public attention it received, demonstrates that until its removal in 2013, the equestrian monument fulfilled an active role both as a site of memory and a focal point of contestation of the history it represents.

Namibia and North Korea: Solidarity in the Post-Socialist Memory-Scape

As mentioned above, the postcolonial transformation of memorial landscapes in Namibia, including the deconstruction of the equestrian monument is inseparably tied to the activities of North Korea's state-owned Mansudae Company. The appearance of North Korean-built memorial culture, museums, and representational architecture on the African continent and its impact on the transformation of postcolonial memorial landscapes has only recently found scholarly attention.[394] An exception is the Heroes' Acre in Zimbabwe, built in 1982, which has frequently been analysed in the context of Zanu-Pf's postcolonial memory politics (van der Hoog 2019; Fontein 2009: 11–15; Werbner 1998b: 78–81; Kriger 1995: 144–154). Zimbabwe is a particularly instructive case, since support for Zanu-Pf, both during its armed liberation struggle and after independence, was one of the more substantial cases of North Korean cooperation with Africa. Notorious in this regard is the establishment of the so-called Fifth Brigade in 1981, which was instrumental in the Matabeleland massacres in the early 1980s (Choi /Jeong 2017: 340–345; Alexander /McGregor /Ranger 2000: 188–196).

The historic connection between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and African states has its source in North Korea's Cold War diplomacy and its active role in the Non-Aligned Movement (Kornes 2019a: 148–150; Choi /Jeong 2017; Young 2015; Owoeye 1991; Chaigneau /Sola 1986). From 1960 to 1990, the DPRK supported African postcolonial states and liberation movements with civilian and military aid, with the focus clearly on the latter.[395] This included weapons and military hardware, but also the training of military personnel and security forces. SWAPO was one of the recipients of North Korean military aid, while some Namibian sources also mention that a number of SWAPO fighters were able to undergo training in guerrilla warfare in the DPRK since the mid-1960s (Williams 2011: 62; Nujoma 2001: 159).[396] As is the case with African students in North Korea, however, hardly any reliable data is available about this

[394] See Kornes 2019a, 2016a, 2016b; van der Hoog 2019; Greani 2017: 504–508; and Kirkwood 2013, 2011.
[395] This included the training of intelligence and border troops in Zimbabwe, as well as training and military missions in Ghana and Seychelles (Chaigneau /Sola 1986: 6–7). Development cooperation focussed on the construction of infrastructure in countries like Mali, Madagascar or Sierra Leone (Kornes 2019a: 149) and the awarding of study-scholarships for North Korean universities like the agricultural college in Wonsan (Young 2015: 106–109). With the exception of research by Young (2015), the transnational experience of African students in places like Wonsan still is a blank space in scholarship. I am not aware of any Namibians who studied in North Korea.
[396] This was also mentioned to me by Helao Shityuwete; see interview, Windhoek, 2 September 2010.

history. Bechtol, Jr. (2010: 47) names thirty training camps for foreign guerrilla fighters in North Korea, where about 5,000 combatants from 25 countries were trained between 1968 and 1988. How many of them were Namibians and what experiences they made, is still largely unknown.[397]

One epicentre of North Korean and African cooperation was the battle ground of armed decolonisation in Southern Africa, in particular the war in Angola during the 1980s. The DPRK supported various regional liberation movements through military training and arms, allegedly also with combat troops (Bechtol, Jr. 2010: 47; Chaigneau /Sola 1986: 10–12; Klinghoffer 1980: 102, 107–108). As Kirkwood has pointed out, the personal relationship between Sam Nujoma and Kim Il-sung was instrumental in establishing relations between their organisations. In 1983, Nujoma visited North Korea and was received by Kim Il-Sung with all the honours of a state guest. The visit underscored North Korea's support for SWAPO and strengthened cooperation between the two parties (Kirkwood 2011: 12–18). Ultimately, it was in the transnational space of liberation politics in exile that North Koreans and Namibians met each other as comrades in arms, fighting for a common purpose.

In my interviews with Namibian war veterans, some recalled the presence of North Korean military advisers in Angolan camps, especially during the 1980s.[398] While this may have been marginal compared to the omnipresence of Russians, East-Germans, or Cubans in SWAPO's camps, it nevertheless had a tangible impact. I already described the performances of North Korean-trained school children at the Independence Day celebrations in 1990 and 1991, which were a result of this cooperation. Based on this history of solidarity, Swapo maintained and extended cordial bilateral relations with North Korea after independence, which were only impeded by the UN's international sanctions regime following the DPRK's nuclear weapons tests in 2015/2016 (Kornes 2016a, 2016b). This relationship links two states led by ruling parties that see themselves as anti-imperialist liberation movements with a history of armed anti-colonial struggle, in the case of North Korea against Japanese colonialism. And as a matter of fact, Namibia became Africa's most loyal customer of North Korea's Mansudae Company, which has profoundly transformed memorial landscapes in postcolonial Namibia (Kornes 2019a; Kirkwood 2013, 2011).

Most of the projects commissioned to Mansudae are memorial sites, museums, and monuments. The first one was the Heroes' Acre, built south of the capital and inaugurated in 2002. In 2003–2004, the Military Museum in Okahandja was built, which still remains unopened to the public. In 2008, a lavish new State House was inaugurated, Mansudae's first project involving a highly representative state building.[399] In 2014, the IMM was inaugurated, the first museum space in Namibia dedicated exclusively to the memory of the struggle for national liberation. In addition,

[397] The only Namibian war veteran so far who trained in North Korea and who is known by name is a certain Mandume Mweshixwa; see <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/monumental-diplomacy/> [last accessed 15 October 2022]. I contributed with information from my research to the production of this podcast episode.
[398] Interviews with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 24 May 2013; Likius Valombola, Windhoek, 30 May 2013.
[399] Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, attended the ceremony as a guest of honour; see "Behind the 'Colossal Korean Kitsch'", *Insight Namibia*, March 2014.

Mansudae has produced a number of monuments at different places connected to the history of the liberation struggle. This includes the Strategist Monument at Ongulumbashe (2014), commemorating the beginning of SWAPO's armed struggle in 1966; statues for Sam Nujoma, both as civil Founding Father of the nation (Windhoek, 2014) and as guerrilla fighter (Ongulumbashe, 2013); as well as the first and only state-sponsored genocide memorial in front of the IMM in Windhoek (2014). Together with North Korean arms manufacturer KOMID, Mansudae was also responsible for constructing the new building of the Ministry of Defence in Windhoek and an ammunition factory for the Namibian army at Oamites, as well as the upgrading of various military bases (Kornes 2016a, 2016b). Allegedly, the company also expanded Sam Nujoma's estate at his farm in Etunda in northern Namibia.[400]

The extent of Namibia's cooperation with North Korea and especially its military dimension caused an UN investigation into potential sanction violations in 2016 (Kornes 2016a, 2016b). As a result, all commercial activities of Mansudae and KOMID came to an abrupt end and their workers had to leave.[401] In the wake of these developments, which had brought a lot of international attention to Namibia's peculiar relation with North Korea, the Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Tjekero Tweya explained Namibia's position: "While reaffirming its full commitment to the implementation of all UN sanctions resolutions, the government wishes to state that the warm diplomatic relations that exists with the DPRK will be maintained".[402] His statement underlines the importance of solidarity among former comrades and frontline states as a principled value for the Swapo government, which has found a lasting embodiment in Mansudae's contribution to the emergence of monumental memorial culture in Namibia.

The Military Museum in Okahandja

Already on the occasion of Heroes' Day 1990, President Nujoma promised to create a "war museum".[403] While no new public museums were built during the first decade of independence, the idea was maintained and realised with some delay. Between September 1998 and February 1999, an agreement was made between the National Museum, the Ministry of Works, and the Ministry of Defence, to enable the latter to use an old German military fort in Okahandja as a display centre for a proposed Military Museum.[404] In 1999, President Nujoma installed a technical committee within

[400] "Not going anywhere: North Koreans still working in Namibia", *North Korea News*, 17 January 2017.
[401] Rumours persist that North Korea continued to operate in Namibia with the help of Chinese companies; see "Not going anywhere: North Koreans still working in Namibia", *North Korea News*, 17 January 2017.
[402] CNN ambush exposed, *Informanté*, 26.10.2017.
[403] "'Ongulumbashe transformed the struggle': a tribute and pledges on historic Namibia Day", *The Namibian*, 27 August 1990.
[404] Betty Hango-Rummukainen: Report on the visit to Okahandja Fort, 5 September 1998; Permanent Secretary Izaks of the Ministry of Works: Allocation of Museum Building in Okahandja to Ministry of Defence, Letter to the National Museum of Namibia, 23 February 1999.

the Ministry of Defence to realise the museum project. According to Wessler, who interviewed the chairman of the committee, the museum was supposed to document the military aspects of the liberation struggle (Wessler 2007: 26).

The museum was built by Mansudae between July 2003 and January 2004 and is located on the premises of the town's military academy. In front of its building, a statue has been erected which depicts three PLAN fighters, who are armed and carry the national flag. On the main building's exterior brick wall is a larger-than-life mural of a bearded man, showing the power salute. On the outer premises, a contemporary tank from the liberation struggle era is mounted on a platform. Even though the Okahandja Military Museum is factually the first museum commissioned by the government after independence, it has never been opened to the public. Asked about reasons for the delay by the *Windhoek Observer* in 2014, the then Minister of Defence Nahas Angula announced that the museum was completed and ready to 'open soon', whereas a senior public relations officer from the same ministry explained that construction was still ongoing.[405] The contradictory statements fit into the general picture: six years later, the museum was still closed for reasons unknown.[406]

One Namibian museum professional I asked about this emphasised that the military leadership of the museum lacked expertise in museology and military history. According to my source, the level of cooperation and exchange between relevant ministries and institutions involved with museum work was inadequate, resulting in unprofessional conduct and the perpetual delay of inaugurations. Other sources close to Namibia's museum and heritage sector repeatedly told me that the permanent exhibition, built and designed by Mansudae, was undergoing 'cleansing' and 'corrections'. This supposedly related to erstwhile Swapo members who have since fallen from grace or joined the opposition, in particular former labour activist Ben Ulenga, as well as late Hidipo Hamutenya. Both left Swapo and formed their own parties, the CoD (1999) and the RDP (2007), respectively. While this may be true, but difficult to prove, it is important to note that both Ulenga as a prominent Robben Island prisoner and Hamutenya as SWAPO's influential Director of Information in exile are represented in the IMM's display. However, the rumours still give an impression in how far the museum is perceived as a political project of the ruling party.

I got a privileged opportunity to get a better picture when I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association of Namibia in Windhoek in 2012, which happened to include a presentation on the status quo of the museum.[407] The presentation was given by two

[405] "Delay in the opening of historic sites", *Windhoek Observer*, 16 January 2014.

[406] "Military museum remains closed", *The Namibian*, 9 March 2020.

[407] Field notes, 18–19 May 2012. MAN is a private institution, founded in 1990. As a self-described umbrella organisation, it represents and supports Namibian museums and heritage institutions with expertise, consultancy, training, and lobby work. The AGM took place in the course of two days, with several occasions to broach the issue of the Military Museum in discussions and informal conversations. The presentation proper took place on 19 May. Participants included the MAN management, representatives of private and public museums and heritage-related institutions, organised in MAN, as well as a range of scholars. During the time of my research, MAN was chaired by the late Dr. Jeremy Silvester.

representatives of the Military Museum's curatorial team, a male colonel and a female major. The latter did most of the talking. According to them, the museum remained in an unopened state mostly due to technical difficulties. For example, the complete renewal of the piping system was necessary, since the one provided by Mansudae apparently turned out faulty and substandard. In addition, the military-trained curators admitted to great difficulties in developing a sustainable exhibition concept. This challenge was aggravated by the project's level of secrecy, which hindered the involvement of external experts.

Their presentation included a series of photographs documenting the ongoing renovations. What was most interesting for me and everyone else in the audience, who had never seen the museum from the inside or any details of its exhibition, was the insights the photos revealed on the 'secret' exhibition design. It consisted mainly of large paintings and murals, which depicted historic scenes of the liberation struggle, as well as sculptures and unfinished multimedia displays. One image showed a room-sized painting of Ongulumbashe, with guerrilla fighters engaged in heavy combat, another portrayed what appeared to be the battle of Cuito Cuanavale as a huge panorama with tanks, helicopters, heavy fighting, and explosions. Another one, titled "audio visuals in the Military Museum", showed some sort of multimedia section with gaps in the wall, apparently intended for screens. According to the presentation, the entire exhibition hall had been "changed and modified", multimedia elements added to display "different war fares [sic!]", a PLAN base (*Vietnam*) had been recreated as a model, and different elements like 'paper ghosts', historical photos, and a cinema were intended to add a nuanced representation of the struggle. Judging from the images, the exhibition design consisted mostly of elements produced by Mansudae, without any objects or discernible exhibition narrative in the form of text or information displays. The final slide showed a huge panoramic scene of fighters gathered in heroic posture and waving SWAPO flags, *Welwitschias* in the front, tanks in the back. Nujoma, showing the power salute, was centre stage.

The major ended her presentation by highlighting some of the 'setbacks', her team encountered ("manpower, budget, internet facilities, materials, inauguration"), while emphasising the need to include multimedia displays for educational purposes. Not shown in the presentation were the life-sized figures of PLAN fighters, produced for a battle diorama by Swedish artists Cathrine Abrahamsson and Oscar Nilsson, which had been created the same year.[408] The scene depicts four male guerrilla fighters, armed with different rifles and machine guns and also clad in different types of uniforms, who are engaged in fighting. One member of the group is operating a radio. The figures are mounted on a plain platform; behind them on the wall is a painting of an exploding artillery shell in a northern Namibian or southern Angolan landscape.

With the words, "the MAN is very curious", moderator Jeremy Silvester opened the floor for discussion after the presentation was finished. He added that from MAN's perspective, there was much room for improving the professional relationship with the Military Museum, since MAN

[408] <http://www.cathrineabrahamsson.se/okahandja-military-museum.html> [last accessed 21 January 2022].

management didn't even know who was representing the Military Museum in the association. Remarkably, the major did not reply to the plenum, but instead mumbled an answer only audible to the moderator, who was seemingly uncomfortable with the situation and changed the subject. This performance oddly reinforced the culture of secrecy that is associated with the museum.[409]

Not surprisingly, "the floor" was not amused. Dr. Martha Akawa, historian and head of the Department of Geography, History, Environmental Studies and Tourism Management, opened the discussion with a question about the representation of women in the museum, which started off a very lively debate. In their answer, the curators emphasised that women were involved in the project, e.g. in the committee work. Not convinced, members of the audience reiterated the concept of representation in exhibition contexts. When the colonel finally answered that the reason, so few women were depicted in the paintings and murals was because so few of them were involved in the armed struggle, displeased murmur erupted.

People started to ask further questions on the issue, digging deeper, and an exercise in 'spotting women' in the exhibition display commenced. The major and Jeremy were standing in front of the image of the heroes' panorama, trying to identify women with the help of people in the audience, largely unsuccessful. As a result of this disappointing effort, another female historian recommended to include a separate section on women's contribution to the liberation struggle to the permanent display, seconded by another museum curator, who proposed to make the contribution of women the topic of a separate exhibition for Women's Day. Others chipped in, arguing that the museum was supposed to tell the stories 'of our grandmothers', who helped and assisted PLAN combatants and who told the stories to their grandchildren. The military would know these stories and had the means to make this possible. However, as another participant put it bluntly in the discussion, regarding museum matters, the army simply had 'no experience at all'.

Later on, amidst socialising and lunch it became clear that many participants were satisfied to have at least gotten some of their questions about the Military Museum answered, even though the mood was overwhelmingly critical. The military's presentation and the unfolding discussion unravelled some of the difficulties of museum and heritage management in Namibia, not only limited to the sphere of commemoration. Above all, it highlighted some of the major fault-lines in Namibia's museum and heritage sector, between a generation of well-educated young professionals, and the old guard of the liberation movement at the helm in public institutions. For this, the Military Museum is a particularly drastic case, even though it fits into the larger picture, explored in more depth in the following two chapters. Still, to end on a hopeful note: since the Military Museum was a member of MAN, in the wake of the meeting both institutions agreed to cooperate in the field of collection management.[410] Eventually, at some point the museum will open its gates to the public,

[409] MAN's AGM in 2011 actually took place in Okahandja and included a tour of the Military Museum. According to some participants I talked to, in their perception measures were made to conceal elements of the exhibition display, for instance by dimming or turning off the light.
[410] Informal conversation with Jeremy Silvester, Basel, 10 September 2013.

maybe with a revised exhibition representing the important and multi-faceted contribution, Namibia's women have made to the liberation struggle and the attainment of independence.

The Emerging Memorial Landscape at Ongulumbashe

As outlined in the chapter on Heroes' Day, 26 August 1966 has an elevated significance as a *lieu de mémoire* in Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation. This entails both the physical site of SWAPO's first guerrilla base on Namibian soil in Ongulumbashe and of 26 August 1966 as a foundation myth of the armed struggle for national independence. In this combination of spatial and mytho-historical aspects, Ongulumbashe emerges as a place of complex and interwoven memories. Unlike the Heroes' Acre, however, which is authoritatively built on mountains overlooking the capital, Ongulumbashe is located rather at the periphery of the postcolonial state. At the same time, it is also removed from the regional epicentres of the armed liberation struggle like Epinga, Endola, or Eenhana. Furthermore, it also features on no regular touristic itineraries.[411] I visited Ongulumbashe twice in July and August 2012 and got a rather rare personal impression of the memorial site. At the time of my visit, the place was difficult to access and in a process of expansion. Since then, the memorial landscape at Ongulumbashe has been transformed considerably.

I visited Ongulumbashe together with my friend Victoria,[412] who grew up in Oshakati and had been working as a teacher in the region for some years. To my surprise, Victoria had never actually been to the site, even though she lived and worked quite near to it. Since I spent several weeks in the region for field research in July and August 2012, it seemed a promising idea to visit the place together.[413] We met in Oshakati and went by car to Tsandi, from where one reaches Ongulumbashe after 22 kilometres on a gravel road that ends at the site.[414] When we arrived, no sign indicated our location or how to reach the monuments. A construction site was visible nearby, so we decided to ask a young worker how to enter the site. He showed us a non-descript gate, which unfortunately was locked. A note with several phone numbers was attached, which my friend started to call. The first two numbers were not in operation, the third was answered by a man who told us that the site usually was only open Mondays to Fridays. He could arrange for us to visit today (Saturday), but we

[411] The Namibian tourism industry still mostly relies on natural assets like wildlife and landscapes, an expanding cultural tourism sector, as well as the still burgeoning tourism segment catering for colonial nostalgia. The rich history of Namibia's liberation struggles, other than from a German or white Afrikaaner colonial point of view, does rarely feature on touristic itineraries. The same can be said about the cultural and historical heritage of Owambo with its plethora of museums, monuments, royal palaces, and market places, which are largely avoided by tourists on their way to the Kaoko, Zambezi or Okavango national parks.
[412] In order to protect her identity, name and particulars have been changed.
[413] The following is based on my field notes of 27 July and 1 August 2012.
[414] At the time of our visit, the road was in a devastating condition. Since Namibia in general has very well-kept roads, I found this remarkable, given the fact that Ongulumbashe accommodates Heroes' Day events on a regular basis, sometimes with foreign heads of state in attendance.

weren't allowed to take any photos.[415] The man, who happened to be a PLAN veteran, told us that someone would come to show us around.

A couple of minutes later a woman approached us who seemed to belong to the construction workers. She opened the gate, but reminded us again not to take any photos. When I showed her a letter from the National Museum, indicating that I was working with the history department, it did not impress her at all. The instruction she had received by the veteran clearly superseded my quasi-official status as a representative of the National Museum. When we finally reached the site, it turned out to be surprisingly inconspicuous. Next to the two monuments, there were no facilities or information panels available. A reception building was apparently just being built by the construction workers. According to the woman, it was supposed to be finished in 2013. After we had a brief glimpse at the site under the watchful eyes of the woman, we decided to leave and to return again at a later stage, when the war veteran was available for us with more information. Our first attempt to visit Ongulumbashe raised a lot of questions: why was the site so difficult to access? Who was it built for? Shouldn't it be open for the people at large, as a national monument? A strange vibe of secrecy surrounded the scene and I am sure that before us, other people had stood in front of the locked gate, pondering the same questions.

We returned on a weekday on the first day of August, accompanied by a friend of Victoria, who was also curious to see the site. This time, we called the war veteran first and announced our arrival beforehand. We picked him up along the road and drove to the site together. As it turned out, the man, who was probably in his fifties and rather tight-lipped, did not speak any English. When we arrived at the site, he made it clear that it was only allowed for each of us to take three photographs of the memorial site, much to the bewilderment of my company. We also asked why the site was locked. According to the man, it was to protect the area from roaming cattle and wild animals, but also vandalism. Furthermore, tourists would need a permit from the NHC to visit the site. Once the reception centre was opened, the site was supposed to be permanently staffed.

While he showed us around, I asked about the meaning of the denomination "Tunama Omugulugwombashe", which is engraved on the marble slab of the monument of 2004. According to him, *tunama* translates to "pond"; in combination with Omugulugwombashe, designating a "pond where Giraffes are drinking". Through Victoria, who translated, we encouraged the man to talk a bit more about the history of the place. He started to point out how the guerrilla fighters exercised and where they lived, showing us what appeared to be remains of dugouts. He also emphasised the role of "Castro", as the one who led the South African police to the site and was responsible for the attack. His narrative closely resembled Nujoma's (2001: 163) authoritative account on the matter. I started discussing this controversial issue, mentioning Helao Shityuwete's explanation that "Castro"

[415] Victoria wasn't quite sure whether he mentioned this restriction because it was Saturday or because I was from Germany. I later was told by a representative of the NHC that there was no restriction for taking photos.

most likely was “turned” by torture. The man, however, did not really seem keen on debating this with me and I felt that the conversation was touching sensitive terrain.

During our drive back home, we talked about our impressions. Victoria reiterated that for her, the visit was rather disappointing: there was hardly any historical information, the site was in a state of neglect, the guide did not speak English, and the restrictions on photography were rather daunting. She came to the conclusion that she’d rather not bring her pupils to the site. On my account, the visit familiarised me with another manifestation of what Werbner described for Zimbabwe as “elite memorialism” (1998a), meaning the memorialisation of a complex, elusive, and quite often contested history, rather detached from the everyday experience of the people who endured the struggle.

Fig. 35: The Ongulumbashe memorial site in August 2012. For close-ups of the monuments, see fig.14–16. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2012).

Namibian historian Vilho Shigwedha has repeatedly written about the Ongulumbashe memorial site, making similar observations and pointing out the site’s shortcomings as a place of learning about history. According to him, the site should have a pedagogic function.[416] The land was donated to the state by Uukwaluudhi King Josia Shikongo Taapopi in 1990 precisely to keep memory alive. Now, most visitors would be disappointed for the lack of information at the site. How would young Namibians understand the symbolism of the monument? What about the history of those combatants who were captured and imprisoned on Robben Island? The site would fall short of its potential, “to encourage discussion or debate”. Instead, the veterans should be actively included in developing the site, “to help transform Omugulugwombashe from its current state of decay into a

[416] “Omugulugwombashe: a site of hidden memories”, *The Namibian Weekender*, 24 August 2001.

heritage site that will do justice to the memory of those veterans who took the first bold steps on Namibia's long walk to independence."

Three years later, on the occasion of the site's upgrading as a national heritage site and the inauguration of the second monument, he reiterated his criticism: "The site is 'empty' and separated from any historical visual evidence; records or images that could educate our children, visitors and tourists about the political significance of the place as the epitome courage of heroism".[417] According to him, the site's "emptiness" was contradicting the meaning which was attributed to Ongulumbashe by the annual Heroes' Day commemoration. Again, he proposed to include the veterans in curating the monument site, as living heritage and communicative memory, as well as the rural community which supported the guerrilla fighters. His plea for a public history, dedicated to promoting education and national reconciliation, ended with a warning:

> In the past, the negligence in preserving most of Namibia's history was blamed on colonisers and missionaries. Yet, if we build impressive looking monuments, but fail to compliment them with the history of the events they commemorate, who will we blame for this neglect in the future? As the saying goes: ombedhi i ha yi yi moshiti (There is always a person to blame when things go wrong)

It is questionable, whether his warning was heeded. In the ten years of Pohamba's presidency (2005–2015), nationalist memorial culture emerged all over Namibia, in most cases built by Mansudae. Next to Windhoek, Ongulumbashe has become the second most important location for this emerging memorialization of the liberation struggle. As mentioned above, the upgrading of the site with facilities like a reception center and a restaurant catering to visitors was planned as early as 2002. When I visited the site in 2012, this was still ongoing. Beginning in 2013, the development of Ongulumbashe received elevated attention and new additions to its memorial landscape.

On Heroes' Day 2013, a statue was unveiled in honour of Sam Nujoma, showing the Founding Father in the posture of a triumphant guerrilla fighter, wearing a uniform and holding an Ak-47.[418] The statue was built by Mansudae and originally planned to be installed in front of the IMM in Windhoek. For many years, pending the delayed construction of the museum, it was stored at the Luiperd-Valley military base. When the museum was finally opened in 2014, a different statue was erected in front of it, depicting Nujoma as a statesman, dressed in a suit and holding the constitution in his hands. Both statues complement each other in reproducing two established modes for representing Nujoma: as the paternal Founding Father of the nation who is watching over Namibia's children, and as the military resistance leader and comrade number one (Miescher /Henrichsen 2009, 2001; see also Lentz /Lowe 2018: 81–87). It is this duality as perpetual resistance

[417] "Omugulugwoombashe: the place where identity is still myth", *The Namibian Weekender*, 3 September 2004.
[418] For a video of the inauguration; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcCFf8XSurc> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

leader and embodied national heritage of the liberation struggle, which is the source of Nujoma's legitimacy.

Seen from this angle, it of course makes sense to inscribe Nujoma into a historical narrative which marks Ongulumbashe as the beginning of the liberation of Namibia, even though he has no direct biographical connection to the site. A vivid endorsement of such a perspective was provided by the Secretary for Health, Population and Environment of the SPYL. On the occasion of Heroes' Day 2013 and the inauguration of the statue, he reflected on the connection between the armed liberation struggle and the heroic leadership of Sam Nujoma:

> Cde. Nujoma was and still is a symbol of heroism of Namibian people. He is the only Commander in Chief of PLAN and commanded the Namibians to fight the formidable colonial regime's army of apartheid South Africa. I would like to wish a well deserved and abundantly blessed long live to Cde. Dr. Sam Nujoma, Founding President and Father of the Namibian nation and thank him for leading a brave liberation movement that freed our country from the yoke of colonialism [sic!]"[419]

The poetics of his praise for the sacrifice of the heroes and the leadership of "Comrade" Nujoma highlight the degree, to which SWAPO's armed liberation struggle and the institution of Heroes' Day are interwoven. As Miescher and Henrichsen have pointed out, Heroes' Day was instrumental in fusing a "specific concept of a collective history centring on specific events and persons (men in particular), and a specific national liberation narrative beginning with the launch of the armed struggle" (Miescher /Henrichsen 2009: 128). This process, through annual commemoration, memorialisation, and patriotic history, has constituted Ongulumbashe as one of the most powerful *lieux de mémoire* of Swapo's liberation memory.

One year later, another monument was unveiled at Ongulumbashe, this time not during Heroes' Day, but on 21 May.[420] The so called "Strategist Monument" stands in marked contrast to the statue of Nujoma. It depicts a group of five armed and uniformed combatants, who are holding a meeting and discussing strategies. Four of the men are sitting on tree trunks, listening, while the fifth man has one knee on the ground and is pointing out something on a map. The whole memorial is made of bronze, including people, trees, guns, and the ground. A sign indicates that the monument represents "Operational Planning under Commander John Otto Nankudhu". The monument was again produced by Mansudae, while the model was co-designed by representatives of the National Museum.[421]

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[419] "Omugulu-gweembashe: a place of heroism and bravery to inspire us for good", undated (August 2013) statement by Sioni Aluta Iikela on Swapo's website, not accessible anymore (a copy is in author's possession).

[420] "Pohamba unveils statues at Omugulugwombashe", *The Namibian*, 23 May 2014. It was already installed in April; see "First Plan statue erected", *Informanté*, 30 April 2014.

[421] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013. A plaster model of the Ongulumbashe memorial site was on display in the Deputy Director's office. It already depicted elements such as entrance gate, parking space, reception centre, 'Strategist monument', and the Nujoma statue.

President Pohamba used the inauguration of the monument to lay wreaths at the graves of Ongulumbashe veterans Josef Uushona and Joseph Ipangelwa, who both died in 2013. This highlights the fact that Ongulumbashe, with significantly less public awareness compared to the Heroes' Acre, has also become a burial site for national heroes. Ongulumbashe has thus become a miniature of the central site in the capital, so far reserved for those with a biographical connection to Ongulumbashe.[422] In his speech, the President called on Namibia's schools to teach the 'true history' of the country and to talk to those who knew the 'true version of the liberation struggle'.[423] He also reemphasised his categorical stance that former Koevoet and SWATF veterans were not eligible for war veteran status: "I will not give veteran status to killers, and if they continue to threaten as they have been, if they want to go to the bush, we will meet them there. They talk about national reconciliation, but national reconciliation has its borders. If you go beyond the borders you are opening up wounds".[424] With his warning to adversaries of the national community, Pohamba echoed the political tone of earlier Heroes' Day speeches. Again, the commemoration of 26 August in particular and liberation memory in general, became a platform to draw exclusive political boundaries.

The veneration of the Ongulumbashe veterans in form of the monument appears as an acknowledgment of their sacrifice and contribution for the attainment of independence. However, in the context of their grievances regarding their dire social and economic situation, which I discussed in the chapter on Heroes' Day, the 'Strategist Monument' is imbued with an aura of discontent. There is a sad irony in the fact that Simeon Shixungileni, the Second-in-Command of 26 August 1966 who objected to being "displayed" on Heroes' Day, refused to be buried at Ongulumbashe. While he and his fellow combatants made history at Ongulumbashe, the liberation movement turned it into a place, as Vilho Shigwedha succinctly put it, void of history and full of myth.

[422] At the time of writing, veterans buried at Ongulumbashe are Joseph Uushona (2013), Joseph Hipangelwa (2013), Lamek Iithete (2014), Reverend Junias Vaino Kaapanda (2016), Isak Ashinkono Shoome (2017), Major Festus Kaapanda Kanangolo (2017) and Major-General Peter Nambundunga (2019).
[423] "Pohamba unveils statues at Omugulugwombashe", *The Namibian*, 23 May 2014.
[424] "Ex-SWATF, Koevoet are not 'war veterans'", *New Era*, 23 May 2014.

7. Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum: The Central Sites of State-Sponsored Liberation Memory in Postcolonial Namibia

With regard to the Ghanaian seat of state, Carola Lentz has noted that "the study of cross-cultural and cross-societal processes of appropriation […] is not only an important field of inquiry in contemporary political anthropology, but also constitutes one possible analytical entry into much larger debates, namely on the current global transformations of statehood and democracy" (Lentz 2010: 60). As I will analyse in this chapter, the construction of Heroes' Acre and IMM as central sites of state-sponsored liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia has a profoundly transnational dimension. It highlights the existence of an entangled history of (post-)socialist countries that connects not only Namibia and North Korea, but also other states in Southern Africa that are governed by former armed liberation movements. The emergence of North Korean-built memorial culture on the African continent is one tangible embodiment of this connection (Kornes 2019a; van der Hoog 2019; Kirkwood 2013, 2011). In this context, it makes sense to conceptualise the construction of the Heroes' Acre and the IMM as a process of cultural and organisational translation (Behrends /Park /Rottenburg 2014; Rottenburg 2002), taking place between North Korea, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The following analysis is largely based on the documentation of the technical committee, which was tasked with the implementation of the two sites. As the decisive agency in this process, the committee work has never been the focus of studies on this subject. I could access and evaluate the files during my work in the National Museum, which was one of the stakeholders in both projects. This is supplemented by interviews with persons involved in the planning process as well as informal conversations that I conducted throughout my research with people employed in the museum and heritage sector in Namibia, including the NHC.

Despite their diverging dates of inauguration, Heroes' Acre (2002) and IMM (2014) were planned as complementary structures by one joint technical committee, which involved a broad range of actors and interest groups. These had different backgrounds, stakes, and agendas in the process, but one common goal which brought them together in a long-lasting professional relationship and institutional framework. Even though the idea for an independence memorial was already discussed in 1990, the actual planning process only started in 1998 with the establishment of the committee. My historical reconstruction of the committee's work will focus largely on the period 2000–2002, when the committee implemented and finalised the Heroes' Acre project and shifted its activities to the planning of the IMM. To contrast the Heroes' Acre as an idea, conceptualised by its planning committee, with its actual use, I will provide additional perspectives that I encountered during my fieldwork. This includes ethnography of the site, generated in the context of a guided tour in 2012, as well as the debate about the Heroes' Acre's inclusivity.

Namibia’s National Pantheon: The Heroes’ Acre

Plans to build a war museum or an independence monument were already discussed right after independence. However, it took more than a decade to implement these ideas. According to Åfreds’ evaluation of the minutes of the National Assembly, the North Korean government approached its Namibian counterpart with a proposal for an ‘independence monument’ in November 1991 (Åfreds 2000: 60).[425] In 1992, the NMC accepted the proposal and planned to establish the monument within three years, to be inaugurated on the occasion of Namibia’s fifth anniversary of independence. This, however, did not materialise and the monument’s construction was postponed for lack of funds. Nevertheless, within the relevant departments and institutions the proposal remained on the table and was discussed repeatedly (Åfreds 2000: 60).

In 1997, while attending the summit of the OAU in Zimbabwe, President Nujoma used the occasion to visit the Heroes’ Acre at Harare, a memorial and burial site to commemorate liberation struggle heroes. The site was built by North Korea’s Mansudae and is modelled after the Revolutionary Martyrs’ Cemetery in Pyongyang (van der Hoog 2019: 35–39). Inaugurated in 1982, it not only embodies Zanu-Pf’s particular variation of heroic liberation memory (Fontein 2009: 11–15; Werbner 1998b: 78–81; Kriger 1995: 144–154), but also reflects the close relationship between Zimbabwe and North Korea, dating from the days of the armed liberation struggle (Kornes 2019a: 149–-150; Choi /Jeong 2017). As it turned out, President Nujoma was so impressed by his visit that he “conceived the idea for the construction of a Heroes’ Acre and a Memorial Museum in Namibia”.[426] That same year, the Swapo Party congress gave its blessing (Åfreds 2000: 60) and the Office of the President established contact with Mansudae through the North Korean embassy in Harare. Later that year, a delegation of the company’s designers came to Namibia and already presented first drafts. At its 13th ordinary meeting on 2 June 1998, cabinet approved the establishment of a high level technical committee for the Heroes’ Acre, tasked with the conceptual planning and organisational implementation of the project.[427]

The committee was chaired by the Secretary to the President Ndeutala Angolo, while Ben Kathindi, Deputy Director of Architectural Services at the Ministry of Work, Transport and Communication, acted as project coordinator. The committee had 18 members, including the Permanent Secretaries of most line ministries and a sizable representation of the Office of the President. The heritage sector was represented by only one member of the NMC. According to Betty Hango-Rummukainen, who began working with the committee as Curator of History of the National Museum in 2002, the composition of the committee reflected the political significance of the project. Among those involved, it was mostly perceived as a ‘State House project’, with the

[425] She refers to the minutes of the NMC, 27 November 1991.
[426] Heroes’ Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 8.
[427] Heroes’ Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 8.

Office of the President as its main stakeholder.[428] Fittingly, most committee meetings took place at State House.

Even though from the very beginning both Heroes' Acre and IMM were planned by one joint high level technical committee, albeit with shifting composition, both projects were implemented one after the other within a time-span of 17 years. The planning process for the Heroes' Acre began in 1997, while its inauguration happened in 2002. Planning for the IMM began around the year 2000 and gained momentum with the completion of the Heroes' Acre in 2002. The IMM's inauguration, however, only happened in 2014, for reasons that I explain in the next chapter.

Planning the Heroes' Acre: Translation and Adaption

The planning phase began with an idea, which was 'conceived' during a state visit to Zimbabwe, the establishing of contact with North Korea through the Namibian embassy in Harare, a first visit of Mansudae representatives in Namibia, and the political implementation of the project. All this happened mainly within the circles of Swapo Party and Office of the President. Through the Ministry of Defence, the government at this point also consulted liberation struggle veterans for advice. One of them was former Robben Island prisoner Helao Shityuwete:

> It was me, John Otto Nankudhu, General Hamaambo, who was the first defence force commander, and Maxton Mutongolume, who has since departed. So, we were called out one night to a house in Eros, it was top secret. So, when we arrived the house was guarded, and who was in? North Koreans! The North Koreans who were there came from Zimbabwe, through our high commission in Zimbabwe, who was also present that time and our minister of defence. So, we were told that we were selected because of who we are, to design a Heroes' Acre. These North Koreans are architects, ready to erect a Heroes' Acre[429]

Tate Shityuwete narrated this episode to me as a kind of cloak-and-dagger operation, serious and amusing at the same time. However, his description does highlight some of the characteristics of the Heroes' Acre project in its early stages: it was conducted in a rather informal and clandestine fashion, without public consultation.

The degree, to which the decision making process for a symbolically vested national project like the Heroes' Acre was subjected to political influence, did court some resentment in the heritage sector. Even though institutions like the NMC or relevant departments of the Ministry of Culture were involved in the committee work, there was criticism of the government's top-down approach and the lack of a public debate about the formats of national commemoration (Wessler 2007: 190). Maybe as a result of the minor role that heritage expertise played in the planning process of the Heroes' Acre, specific heritage-related challenges appeared on the committee's agenda. This

[428] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.
[429] Interview with Helao Shityuwete, Windhoek, 2 September 2010.

involved questions regarding the specific use of a site like the Heroes' Acre, as well as policy for administration and management.

In September and October 2000, the committee discussed guidelines for the use of the proposed Heroes' Acre.[430] To have a basis for discussion, the Ministry of Education was tasked with the preparation of a report on the function of Heroes' Acres. For this, PS Katoma prepared an evaluation of the use of similar sites in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, North Korea, and Cuba, titled "Uses of Heroes' Acre".[431] The report underlined the plural use of Heroes' Acres as 'national shrines' and sites of national commemoration, as burial sites for 'national heroes of the liberation struggle' and 'social heroes', and as tourism destination and educational sites. Additionally, memorial sites and national monuments in Russia, Egypt, France, and the United States were compared and summarised as "focal points of national unity".

Based on this analysis, four main characteristics were established for the Heroes' Acre:

> 1) Political and Social Value: It will be a place where the people of Namibia would express their national unity and patriotism because they will identify with the cause and ideals of the people that will be resting there.
> 2) Spiritual Value: The Heroes' Acre will be the final resting-place of the remains of the heroes and heroin [sic!] of the country and this will make it a sacred place. Essentially it will be a graveyard and hence all the respect accorded to the departed ones should take precedence.
> 3) Historical, Scientific and Educational Values: The place will be a symbol of triumph over colonialism and nationhood hence in addition to being a sacred shrine it must be an educative place. A place where memories of the struggle are kept alive. It is a place that will tell the story of the contribution of its occupants to the struggle for the liberation of Namibian [sic!] and national identity. The place will be a centre where people can learn more about their departed leaders.
> 4) Tourism Value: One point that was common in all the places researched is that the Heroes Acre will inevitably attract attention of visitors to the city and the country

Furthermore, under "Uses, Rules and Regulations", the "Use for Political and Social Gatherings" was established as mostly commemorative in nature, primarily regarding national day ceremonies, acts of state and heroes' funerals. All activities involving visitors, whether in the context of commemoration, school trips, or tourism, were supposed to be guided by the overarching principle, that "[t]he general public must identify with the Heroes' Acre; they must embrace it as a symbol of their identity as Namibians". In order to maintain order and protect the dignity of the site, access to

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[430] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre and Memorial Museum, 2 October 2000, dated 4 October.
[431] All subsequent quotes refer to "Uses of Heroes' Acre", Ministry of Basic Education, Sports, and Culture, undated, addendum to Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre and Memorial Museum, 2 October 2000, dated 4 October.

the Heroes' Acre should be limited and strictly supervised. For this, regulations should be applied according to different categories of visitors: family members of 'heroes and heroines' buried on the site were supposed to have unrestricted access, tourists and school children would have only limited access within guided tours, including educational programs, while researchers were to adhere to the standard procedure regarding national monuments.

The report offered a first tentative approach to clarify the function and use of the Heroes' Acre as a national monument for the committee members, tasked to implement its construction. It conceptualised the Heroes' Acre as a national monument, instrumental in forming 'national identity', and made recommendations for its use as a site of commemoration and education. It also highlighted that as a national monument, the Heroes' Acre was based on an international model, which had to be translated and adapted to fit a Namibian context. In this case, the template was a North Korean model, eclectic in itself (Kornes 2019a: 148, 154; Kirkwood 2011: 3), which had already gone through a process of translation and appropriation into a Zimbabwean, Southern African context (van der Hoog 2019). This differentiation is important, since the Namibian Heroes' Acre was not simply 'imported' from stalinist North Korea, as some commentators criticised (Fox /Lühl 2013: 5), but adapted from the version in Harare, which already is an expression of Mansudae's production of monumentalist memorial culture for an African market (Kornes 2019a: 144–146). Accordingly, throughout the planning process in its efforts to make sense of the Heroes' Acre, the one in Zimbabwe served as an ideal.[432]

With the investigation of the possible and desired use of the Heroes Acre came the question of mandate and administrative responsibility. Four months before the scheduled inauguration, there still was uncertainty as to which ministry would subsequently be responsible for the Heroes' Acre;[433] a matter, the committee referred back to cabinet.[434] At the same time, PS Katoma proposed to rework her ministry's report on the 'use' of the Heroes' Acre into a proper management plan, still outstanding at the time.[435] The drafting was delegated to the National Museum, which falls under the ministry's jurisdiction and which at the time, due to the increasing work on the IMM, was represented by four members in the committee.

At the committee meeting of 10 July 2002, the management plan was presented.[436] It summarised the previous efforts, in conceptualising the Heroes' Acre as a national monument that

[432] The Ministry of Defence proposed to send a fact-finding mission to Harare to familiarise itself with the use of the Heroes' Acre. I could not establish whether such a mission was carried out; see Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum of 8 July 2002.
[433] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 16 April 2002.
[434] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 7 May 2002.
[435] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 8 July 2002.
[436] "Conservation Management Plan for the Heroes Acre", National Museum of Namibia, 10 July 2002, addendum to the Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 15 July 2002. Page numbers refer to the document.

"portrays the liberation struggle and the eventual triumph over the apartheid regime" (3), recognizing "the centrality of memory to the historical heritage of Namibia" (4). The authors emphasised that the Heroes' Acre was going to be "the only physical structure and place that represents the resistance and liberation struggle of the people of Namibia" (6). With respect to an "African world view", the Heroes' Acre was also characterised as a final resting place for deceased liberation struggle heroes, who "need be heeded the respect and serenity of their burial places" (6). Throughout the report, the Heroes' Acre was described as a symbol of national unity, with the potential to create "harmony" (4) between Namibia's "tribal" (4) groups. In order to maintain the dignity of the site, the same recommendations were made as in the previous report, to limit public access and mobility (6–8). Furthermore, it included recommendations for possible stakeholders and an organisation plan with job descriptions.

While only a draft, it is significant how self-evidently the Heroes' Acre was imagined through the ideological idiom of classic European nationalism: a monument to unite a nation, forged in the collective suffering of a war for liberation. In Hage Geingob's already cited "Foreword" of the official government publication on the inauguration of Heroes' Acre, this symbolism was strong:

> Any country which went through the struggle, pain and suffering that we experienced ought to create a national symbol to remind it of the many men and women who sacrificed their lives. Similarly, almost all nations have created memorials to honour the bravery of their gallant sons and daughters. It is, therefore, appropriate that we as Namibians decided to build our own monument to honour our heroes in the form of a heroes' acre. […] The Heroes' Acre represents our collective desire as a nation to honour those individuals whose character and achievements have contributed to the Namibian identity[437]

It is further interesting to see how the committee members, roughly one month prior to inauguration, worked hard to imbue a model with meaning that came from outside as a novelty, designated to become Namibia's first and foremost monument to independence. It had to be translated into a form, which was adaptable to the Namibian context, both in its symbolism, and its administrative and organisational structures.

The process of translation also kept the committee busy in other regards. One issue that came up repeatedly were matters of design and vernacularisation. Quite early, apparently, the committee was confronted with criticism that the aesthetics of the Heroes' Acre lacked a Namibian 'flavour';[438] a critique that would resurface as well in the course of the construction of the IMM. One element of the design that raised particular questions among committee members was the depiction of two little girls at the entrance of the site who carried sunflowers in their hands. For the committee meeting of 16 April 2002, the Mansudae designers were explicitly invited on behalf of project coordinator Ben

[437] Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 6.
[438] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September.

Kathindi to explain the symbolism. According to the Koreans, including the site representative, the Vice-President of Production, and the Chief Designer, the images of the young girls at the entrance represented "the silence of the Heroes' Acre and paying respect in memory of the heroes' great contribution to the liberation of Namibia".[439]

As appears from the ensuing discussion, some members of the committee had different opinions about what symbolism was best to be represented at the entrance. Some recommended using the coat of arms, others preferred to have soldiers depicted at the gate. Ultimately, the girls were agreed upon as a design, even though the committee members were tasked to think about the appropriate position of the girls ("i.e. sitting, kneeling or standing") until the next meeting. On 7 May, the issue was discussed further. Again, representatives of Mansudae took part, albeit different ones than before, at least according to the attendance list.[440] Regarding the floral symbolism, the Korean designers made the recommendation to stick with sunflowers, "because it follows the sun" and symbolised the "*passing of the legacy to young generation* [sic!]".[441] Some committee members, however, rejected the idea of sunflowers as 'not Namibian' and it was agreed that the designers were to find 'similar' flowers. More emphasis was then laid on the posture and appearance of the girls: they should "kneel down" and "depict a Namibian character", thus representing a 'traditional' and gendered understanding of hospitality.

Another topic that was discussed in the committee resulted from the initially rather unclear function of the memorial as a burial site. At the meeting of 8 July 2002, chairwoman Angolo noted "that some people do not understand what the Heroes' Acre entails because they think that bodies will be exhumed from exile or elsewhere to be re-buried at the Heroes' Acre. She [Angolo; G.K.] said that it would not be the case. The Heroes' Acre will be symbolic".[442] A cabinet committee, chaired by Minister of Health and Social Services Libertine Amathila, would select the "heroes and heroines" to receive a symbolic grave. In the next meeting on 15 July, the committee was informed about a decision reached by the cabinet commission that nine heroes were to be symbolically 'buried' on Heroes' Acre at the official opening.[443] As mentioned earlier, in his inauguration speech President Nujoma explained that these nine historic persons were "identified from the period of our

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[439] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 16 April 2002.
[440] The rotation of Mansudae designers and their frequent absence was a feature that continued to affect the planning process of Heroes' Acre and IMM.
[441] Emphasis is in the original, probably indicating a quote. Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 7 May 2002.
[442] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 8 July 2002.
[443] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 15 July 2002. A handwritten note on the minutes of 8 July lists the names of Hendrik Witbooi, Samuael Maharero, Jakob Morenga, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Ipumbu ya Tshilongo, Kahimemua Nguvauva, Hosea Kutako, and Kukurukaze Mungunda, the only woman in the list.

people's resistance against German colonialism to the era of modern anti-colonial struggle, specifically the Windhoek Old Location Uprising on 10 December 1959".[444]

The selection is noteworthy for the fact that while most of the names relate to 'early resistance' leaders, with Kutako and Mungunda only two prominent figures from the early days of the nationalist movement are included. While both Kutako and Mungunda were influential on the formation of Namibian anticolonial nationalism, the first as an important political organiser, the second as a symbol of militant resistance against apartheid, none have a clear affiliation to Swapo. According to Becker, who refers to an anonymous source close to the cabinet commission, its members got so divided on criteria for identifying heroes that the selection represents a minimal consensus: no person from the post-1960 era of armed liberation was included (Becker 2011: 531). Regardless of the contestation that apparently informed the decision, the nine historical figures chosen represent the canonical and predominantly male pantheon of 'early resistance' leaders and national heroes' in Namibia. As such they also reflect a Namibian version of national unity in diversity where it comes to acknowledging historical struggle credentials as an ethnically inclusive, agreeable past.

Through its work, the committee thus implemented the transfer of a North Korean model through its mirror in Zimbabwe into a Namibian setting. In the Namibian case, the model was translated into an inherently hybrid memorial site, including a cemetery, a parade and ritual ground, and an array of monuments. Even though in its totality, the Heroes' Acre strongly emanates the aesthetics and symbolism of European nationalist modernity (Becker 2011: 526) the committee tried to find forms that fit a Namibian vernacular. This includes a comprehensive management plan, the representation of traditional hospitality, and an inclusive pantheon of national heroes. While this may appear trivial in the monumental grand design, the North Korean model did leave limited room for conceptual creativity. This, however, should not be seen as a contradiction: throughout the whole process – from the moment, President Nujoma was in Harare, to the planning and conceptual work in the technical committee and the cabinet commission on heroes – it was mostly representatives of the liberation movement, former exiles and veterans, who influenced the decision-making.

Making Sense of the Heroes' Acre

The Heroes' Acre was inaugurated on Heroes' Day 2002 with an act of state and close to 20,000 people in attendance.[445] On the occasion, Hage Geingob stated that the Heroes' Acre is "truly a national monument with which all Namibians should identify. A place where Namibians of all walks of life can gather to proudly honour their heroes and heroines and pay respect and homage to the memory of those fallen".[446] So far, the site is mostly used for acts of state on the occasion of

[444] Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 11. The publication includes biographical profiles of each of the nine heroes.
[445] National Monuments Council: "Annual Report 2002".
[446] Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 6.

heroes' funerals, national day ceremonies, or state visits. Its erstwhile purpose, to become the central site for all political national holiday ceremonies to be staged, was countermanded, when President Pohamba introduced the concept of rotating events in 2005 (Becker 2011: 532).

Visitor statistics for the years 2006–2013 give an average of 7,000 visitors per year, the majority most likely school children and tourists, as well as guests of heroes' funerals, in case they are recorded at the entrance.[447] Removed from town, inaccessible without private transportation and with entry fees, the Heroes' Acre is an unlikely place for ordinary people to just go and pay their respects (Becker 2011: 529). People who identify with the political opposition and also many white Namibians have repeatedly told me that they felt uneasy to visit the site. Gwen Lister has prominently expressed this sentiment: "The question is always asked by high-ranking government officials why Namibians in general don't participate in national events. The answer is clear. They do not feel welcome and this should not come as a surprise to anyone".[448] Likewise, many visitors whom I accompanied narrated their experience of the site as disconcerting, an effect that may well be triggered, and intrinsically intended, by the site's monumental emptiness.

I have been to the Heroes' Acre several times since 2008, but it was only in 2012 that I visited the memorial site with a guided tour. This took place on 13 September as part of the social programme of the annual meeting of the International Committee of Museums of Ethnography, in which I participated. Our group was arguably the worst possible crowd for such an endeavour: about two dozen Namibian and international historians, social anthropologists, and museum and heritage practitioners, equipped with an inexhaustible supply of critical questions. Set and setting was very interesting, for apart from the professional competence concentrated in our group, many of the Namibian colleagues had not taken a proper tour of the site before, either.

At the entrance gate, one of the two guides who accompanied us pointed out the girls with the flower bouquets: they were a symbol of welcoming the visitors to this site, which was built to commemorate Namibia's "sons and daughters who died during the liberation struggle".[449] We proceeded and passed the fountain, situated half-way between the entrance gate and the main site. The fountain, which depicts two young people, was not in operation; but when it was and the water ran over the figures' faces, our guide explained, "it means: their blood waters our freedom". She further explained the meaning of the site's Eternal Flame ("this is where you can connect with the spirit of the heroes and heroines") and the iron cross-like Heroes' Medal, dedicated to the "sons and daughters of the land who participated in the liberation struggle for our country". Regarding the burial site, she explained the difference between actual and symbolic graves and that the latter "represent most of our tribes in Namibia […] our forefathers who fought [the] early resistance".

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[447] I wish to thank Alma Nankela of the NHC for providing me with the statistics for 2007–-2013. For 2006/2007; see NHC: "Annual Report 2006/07", p.18. The number of visitors is in the range of 7,000 annually: 6,981 (2006–2007), 7,777 (2007–2008), 7,268 (2008–2009), 7,418 (2009–2010), 6,592 (2010–2011), 6,812 (2011–2012), and 6,199 (2012–0213). Unfortunately, the statistics do not differentiate categories of visitors.

[448] "Political Perspective", *The Namibian*, 9 August 2013.

[449] This and the following is based on my field notes, 13 September 2012.

Fig. 36: Heroes' Acre, Windhoek, inaug. 2002. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Fig. 37: Heroes' graves at Heroes' Acre, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Our guide offered a text-book explanation of the site and its elements, as drafted by the committee more than one decade earlier. Our second guide also used the occasion to remind us that this was a cemetery and site of "sacred heritage", and that we should act and move accordingly, since there was the possibility of "restrictions". The first guide chipped in and pointed out that soldiers were present on the ground to guard and protect the site. When I had visited the Heroes Acre in 2008 (twice) and in 2011, always accompanied by other people, foreigners and Namibians

alike, soldiers were indeed always around. I never experienced their presence as menacing, knowing of course, that the Heroes' Acre was adjoining the Luiperd Valley military base. Still, it gave the site a distinctive vibe of militancy. I also never experienced any of the restrictions of movement or otherwise, insinuated by the second guide and stipulated by the above mentioned management plan. The NHC's annual report of 2006–2007, however, mentions complaints by visitors who apparently felt threatened or annoyed by "the not-so-welcoming reception"[450] of the soldiers on the site. According to the same report, this situation changed for the better.

Fig. 38: The Unknown Soldier, Heroes' Acre, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2011).

When we approached the statue of the Unknown Soldier, our guide explained that he represented a comrade who had died fighting in exile. For this reason, government had gathered soil from Angola and Zambia and used it in the construction of the statue. Maybe sensing the inevitable question coming up, the guide then said proactively: "Most of the people say it's the former President, but no, it's the Unknown Soldier […] it's not Sam Nujoma!" Some people in the group

[450] NHC: "Annual Report 2006/2007", p.18.

could not help but laugh and a discussion ensued, regarding the facial characteristics of the Founding Father. Our guide, however, remained steadfast that the Unknown Soldier definitely did not resemble any living person.The discussion then shifted towards the construction of the site. The North Korean background was interesting for the group, which also happened to include a museum curator from South Korea. The guides tried to explain the planning process to us, the model character of the Heroes' Acre in Harare, while also emphasising the intricately political nature of the project. Some of the Namibian colleagues explained the historical background of North Korean solidarity with SWAPO and other liberation movements in Southern Africa.

The discussion got even livelier when we reached the mural, which the guide explained as representing "One Namibia, one nation". The members of our group started examining the details, quickly getting confused with the different temporal levels of the narrative depicted. When was independence? When did which war of resistance take place? Did Ovaherero fight the South Africans? It needed Namibian social anthropologist Dr. Michael Akuupa to step in and give a short ad hoc presentation on the historical context. It became obvious that in the absence of more detailed information provided on site, neither the mural, nor the existence of symbolic graves was self-explaining to visitors, who did not have a specialised knowledge on Namibia's history of anticolonial resistance.

Fig. 39: Mural, Heroes' Acre, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Finally, one member of the group remarked that the Heroes' Acre presented only a 'selection' of heroes, where in reality thousands of people were involved in the struggle for independence. When the guide replied that the government had installed a committee to establish and designate hero status, a vocal debate broke out regarding criteria, especially involving the Namibian participants. Terms like 'excelled' and 'wavered', 'extraordinary' and 'good character' were thrown around, and despite much humour and irony fuelling this academic discussion, it did give an impression of the challenges, a civil service commission might face in evaluating heroism.

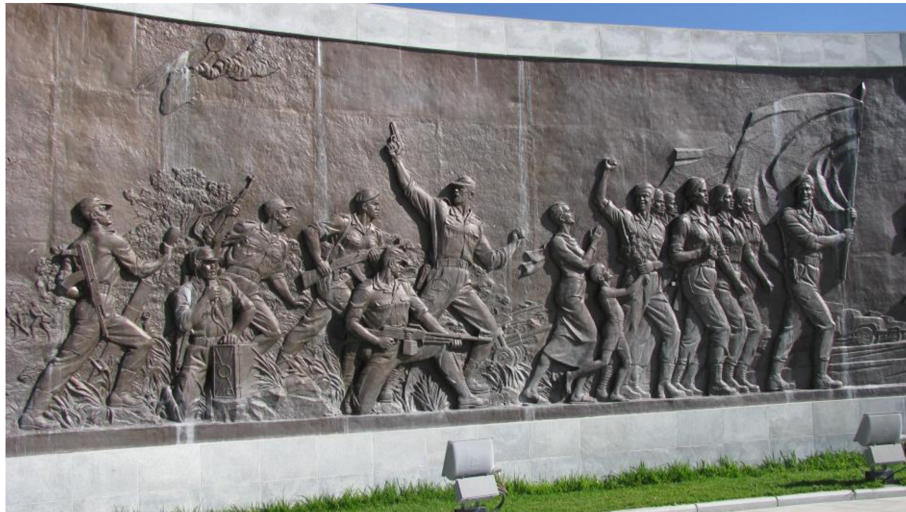

Fig. 40: Mural, Heroes' Acre, Windhoek. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

The debate became even more multifaceted, when one Namibian historian started to question the gender representation of the Heroes' Acre: "What does it say about women?" She emphasised that even though war was always gendered, the Heroes' Acre had a thoroughly "masculine" set-up, both in representation and architecture. She then referred to the Eenhana Shrine, where the critique of the Heroes' Acre had resulted in a representational acknowledgment of female perspectives, mirroring Becker's (2011) argument. She then concluded with a hint of aggravation that there was "no space for us" as historians to have significant impact on state-sponsored monument and museum projects, which too often tended to be political in nature.

This was a sentiment, voiced that day in semi-public, which I encountered time and again during my research when I talked with Namibian historians and heritage practitioners. Since I shared a social role at that moment, not only as participant of the conference but also as someone, who had come as an outsider but by now found entry into the small and close-knit community of Namibian museum and heritage professionals, I could relate to my Namibian colleagues. As on several other occasions during my research, I experienced this situation of critique and deconstruction as a moment of group formation among young scholars, who had impressive academic merits, often studied abroad in countries like South Africa or Switzerland, but felt 'out of place' and side-lined. Their emic understanding of issues like national commemoration or heritage was infused with transnational perspectives derived from critical scholarship and their own globalised biographies. Still, they had little say in Namibia's emerging memorial culture complex, which was still largely dominated by the representatives of the liberation movement in power, its state-sponsored monumentalism, and its control over employment opportunities in the heritage-related public service sector.

The Contested Politics of Heroism

Visiting Heroes' Acre with Namibian scholars, who also looked at the site as an institution of the state and a resource for applied heritage, was one important learning effect for me. Another was to compare the reactions of the experts in our group on the memorial site's aesthetics in light of the scholarship on Heroes' Acre. Scholarly visitors have pointed out the aura of militancy and triumphalism (Becker 2018: 8, 2011: 528; Kössler 2007: 370–372), emanating from the site. In addition, the Heroes' Acre has been criticised for a broad range of other things: the selectiveness of categories, applied to ascribing hero status (Shiweda 2005: 59–61), the silencing of atrocities committed by the liberation movement (Becker 2011: 529–530), its focus on armed resistance, blanking out the heterogeneity of the anti-apartheid movement and the contribution of workers, trade unions, students, and churches (Kössler 2007: 372), its gender bias and emphasis on heroic masculinity (Becker 2011: 530–531; Shiweda 2005: 61), its representation of ethnicity, supporting tribalist narratives of liberation (Becker 2011: 530–531; Kössler 2003: 107), and the cult of personality, embodied by the statue of the Unknown Soldier who clearly resembles the Founding Father (Becker 2011: 529–530).

Unlike the Heroes' Acre in Harare, the graves at the Windhoek memorial are not assembled in a form that represents a hierarchy of heroes (Kössler 2007: 369–370). The site is symbolically dominated by the statue of the Unknown Soldier, which towers above terraced burial grounds. As Shiweda (2005: 75–76) has noted, the shape and structure of the burial site has a homogenising effect on those buried there. She used the example of two 'early resistance' leaders from northern Namibia, Mandume ya Ndemufayo and Iipumbu ya Tshilongo, who are both recognised as national heroes at the site. This despite the fact, that some people considered ya Tshilongo "a lesser hero" (Shiweda 2005: 67). The Heroes' Acre has a limitation of 174 gravesites, which means that the people buried there since inauguration, like Dimo Hamaambo, Gertrud Kandanga, David Meroro or Reverend Markus Kooper, are successively filling the 'ranks' of the pantheon in the temporal order of their death. Accordingly, the hierarchy is established at an earlier stage, when the decision is made who should or should not be buried at the Heroes' Acre.

When chairwoman Angolo explained at the committee meeting of 8 July 2002 that graves on the Heroes' Acre will be 'symbolic', she apparently did not anticipate the amount of controversy that would evolve out of the practice of according state funerals to selected people, designated as national heroes. As regards the committee's documents, this does not seem to have been an issue in the planning process – even though the Heroes' Acre in Harare was clearly used as a burial site for war veterans. It was President Nujoma, who announced the intended purpose in his inauguration address:

> The entire leadership in Government has gone through an agonising process of identifying the parameters that will assist our citizens to identify those persons whose names will be engraved in golden letters here and those who will be buried here in future. […] for practical,

> logistical and other reasons, not all of the names that will be received from the regions will find place for inclusion here at the Heroes' Acre. However, our citizens must rest assured that through transparency the identification process will be thorough, balanced and objective[451]

Citizens everywhere in the country were invited to come forth with ideas for national heroes to be recognised at the Heroes' Acre, after they went through a process of selection.

Already in 2005, Shiweda highlighted the inherently flawed concept behind this approach. Not only did the selection process clearly give preferential treatment to male SWAPO veterans and exiles (Shiweda 2005: 59–61), it also failed to truly enable citizen participation (Shiweda 2005: 71–73). It rather turned out to become an elite-driven political process, estranging stakeholders like the NMC, whose erstwhile Director considered the whole procedure to be too 'politically sensitive' to even comment on it (Shiweda 2005: 72). Examples from recent years give an indication of the categories of people, who 'qualify' for burial at Heroes' Acre, but also of pitfalls and contestations.

On Heroes' Day 2014, the human remains of several SWAPO members who had died in exile and were buried in Angola and Zambia were exhumed, repatriated, and reburied at Heroes' Acre. This included SWAPO's Secretary of Defence Peter Nanyemba, as well as Homateni Timoteus Kaluenya, Isak "Pondo" Shikongo, Augustus "McNamara" Nghaamwa, Lineekela Kalenga, Natalia Ndahambelela Shikangala Mavulu, who died during the attack on Cassinga in 1978, and SWAPO's first female cadre in exile, Putuse Appolus.[452] On 25 February 2015, co-founder of SWANU and ex-Robben Island prisoner Gerson Hitjevi Veii became the first non-Swapo member who received an official heroes' funeral at Heroes' Acre. Veei, who was imprisoned in South Africa from December 1966 to May 1972, was lauded by President Pohamba for his outstanding "bravery and patriotism".[453] He was buried next to Ongulumbashe veteran Mzee Kaukungwa, who had received a heroes' funeral on 17 September 2014.

On Heroes' Day 2015, as another novelty Anton Lubowski became the first white person recognised at Heroes' Acre. Lubowski joined SWAPO in 1984 and represented many of its members and supporters as a lawyer. In doing so he suffered harassment from apartheid authorities and was vilified within the racist white society. He was assassinated in Windhoek on 12 September 1989, presumably by South Africa's notorious Civil Corporation Bureau and buried in a modest grave in Katutura's main cemetery (Lubowski /van der Vyver 1992). His family expressed its

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[451] Heroes' Acre Committee on Media Liaison 2002: 11.

[452] Undated (August 2014), <http://www.swapoparty.org/remains_of_the_gallant_fighters_laid_to_rest.html> [last accessed 7 March 2019]. The reburial of Putuse Appolus was already discussed in 2002, but took place only twelve years later. Appolus was the first woman to join SWAPO in exile in Tanzania in 1960. She co-founded the SWAPO Women's Council in 1969 and served as Deputy Secretary-General of the Pan-African Women's Organisation in Algiers for 14 years. Many Namibian exiles remember her as a nurse in SWAPO's 'Old Farm' camp in Zambia; see "Namibian heroine Putuse Norah Appolus the first to be buried in Heroes Acre", *The Namibian Weekender*, 15 February 2002.

[453] "Veii laid to rest", *The Namibian*, 26 February 2015. Together with Fousy Kambombo and Benson Muramba, I interviewed Gerson Veii for the National Museum in Windhoek on 12 October 2012.

gratitude over the recognition.[454] He was reburied together with former Swapo Party Secretary-General Moses Garoeb and Peter Mweshihange, who was SWAPO's leading military commander in exile and Namibia's first Minister of Defence.

Another category relates to Namibians who are not accorded prestigious state funerals at Heroes' Acre, even though they are equipped with the necessary struggle credentials to qualify as national heroes in public opinion. One example is musician Jackson Kaujeua, whose songs were an important soundtrack to the Namibian liberation struggle, especially during the 1980s. Another is the case of Bishop Kauluma, who played an important role as a representative of the Anglican Church in the anti-apartheid struggle. The fact that neither was declared a national hero caused considerable debate and has led to criticism of government policies regarding the designation of hero status.[455] A different, yet heuristically related case involves people who are offered state funerals on Heroes' Acre, even though they were staunch political opponents of Swapo, but who refuse, either in their own capacity or on behalf of their families, as was the case with Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako.[456]

Because of these controversies, Namibian political commentators like Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari, Fluksman Samuehl or John Mbenzi have criticized the arbitrariness and ambiguity of the whole process. According to Hengari, the absence of proper criteria and transparency fuelled a culture of entitlement and rather devalued the idea of heroism,[457] while Samuehl criticised the lack of a "national dialogue on this important national subject", calling for a discourse on "post-independence national hero[es]".[458] On the occasion of Heroes' Day in the year of Namibia's twentieth anniversary of independence, scholar John Mbenzi published a fierce critique of government's policy regarding hero status. According to him, there were "strong sentiments" in the population and especially among liberation war veterans, how recognition was tied to political connections rather than individual contribution and people with 'questionable struggle credentials' were being honoured. What was necessary, according to Mbenzi, was the establishment of "a national policy on heroism" with comprehensible guidelines for the conferment of hero status.[459]

His criticism reflects widespread disenchantment about the commodification of struggle credentials and a resultant culture of entitlement. Sentiments like this are readily and frequently voiced in public fora like political discussion groups on social media, radio chat shows, or the newspapers' SMS columns, often accompanied by a critique of political elites and 'tenderpreneurs', who use their connections to the ruling party for self-enrichment. What most people criticise,

[454] "Anton was integral - Almo Lubowski", *Namibian Sun*, 20 August 2015.
[455] See "Who is really a hero?", *New Era*, 20 August 2010 on Kaujeua; and "Bishop Kauluma hailed as hero", *The Namibian*, 24 April 2007. Regarding contestation over burial politics at Heroes' Acre; see also Kössler 2015: 35–36.
[456] "From Villain to Hero in Death", *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014.
[457] "Who is fit for Heroes' Acre?" *The Namibian*, 3 May 2007.
[458] "Who Is A National Hero In Namibia?" *The Namibian*, 24 August 2007.
[459] "Who is really a hero?" *New Era*, 20 August 2010.

however, is not the category of 'hero' or the value of struggle credentials per se, but their accreditation without merit.

The need for transparency regarding the conferment of hero status was also confirmed by Timotheus Mashuna, a Basel-trained historian, journalist, and employee at the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. Part of Timo's job assignment included the researching and fact-checking of biographies of liberation struggle veterans, who were designated as national heroes. According to him, the establishment of comprehensible criteria was one challenge; the changing perception of struggle credentials of individuals another. The latter posed a problem especially where people were honoured who were still alive and eventually fell from grace in public opinion. In Timo's opinion, the government should make sure to "only declare someone a hero […] when a person has passed on". He also mentioned that a national honours act was in the making, which would address many of these problems.[460] As a writer for state-owned *New Era* newspaper, Timo himself contributed a nuanced and balanced perspective on the difficult question of heroism. In his weekly column, he routinely portrayed individuals from Namibia's past and present, who have contributed in their respective fields to the struggle against apartheid, the attainment of independence, and nation-building. This includes people as diverse as archaeologist Beatrice Sandelowsky, church leader Johannes Isaaks, Ongulumbashe veteran Simeon Shixungileni, or law professor Manfred O. Hinz.

The debates over recognition highlight that struggle credentials are a powerful form of symbolic capital with serious repercussions on society. As Bayer and Pabst have carved out in their comparison of entitlement economies in post-conflict societies, the formalisation and bureaucratisation of categories like 'hero' or 'victim' inevitably conflates economic and moral dimensions. The rejection of claims for entitlement can consequently be accompanied by both "economic misery for many of the claimants, but also social exclusion" (Bayer /Pabst 2017: 13). Ex negativo, this is evidenced by the exclusion of Namibians who served in South Africa's security forces from recognition as either national heroes' or war veterans. The struggle of SWAPO's ex-detainees for recognition as war veterans, but also public apology and moral rehabilitation, is another example (Kornes 2013). The passionate debates over recognition in the form of heroes' burials, or the absence thereof, show that this holds true for the Heroes' Acre as well. At the same time, due to the socially accepted prestige of struggle credentials, recognition in form of a burial on Heroes' Acre can also be a resource of positive identification.

One instructive example for this is the case of Reverend Markus Kooper, who was accorded a heroes' funeral on Heroes' Acre on 22 December 2005. Kooper, who was born in Hoachanas in 1918, was instrumental in organising communal resistance against South African apartheid rule in his community, especially from within the fold of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). A focal point of his activism was the struggle against the intended forceful relocation of the Hoachanas community and the disappropriation of their communal land, planned by the colonial

[460] Interview with Timotheus Mashuna, Windhoek, 22 June 2012.

administration since 1923. For this, he faced constant harassment by authorities. In January 1959, he and his family were forcibly removed from their home and deported to Itsawises, a desolate place near Keetmanshoop, where they were kept under house arrest. In early 1960, he illegally crossed the border into Botswana and travelled to Zambia and Tanzania, where he met fellow Namibian nationalists like Sam Nujoma, Jariretundu Kozonguizi, Mburumba Kerina and Theo-Ben Gurirab. With the help of British clergy man Michael Scott, Kooper was able to travel to New York where he became one of the early petitioners for Namibian independence at the UN. He returned to Namibia and Hoachanas in 1976, where he continued his peaceful resistance against apartheid, again facing harassment and imprisonment.[461]

Fig. 41: Grave of Reverend Markus Kooper at the Heroes' Acre. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2011).

For his family and the Hoachanas community at large, Reverend Kooper's inclusion in the national pantheon and the acknowledgement of his contribution to independence is a source of great pride and identification. The Kooper family is prominently represented in the Kai-ǁKhaun traditional authority, which annually commemorates the community's history of resistance and Markus

[461] This and the following is based on interviews with Neels Kooper, Hoachanas, 3 December 2012; Simon Gerhardus Kooper, Hoachanas, 23 January 2013; Francis Kooper, Windhoek, 13 March 2013; Chief Petrus Simon Moses Kooper, Hoachanas, 23 April 2013; Susanna Kooper, Hoachanas, 27 April 2013; Magdalena Kooper, Hoachanas, 2 May 2013; numerous informal conversations with Markus Kooper jun. throughout 2011–2013; as well as Lowenstein 1962: 92–102. I conducted several weeks of fieldwork on communal memory-politics in Hoachanas and also attended the annual Kai-ǁKhaun heroes' day in 2011 and 2012. For conceptual reasons, however, it was not possible to include a separate chapter. See Kössler (2004) for an instructive case study on communal memory pratices in Hoachanas and Berseba.

Kooper's contribution to it.[462] Long-serving late Chief Petrus Simon Kooper was a son of the Reverend and also continued his father's legacy as a priest of the AME church. In 2013, the traditional authority inaugurated a monument in Markus Kooper's honour next to the building of the AME Private Community School, which was founded by the Reverend after his return in 1976. The monument was self-financed and built by members of the community. With its aesthetics and explicit reference to the status of the reverend as a recognised "national hero", it mirrors and adapts the grave site on Heroes' Acre.

Fig. 40: Reverend Markus Kooper monument at Hoachanas, inaug. 2013. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2013).

The monument thus provides a symbolic link and material evidence for the connection between the history of Hoachanas and that of the national liberation struggle.[463] As such, it adds weight and

[462] For example by means of an exhibition, which Markus Kooper, a grandson of the Reverend, curated for the annual Heroes' Day of the Kai-ǁKhaun traditional authority, which he put on display in 2011 and 2012. In 2012, I assisted with mounting the exhibition, consisting of photographs mostly, in the Hoachanas community hall.
[463] And even its international dimension, since Kooper's case became the subject of a UN resolution in 1959; see UN Resolution 1357 (XIV) "The Hoachanas Native Reserve" (17 November 1959). In: United Nations, 1960: Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during its Fourteenth Session, 15 September – 13 December 1959. General Assembly, Official Records: Fourteenth Session, Supplement No.16 (A/4354). New York, p. 27.

legitimacy to ongoing claims of the Kai-ǁKhaun traditional authority for the restitution of communal land, which was disappropriated and sold to German farmers after the war of 1903–1908.[464] This underlines once more the importance of struggle credentials as a political resource for negotiating claims in the postcolonial nation-state and for inscribing communal histories of resistance into the authoritative national narrative of liberation, which the Heroes' Acre represents.

Central Site of State-Sponsored Liberation Memory in Postcolonial Namibia

As a war memorial the Heroes' Acre stands in the tradition of a distinctly modern nationalist memorial culture. It paradigmatically reflects Anderson's observations on monuments of the Unknown Soldier, as repositories of 'ghostly national imaginings' (Anderson 1991: 9). In the same vein, it resonates strongly with Koselleck's studies on war monuments as 'central sites of the political cult of the dead':

> It is the unsurpassable last instance of death, which is semantically and iconologically mobilised to justify death for 'the people', and thus the 'rule of the people'. [...] The violent death of the individual is already justified in itself, as long as it helps to safeguard the collective's political salvation for the future. For that reason, he has to be remembered.[465]

It is through the secularisation of death and its veneration in the symbol of the nameless and unidentified *soldat obscure*, that monuments like the Heroes' Acre serve to glorify selfless martyrdom and sacrifice for the nation (Koselleck 1994: 14–15).

What adds additional significance is the symbolic order, embedded in the structure of the Heroes' Acre. The Unknown Soldier, replete with sand symbolising the mortal remains of those who perished in exile, is towering above the individual graves. These, however, are not the graves of regular soldiers, but mostly 'early resistance' leaders and PLAN commanders. Some notable exceptions like Reverend Kooper, Gerson Veii, and Anton Lubowski demonstrate that the state's bureaucratised concept of national hero status does leave some space for individual variation. Still, as a national pantheon the Heroes' Acre clearly favours the contribution of male military leaders. Common, rank-and-file soldiers have not been recognised, neither by graves nor the mentioning of names, as was done at other prominent war memorials in Pretoria (Freedom Park) or Washington (Vietnam Veterans' Memorial).

The Heroes' Acre has a limited number of grave sites, which also limits its capacity as a pantheon and also increases the symbolic value of inclusion. At the same time, as such, the graves

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[464] See "Still chewing yesteryear's stones: Namas accuse Swapo govt of colonial tactics", *Namibian Sun*, 27 September 2016; "Hoachanas residents 'chewing stones'", *Namibia Economist*, 30 September 2016.

[465] My own translation from German: "Es ist die nicht überbietbare Letztinstanz des Todes, die semantisch und ikonologisch aufgeboten wird, um den Tod für das 'Volk', und damit die 'Herrschaft des Volkes' zu rechtfertigen. […] Im gewaltsamen Tod jedes Einzelnen liegt bereits seine Rechtfertigung, solange er das politische Heil des ganzen Volkes für die Zukunft verbürgen hilft. Und deshalb muß an ihn erinnert werden" (Koselleck 1994: 14).

know no differentiation, as they do in the Zimbabwean model. Accordingly, the categorical differentiation is not *how* people are buried, because there is only one option; but rather the hierarchy of *who* is selected for inclusion and who is not. As discussed above, criteria are ambiguous and a matter of unceasing contestation: the examples of Gerson Veii and Kuaima Riruako indicate that party affiliation is not a hard category, nor is ethnicity or race, as the case of Lubowski shows.

The Heroes' Acre epitomises the elite memorialism of the liberation movement in power, as it embodies the concretion of struggle credentials as symbolic capital. At the same time, it demonstrates the inherent ambiguities and limitations of the recognition of hero status. Clairvoyantly, in hindsight, du Pisani already anticipated this problem in 1997, when the Heroes' Acre still was a mere conceptual idea:

> We do need to find a more organic way of commemorating and honouring the icons and the memories of all of those that engaged themselves in these edifying events without forcing everyone into a particular corset of celebration. […] there seems to be a need for more transcendent symbolic action (du Pisani 1997: 30)

For Namibia's eminent political scientist, the important thing was to recognise the contribution of Namibians across all strata and sections of society: "This would not necessarily imply a grotesque and immodest 'Independence Monument' or a lifeless mausoleum of cold granite and marble" (du Pisani 1997: 30). While many would probably argue that the Heroes' Acre has become just this, another brazen claim to power in concrete and bronze, it is important to consider this in relation to its complementary structure, the IMM.

Planning the Independence Memorial Museum

Even though the construction of the IMM only began in 2009, a lot of the conceptual work regarding exhibition narrative and display design was done in the years before, parallel to the planning of the Heroes' Acre. That the display centre[466] took so long for its completion has several reasons: first of all, budgetary constraints hindered the simultaneous construction of both sites. The budget of N$35 Mio, which was allocated to the Heroes' Acre project, did not cater for the IMM, for which a separate budget had to be drawn up for.[467] This caused some debate in the committee, whether Heroes' Acre and IMM were initially conceptualised as one project, and if yes, why it was not fully budgeted for. For Joseph Kashea, a former Robben Island prisoner and Under-Secretary at

[466] Technically, the IMM is not a 'museum' proper, but a display centre of the National Museum.
[467] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September. For this figure, chairwoman Angolo refers to Cabinet Action Letter, Decision No: 25/14.09.99/009 of 28 September 1999. To finance the completion of technical drawings, Mansudae were paid US$30,000 in advance. As other minutes indicate (8 & 15 July 2002), the Heroes' Acre budget was exceeded by N$8,5 Mio – a constant cause for debate in the committee.

the Office of the President, the fact that both projects were seen as separate, "was the fault of the Committee and the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication (as adviser)".[468] Accordingly, additional funds were necessary. Loini Katoma of the Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture (MBESC) emphasised that the construction of Heroes' Acre and IMM was one project, albeit with two distinct phases and that only the first phase, i.e. the Heroes' Acre, was covered by the cabinet decision on funding. This view prevailed in the end and was also officially used as a wording by the committee.[469]

In addition, the financial situation at the time was strained by the construction of the new State House, completed between 2002–2008, which was another prestigious and expensive project commissioned to Mansudae (Kirkwood 2011: 28–38). Even though Mansudae promised that all projects could be built simultaneously if properly financed,[470] this obviously was not the case. Expenses for the new State House were skyrocketing and ended up twice as high as initially estimated.[471] According to Fousy Kambombo, who since 2002 represented the National Museum in the technical committee, this financial burden was the main reason for the delay.[472] In May 2006, the Minister of Works Joel Kaapanda informed the National Assembly that due to lack of funds the IMM was put on hold at least until 2008, because his ministry had only been allocated N$10,000 for the display centre in that year's budget.[473]

Another reason that caused delay involved the decision where to build the display centre. As the committee's documents indicate, initially the IMM was supposed to be situated at Luiperd Valley next to the Heroes' Acre, which also caused debate in the committee due to its peripheral location.[474] When the decision was made to build it in central Windhoek and next to *Alte Feste*, this included the preparation for the relocation of the equestrian monument, which was announced in July 2001 (Kössler 2007: 374). The monument was removed only in 2009, however, when the construction of the IMM commenced. Throughout this time and regardless of the delays, the technical committee was active: first, with planning the Heroes' Acre (1997–2002), then from 2000 with the implementation of the IMM.

Conceptual Work: The National Museum as a Stakeholder

As in the case of the Heroes' Acre, the idea of an Independence Museum is associated with Sam Nujoma and his encounter with Mansudae's work in Zimbabwe. Kirkwood also highlights the

[468] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September.
[469] See section below on the planning process of the IMM.
[470] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre and Memorial Museum, 2 October 2000, dated 4 October.
[471] "Shock and awe over State House costs", *The Namibian*, 8 September 2003.
[472] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012.
[473] "Independence Museum put on hold", *The Namibian*, 2 May 2006.
[474] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September.

importance of Nujoma’s state visit to North Korea in 2000, where he had the chance to visit the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, the Revolutionary Martyrs’ Cemetery, and the Mansudae Art Studio; reportedly he was very impressed (Kirkwood 2011: 12–18). In a document of July 2000, in which Mansudae’s formal bid to construct the museum is announced, it is characterised as “a brainchild of H.E. the President”.[475] The document further indicates that the MBESC and subsequently the National Museum were tasked with developing a draft concept for the display centre. This was supposed to be done preferably by the end of August 2000, so that the Koreans could timely begin with implementing the draft. The National Museum was instructed to present its display concept to the Heroes’ Acre committee and assist the Koreans in the planning process. According to the document,

> [t]he Museum seeks to among other: Immortalize the memory of the heroes of Namibia [sic!] struggle for independence. Present reproductions of decisive battles such as Ongulumbashe or the Kasinga [sic!] massacre using high tech display approaches such as sound and smell effects. Tell the story of the liberation struggle through pictorial, material and other forms of presentation. Present documentaries of the struggle

Beginning with the end of July 2000, documentation thus allows to reconstruct the planning of the IMM alongside the Heroes’ Acre. As I outlined in the section on the Heroes’ Acre, in its early stages the technical committee was strongly influenced by the Office of the President, both in regard to decision making and personnel. With the emergence of the IMM on the committee’s agenda, this did change. Not only did the National Museum increasingly claim ownership of the new display centre, it also brought its own experts into the committee.

A short proposal, most likely produced by the MBESC as input for the committee, sketched the IMM’s purpose and mandate: “It aims to educate and inspire the people to the building of a new society by systematizing information and materials of the history of Namibian people’s heroic struggle for the national independence from the colonial rule of foreign imperialists imposed more than a century”.[476] The narrative, outlined in bullet points on half a page, focussed strongly on the founding of SWAPO, armed guerrilla war, the “triumphant return to the homeland”, and the “building [of] a new society”. In terms of display content, it was mostly objects, images, and film related to SWAPO, which was to be considered. ‘Early resistance’ or the contribution of southern Namibian communities to liberation was not mentioned. Handwritten notes by the National Museum’s Curator of History on the document, however, added the important role of the labour and education movement, and of youth and women.

Tasked with the conceptual drafting of the display centre, the National Museum then produced a detailed production schedule, planning the creation of the museum in several stages

[475] Brief notes on the meeting concerning the establishment of the Independence Memorial Museum, 26 July 2000. The document is part of the National Museum’s collection of files of the committee work.
[476] Independence Memorial Museum, undated, second half of July 2000.

within a time-frame of two years.[477] The first stage (August 2000) envisaged mostly conceptual drafting as input for the high level technical committee and the selection of architectural and interior exhibition designs that Mansudae would provide for the museum. Further stages of the "Construction Program" foresaw the drafting of the designs of the exhibition and the building's architecture, its discussion, time for revision, and completion by Heroes' Day 2002. While still sketchy at this point, the proposal already mentioned several features that were part of the final display: historic paintings of battles, bronze statues of fighters, and documentary film.

In a more elaborate project proposal of 7 August 2000 addressed to the Permanent Secretary of the MBESC, the National Museum officially claimed authority over the project and emphasised that it should be treated as a formal display centre and "educational extension" of the National Museum.[478] It also recommended to widen the focus of the exhibition and to also include the "early resistance" and "educational and diplomatic front of the struggle". Preferably, room for temporary exhibitions should be considered to "allow for more topics to be covered such as the role of women and student movements in the struggle". In the report, the National Museum is repeatedly positioning itself as the major stakeholder in the project, claiming central responsibility for the IMM and curatorial duties. The establishment of a sub-committee, including people from the Heroes' Acre committee, the National Museum, and Mansudae is proposed to be "responsible for deciding the contents of the displays and how they should be exhibited. In this regard the museum historian will have to work closely with the Korean team in developing the story line for the exhibition".

In the high level technical committee meeting on 25 September, the plans for the construction of the IMM were discussed at length for the first time. According to the minutes, PS Katoma explained "that a need was identified to construct a museum for educational tours and to record the history of independent Namibia. She said that the Museum would inspire and educate Namibia's present and future generations".[479] A first set of draft designs produced by Mansudae were handed out to the committee members. These included the building's façade and foyer, display rooms, as well as statues, while the PS emphasised that Mansudae would prefer "to consult many Namibians before finalizing the sketches". According to her, Mansudae produced the drafts free of charge, since no contract had been signed with the company yet.

The construction design depicts a rectangular building with a large glass front, the outer façade decorated in unpolished white granite.[480] Its sides have additional segments with 'concrete decoration', while the back of the building is round. In the midst of the glass front and above the entrance, a large round field is available to attach a symbol; "coat of arms" has been added in

[477] Scheduled construction program of the Independence Memorial Museum to be built in Windhoek, Namibia, dated 31 July 2000.
[478] National Museum of Namibia: The Independence Memorial Museum – Proposal, dated 7 August 2000.
[479] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September.
[480] Mansudae Overseas Project Group of Companies: Independence Memorial Museum (Namibia), Drafting Design, September 2000.

handwriting. The building is topped by a smaller structure with windows, like an observation deck. The dimensions given are length 48, width 30, and height 13 meters. For the interior, the design basically follows a horseshoe-like structure: visitors reach an 'entrance hall' via a staircase and the 'main hall' via a second staircase. To the left and to the right, two wings with rooms are planned, including six exhibition galleries, toilets, an office, and a 'machine' room. Both wings lead to the round part of the building, where a large cyclorama is located. As prevalent building materials polished marble, carpet, tile, painting, plaster plate, glass, and mortar plastering are listed. Compared to the actual building, the draft design is different in some regards, like being rectangular and structured only on one level, while some features made it into the final design.

The minutes record an ensuing controversial discussion on the "oriental flavour" of the designs and the plea of the National Planning Commission's Permanent Secretary, to have Namibian architects implement the project.[481] In this he was seconded by the City of Windhoek's Chief of Sport, Art and Culture. Chairwoman Angolo rejected this objection, the Koreans were able to cooperate with Namibian architects and artists who could revise the designs, but ultimately Mansudae would do the job. She then emphasised that awarding the contract to Mansudae was a "political decision" by cabinet, not to be reversed by the committee. This obviously set clear boundaries for the work of the committee and the National Museum, in particular.

Another issue that caused controversy in this meeting was the question of the prospective location of the display centre. At this point, it was still intended to be built next to the Heroes' Acre at Luiperd Valley. Some committee members criticised that this location would make the IMM largely inaccessible for students and ordinary citizens due to transportation and costs and that it should rather be built in the centre of town. Others advocated for keeping Heroes' Acre and IMM a spatial unit. One Permanent Secretary is quoted in support of the designated location, "to enrich and strengthen the Heroes' Acre, so that it could not only be there as a white elephant". A representative of the Ministry of Works cautioned that the area was mountainous terrain, difficult for heavy construction work.[482]

In the meeting, discussion of concept and designs remained rudimentary and more general questions determined the agenda. Certain fault-lines appeared, however, regarding the political nature of the project and the agency of Namibian professionals, also vis-à-vis the role of the Koreans, as well as the still rather undefined institutional status of the IMM. These questions were further discussed in an internal meeting of the National Museum members involved with the project, resulting in a conceptual handout.[483] In this document, the difference between "museum", "museum

[481] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre, 25 September 2000, dated 29 September.
[482] This was indeed one of the major reasons given to explain construction delays and increased expenses for the Heroes' Acre; see Minutes for the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 14 April 2002.
[483] National Museum of Namibia: Further thoughts on the proposed Independence Memorial Museum from the National Museum of Namibia, dated 27 September 2000.

building" and "display centre" was explained with reference to definitions of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). It was further pointed out that from the museum practitioners' perspective; the IMM still lacked a clear definition of its purpose and target audience. Furthermore, the technical committee was called on to clarify the relationship between Heroes' Acre and IMM. In a markedly extensive paragraph, it was recommended to build the display centre at the site of the erstwhile Old Location in Hochland Park, due to its historical significance for the liberation struggle. The authors also referred to the discussion of the purported "oriental flavour", remarking that Namibia so far had not developed its own characteristic style of postcolonial architecture. It thus proposed to "include Namibian symbols on what the Koreans have designed (some of which are already visible) so that the museum building will have a Namibian flavour". The document indicates that parallel to the committee work, the National Museum developed its vision regarding the IMM, trying to sharpen its profile as a professional authority among the various stakeholders. This involved adapting a museological approach to deal with a project, which was heavily infused with politics and bureaucracy and depending on the cooperation with a contractor from North Korea. As the further course of events shows, the National Museum's strategy was largely successful.

In the next committee meeting on 4 October, the MBESC proposed to treat the IMM as a "display centre" and "educational extension" of the National Museum, using by and large the concept provided by the National Museum in its previous proposal.[484] It also called on the committee members to clarify what type of institution they envisaged and in how far it would distinguish itself from already existing museums. A sub-committee on the IMM was installed, including representatives of the Office of the President, the Ministry of Work and MBESC, as well as the Chief Curator of the National Museum Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, the Curator of History Betty Hango-Rummukainen, the Curator of Archaeology Goodman Gwasira, and at a later stage, Fousy Kambombo of the National Museum's archaeology department. Significantly, the three female representatives of the National Museum are all former exiles. The sub-committee was tasked with producing a project proposal and identifying a suitable place for the construction of the IMM. This was supposed to be done until the end of October. All technical committee members were called on to visit *Alte Feste* to familiarise themselves with the exhibition display on Namibian history and independence.

Conceptual Work: The North Korean Model

The major challenge of the sub-committee was to develop an exhibition narrative that was compatible with the highly unique museum format provided by Mansudae. Not only were the North Koreans supposed to design the building and build the exhibition, the IMM's conceptual design also followed a logic, which reflected the ideology of the DPRK's anti-imperialist dialectical-

[484] Minutes of the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes Acre and Memorial Museum, 4 October 2000.

materialism (Kornes 2019a). What this implied can be gathered from a document that supplemented the construction design and depicts a North Korean narrative of Namibian liberation history, based on information made available to Mansudae by the Swapo Party. The document, titled "Historical theory system and display drawing for the interior exhibition of the Independence Memorial Museum", gives a description for each projected display gallery, based on a teleological and deterministic reading of history. It also has a list with recommendations for the themes and subjects of each gallery to be represented by objects, photographs, or film in the display.[485]

The subject of gallery 1 was labelled "Namibian peoples' peaceful co-existence in pre-colonial society and imperialist aggression". The narrative described precolonial society as characterised by 'peaceful and harmonious' co-existence, which was disrupted by the aggression of "imperialist forces", "capitalist development", and "Christian 'charity'". Remarkably, the proposed gallery contents foresaw a display of the "classification of each tribes [sic] and their living areas", reminiscent of anthropological museum displays of the colonial era. Consequently, 'early resistance' was outlined as a succession of tribal struggles.

Gallery 2 portrayed "South Africa's new colonial rule and popular uprising", by describing the emergence of popular resistance, especially against the economic exploitation by the contract labour system, which sparked a movement for national independence. Special emphasis was laid on revolutionary violence: "It will also let [sic] the people aware of the revolutionary truth that violence and armed suppression must be answered with violence and armed struggle by showing the process of preparation of armed struggle which is the higher stage of national liberation struggle." Much of the document was dedicated to describing the armed struggle as a result of a "united front", which included the popular resistance of workers, youth, women, students, and peasants and the merging of other progressive parties and movements with SWAPO.

The third gallery was entirely dedicated to SWAPO's armed struggle and the "heroic struggle of PLAN". The emphasis was on the depiction of military culture, discipline, and technical aspects of warfare, as well as the solidarity of international combatants and liberation movements engaged in fighting in Southern Africa. In line with the affirmation of revolutionary violence of the previous gallery, "Gallery 3 will also show the revolutionary faith and principle of Namibian fighters and invincibility of unity of Namibian people around SWAPO by exhibiting fallen fighters died in the sacred cause for national liberation and the content of their heroic struggle." As I will explain in the next chapter in more detail, the representation of combat and war-related violence and suffering turned out to become a defining feature of the exhibition.

Gallery 4 has a focus on SWAPO's efforts in the fields of education and public health for its exile community, as well as "the brilliant victory of SWAPO in [sic] diplomatic arena" in light of international recognition and solidarity. A large segment of the narrative consists of a reproduction

[485] Historical theory system and display drawing for the interior exhibition of the Independence Memorial Museum (Gallery 1–5). All subsequent quotes are from this source.

of SWAPO's educational and public health policy for the time after independence – which seems a bit odd, since the narrative appears to be largely based on SWAPO documents from before independence.

Themed "National independence and building a new society of Namibian people", Gallery 5, finally, represents the peace process and transition to independence. Even though one focus is on the different UN resolutions and the political negotiation of independence, special emphasis lies on the "triumphant return of President Nujoma" and the "triumphal entry of PLAN into the homeland". In light of history, it seems irritating that the resurgence of devastating fighting in April 1989, after PLAN's crossing of the border, isn't even mentioned. Whether this is because the Korean drafters only had access to SWAPO publications written before 1989, or because it would cast doubt on the 'triumphant return' remains an open question.

The "Historical theory system and display drawing" is a remarkable document to understand the genesis of the IMM's permanent exhibition display. History is presented as a dialectic-materialistic process, where the social and economic contradictions produced by imperialism and bourgeois-colonial class rule inevitably lead to popular uprising and a revolutionary process. In the last section of the document, this is spelled out succinctly: "Gallery 5 will let the people know the revolutionary truth that where there are [sic] exploitation and oppression there will always be revolutionary struggle". The narrative is written from the perspective of the liberation movement, which achieves national independence through armed resistance and revolutionary violence, the exclusive focus on SWAPO is overwhelming. Consequently, the history of Namibia's struggle for national independence is not only told as the history of SWAPO, but a result of SWAPO's anti-imperialist struggle as the revolutionary force of history.

Like the Heroes' Acre, the IMM also has a North Korean model in Pyongyang's Museum of Revolution, which was established in 1948 and reopened in 2017 after extensive renovations. In a similar fashion, the museum narrates the history of North Korea as a revolutionary process, led by the Worker's Party and championed by Kim Il-sung and his dynastic successors. The anticolonial struggle against Japanese imperialism and the war against the USA are narrated as "the glorious road of victory under the wise leadership of the leaders".[486] As an "edifice for education in the revolutionary tradition", the Museum of Revolution thus mediates the memory of the Worker's Party by interweaving the mythical biographies of the Kims with the history of the nation. On the occasion of his visit for the reopening in 2017, Kim Jong-un is quoted as describing the museum as the "ideological and mental mainstay and beacon of our army and people" and "the greatest treasure and textbook of the revolution".[487]

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[486] For this and the following quote; see <https://exploredprk.com/articles/korean-revolution-museum-dprks-treasure/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

[487] See <http://www.nkleadershipwatch.org/2017/03/31/kju-visits-korean-revolution-museum/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

The Museum of Revolution in Pyongyang has some remarkable parallels with the IMM in Windhoek. Regarding architecture, its modernist monumentalism probably is the most obvious resemblance, while the outer façade with its white tiling and concrete ornaments also shows clear similarities. The permanent exhibition is dominated by large-scale murals and paintings, depicting historical scenes of militant revolutionary history. Oversized painted panoramas with multimedia elements visualise selected historic battles, which serve as founding myths of the Workers Party's national liberation narrative, such as the "Battle of Pochonbo" against Japan or the "Battle on Height 1211" against the USA.[488] In terms of narrative, history is portrayed as teleology with clearly marked phases, reflecting stages in the revolutionary process to final victory. The veneration of the Great Leader, Kim Il-sung, is the dominant topic of the museum, underscored by a monumental statue in front of the building, which according to Portal forms the "epitome of Kim Cult Art" (Portal 2005: 82).

A fascinating and so far largely overlooked parallel exists between Namibia's IMM and the Museum of Revolution in Maputo (Mozambique), which has also been designed by Mansudae and was inaugurated in 1977.[489] Not only do similarities exist in the aesthetics and materiality of the exhibitions, the development process was also quite similar. For example, the North Korean designers worked closely with representatives of the Mozambican liberation movement FRELIMO to interview war veterans and collect artefacts, especially military equipment. The exhibition follows a strictly linear and chronological narrative, with a strong focus on violence, war, suffering, and warfare. It centres on the personality of Samora Machel as a heroic leader, what apparently caused conflicts between the Korean designers and the Mozambican museum curators, who would have preferred a more nuanced representation. However, to maintain good relations with North Korea, their concept was implemented. Initially, the museum was a private initiative, owned by the party and then transferred into the custody of the state. According to Dores Cruz, contestation about ownership and whether it was a national or a FRELIMO museum has been accompanying the Museum of Revolution ever since. In an interesting parallel to the case of the War Museum in Okahandja, the Museum of Revolution was closed for renovations in 2010 and has not been reopened ever since.

While it is not possible to go into a detailed analysis of the aesthetics and politics of North Korean museum representation, it suffices to say that museums form an integral part of Mansudae's repertoire of memorial culture and monumental structures for global export (Kornes 2019a).[490] Remarkably, some of the most prominent museums built by the studio are not focusing on

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[488] On the significance of these battles in the DPRK's anti-imperial heroic narrative; see David-West 2014: 113; Nasr 2014: 36–38; and Portal 2005: 121. Parallels to the construction and representation of the battles of Ongulumbashe and Sinoia as *lieux de mémoire* of Southern African liberation struggles are evident.

[489] Information is based on informal conversation with Dores Cruz on 9 May 2018 in Mainz, her presentation at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Mainz on 24 May 2018, as well as several unpublished draft papers of her ongoing work, which she kindly made available to me.

[490] Portal (2005) makes numerous references to museums in her analysis of art and ideology in North Korea.

revolutionary history but rice, as in Kedah (Malaysia)[491] or the history of Angkor Wat in Siem Reap (Cambodia).[492] Despite the differing themes, in the aesthetics of their displays both museums are characterised by Mansudae's trademarks of painted murals and largescale cycloramas.

The latter refers to the depiction of scenes and events in the form of panoramic displays on cylindrical surfaces, evoking an immersive, near 360 degree perspective. The technique is not a North Korean invention, but commonly attributed to the Irish painter Robert Barker, who developed it around 1790 in his famous panoramic paintings of British cities (Miller 1996). Cycloramas were a popular display genre especially in the late 19th century and often used to depict historical events, in particular famous battles. Noteworthy cycloramas done by Mansudae include the already mentioned ones at the Museum of Revolution in Pyongyang and the Angkor Wat Museum in Cambodia. Others are the "Battle of Taejon" at the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang and the 6th of October War Panorama in Cairo, commemorating the war against Israel in 1973. As already referenced in Mansudae's drafting design of 2000, the museum in Windhoek also includes a cyclorama.

The combination of the architectural design and the exhibition narrative, which are both strongly characterised by a very particular ideology and Mansudae's unique display techniques, constituted a challenging model to translate into a Namibian context. It was made clear by the technical committee that employing Mansudae as contractor was a political decision. The role of Namibian artists, historians, and museum practitioners was to assist and advise their Korean colleagues. It was against this challenging background that the IMM sub-committee began its work to appropriate the model and translate it into a Namibian vernacular.

Conceptual Work: Appropriation and Translation

The sub-committee met on 10 October 2000 to discuss the exhibition narrative. As can be gathered from the available documentation, this meeting was important for the development of the IMM and the National Museum's stake in it. The National Museum members had prepared a three page "display sequence", which was to be discussed. Since the building proposed by Mansudae was supposed to have six display rooms, the National Museum developed a story-line, which was based on a division of history "according to [the] thematic progress and chronological order in which the events took place".[493] The chronology was structured along five central themes: 'encroachment'[494] and 'early resistance', armed struggle, life in exile, struggle inside Namibia, transition to independence, while a sixth gallery was supposed to provide audio-visual material and additional

[491] "Malaysia-North Korea ties symbolised by rice museum", *The Straits Times*, 12 March 2017.
[492] "An Art Powerhouse From North Korea", *New York Times*, 25 January 2016.
[493] Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Meeting of the Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum, 10 October 2000.
[494] The term is frequently used in Namibian and Southern African discourse on colonial history to designate the advancement of colonialism; first by missionaries and traders, then settlers and imperial protector powers, resulting in violent conquest and the establishment of settler colonialism.

information for educational purposes, as well as space for temporary exhibitions. The National Museum thus adapted the Korean exhibition draft in its main features. A second, revised document includes the comments and suggestions for improvement after the sub-committee's meeting.

Here, additional emphasis was laid on precolonial history, summed up in the suggestion that "[i]t will also be necessary to showcase the Namibian society before contact with Europe. This can be effected [sic] by a mural that tells of the peaceful coexistence of the different ethnic groups before imperial expansion and consequent colonialism".[495] Furthermore, 'early resistance' was to be portrayed more inclusively and also represent anticolonial resistance in the Caprivi and Kavango regions, with a recommendation to conduct more research about this particular history.

Regarding the 'armed struggle' display, the role of political prisoners was supposed to get more emphasis, in particular the Robben Islanders veterans. The didactic rationale of this section was explained as follows: "Gallery number 2 will tell the story of the formal armed struggle under the national liberation struggle. This is viewed as a continuation of the scene that is set in gallery 1 in that while the resistance depicted in gallery 1 theme 2 was organised at ethnic group level the formal armed struggle under SWAPO was a national effort." The combination of an effort to make 'early resistance' more 'ethnically' inclusive, while at the same time subordinating it to the 'national effort' of SWAPO, is significant, and in line with the dominant narrative of the liberation struggle.

For the gallery on 'life in exile', the role of international solidarity was highlighted, while the sub-committee members accentuated that depicting the exile experience in great detail was of central importance for the general exhibition: "Many people will associate with this theme and thus immortalis[e] the memory". As regards the gallery on the struggle at home, the role of churches, political prisoners, labour organisations and the rural population was to be emphasised. For the final thematic gallery on independence, the Koreans' suggestion of "triumphant return" was taken up, to be portrayed as a "logical conclusion of the permanent exhibition on the struggle for the independence of Namibia." It was supposed to be represented in "a way that will vividly illustrate that independence was the ultimate goal and was triumphantly achieved". The educational gallery should provide a space for school children to interact with "real living heroes of the liberation struggle" and also to collect and display oral history of political prisoners or former contract labourers at commercial farms. Room for temporary exhibitions was necessary because the story of the liberation struggle was "too long to be told in one display centre". The role of women in the struggle, for instance, could be told by special exhibitions for women's day.

The two documents, as well as handwritten notes from the drafting period demonstrate the work flow of the conceptual drafting process. Driven mostly by Betty Hango-Rummukainen and Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, the National Museum developed the exhibition narrative based on the North Korean model and supplemented by the feedback of the sub-committee, and turned it into

[495] Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Meeting of the Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum, 10 October 2000 (revised document with alterations and additions in italics).

a Namibian narrative.[496] In this way, it translated the dialectic-materialist history model of Mansudae's exhibition design into a form which corresponded more closely to that of the Namibian liberation movement. At the same time, the National Museum claimed ownership of the IMM as a site of learning and education, in line with more established concepts of international museology.

In the remainder of October 2000, the sub-committee worked to refine and expand the concept as mandated by the technical committee. An undated draft from ca. mid-October documents the progress of the conceptual work. Responding to the committee's request to specify the purpose, mandate, and target audience of the display centre, the drafters added several new layers of complexity, including a 'problem statement':

> The history of the liberation struggle of Namibia is little publicised in museums around the country. The effect of this is that the younger generation will soon forget the causes of resistance to colonialism and the aims of the struggle for independence. The foundations on which the nationhood of Namibia are [sic] rooted and the main actors in the struggle will so be beyond recollection. With passage of time there will be a danger that the evils of colonialism can be repeated unless the younger generations know and understand how the independence was won. To avoid such state of post independence [sic] amnesia, an independence memorial museum is hereby proposed[497]

The problem statement emphasised the lack of representation of Namibia's liberation struggles in existing museums and highlighted the role of museums as a medium of memory. This was also underscored by defining the aim of the IMM: "to educate and inspire the people about the building of a new nation by systematising and displaying information and materials of the history of the Namibian people's heroic struggle for national independence from colonial rule imposed for more than a century". While the concept clearly addresses 'the Namibian people' as the IMM's target audience, it specifically identifies school children and students as audience groups to cater for, as well as tourists.

As an additional change, the gallery on 'armed struggle' was positioned as third gallery, while the 'struggle at home' was chosen as topic for gallery 2. This was explained with the important role, played by those who contributed to independence at home, in churches, labour organisations, student movements, etc. Acknowledging the role of civil actors and organisations implied, however, that their contribution paved the way for the armed struggle and supported the "comrades who were fighting in the bush", thus affirming the primacy of the armed liberation struggle.

The document also indicates that at this point no decision had yet been made where to build the IMM, while the Ministry of Works did propose three possible venues, all in central Windhoek.

[496] Interviews with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012; Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.
[497] Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Project Proposal (Draft): Independence Memorial Museum, undated (ca. mid-October 2000).

One of them was the National Museum's main premises on Robert Mugabe Avenue, for which the sub-committee "unanimously" voiced its support. It argued that a location next to *Alte Feste* was ideal to attract visitors, more affordable and accessible for school children, and also benefitting from the proximity to the National Museum's administrative offices and research facilities. In addition, it would have a positive impact on the cityscape: "Finally the site will blend with other symbols of Namibian sovereignty such as the Supreme Court, the new bank of Namibia and the Parliament". No mention was made, however, of removing the equestrian monument, which only appeared on the committee's agenda in June 2001.[498]

At the end of October and in line with the technical committee's deadline, the document was developed into an official draft version with only minor changes.[499] One of them was an emphasis on the statement that design and construction will be done by artists from North Korea, as per cabinet decision and that all stakeholders intend to closely cooperate with the Koreans. Most notably, however, in the proposal the sub-committee advocated for building the display centre next to *Alte Feste*, which either referred to the Museum ACRE or implies that the decision to remove the equestrian monument was made in the meantime. When I asked committee member Fousy Kambombo about this decision, she explained it also with reference to the history of the site: "people in the committee just thought that this is an appropriate place because it used to be a concentration camp during 1904, so they didn't think that there was any other appropriate place in Windhoek to build the Independence Memorial Museum, [...] and that's why it was put there".[500]

This ended a first conceptual stage of the planning process. While from the beginning a museum was intended to complement the Heroes' Acre, its construction, as 'phase two' of the national project, began in earnest only in July 2000. The technical committee of the Heroes' Acre tasked a sub-committee with drafting a project proposal, which was finalised at the end of October. The sub-committee's work was based on and limited by the model presented by Mansudae. The exhibition narrative proposed by the North Koreans implied a rather rigid structure for historical representation. It was, however, translated and adapted into a locally established form by a sub-committee, which consisted largely of members of the liberation movement. The proposal, ready for discussion in the technical committee by the end of 2000, thus represents a narrative of anti-colonial resistance that draws on a North Korean model of revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle, which was translated into the context of Southern African liberation history.

[498] Agenda for the Meeting of the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 13 June 2001.

[499] Sub-committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: The Heroes Acre and Independence Memorial Museum: A National Project of the Republic of Namibia. Phase II: The Independence Memorial Museum Project Proposal, undated (ca. mid or late October).

[500] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012. "1904" referred to the war, not the year.

Implementation and Design: The Process of Vernacularisation

During 2001, the sub-committee and its National Museum members were mostly involved with discussing the proposal, presenting it to political stakeholders, revising and substantiating it, and also conducting research and field trips to generate knowledge and content for the exhibition display. One of the more substantial points of critique in the committee concerned the lack of what was coined 'Namibian flavour'. This criticism, with its appeal to cultural and national identification, apparently hit a nerve. Therefore, efforts were made to 'Namibianise' the IMM's architecture and exhibition display. This process of vernacularisation involved the search for symbols and stylistic elements that would reflect a Namibian or African 'flavour'. It also meant continued efforts to translate the North Korean exhibition model and the sub-committee's reworked version of it into the specific context of Namibia's liberation struggle history.

Regarding arts and aesthetics, the technical committee involved Namibian artist and former Director of the National Art Gallery Joe Madisia, to help with his expertise in remodelling the museum project. Consequently, Madisia played an important role in advising the Mansudae designers to paint and depict Namibian landscapes and people more accurately.[501] The latter was necessary, since painted Namibians apparently tended to have Korean features.[502] Furthermore, Madisia made a recommendation to alter the building's structural appearance with a "round shape [that] suits the African architecture (traditional hut)",[503] which was supported by the sub-committee and eventually implemented.

The sub-committee also agreed on other additional design elements to enrich the museum project with national symbols, like the representation of *Welwitschia mirabilis* in the display as a "Namibian symbol for resilience"[504] and the mounting of the sun symbol on the outer façade. In its summary of feedback on the draft exhibition given by the Office of the President and Swapo Party Politburo, the sub-committee noted that a display of Namibia's natural beauty should be also be included: "The central message being that while Namibian people were dying in the war the colonisers were illegally enjoying Namibian beauty at the expense of Namibians".[505] In the same document, it was further recommended that the role of visual artists and musicians in the struggle should be portrayed for their impact on people's morale, "at home and in the camps abroad".

In terms of representation, all stakeholders including the sub-committee, technical committee, Office of the President and Swapo Party, made recommendations to make the exhibition narrative

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[501] Interviews with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012; Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.

[502] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012; Technical Committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Synthesis of comments arising from the presentation to the President and the Politburo, undated (first half of 2002).

[503] Notes from the Meeting of the Independence Memorial Museum Sub-Committee, 12 April 2001.

[504] Notes from the Meeting of the Independence Memorial Museum Sub-Committee, 12 April 2001.

[505] Technical Committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Synthesis of comments arising from the presentation to the President and the Politburo, undated (first half of 2002).

and display more inclusive, at least, where the contribution of individual actors and collectives to the liberation struggle was concerned. Remarkably, emphasising the role and representation of women as combatants and civilians was a reoccurring issue for many stakeholders. It was recommended to include female PLAN combatants in display murals, since women were "in charge of communication"[506] during the struggle, as well as to feature women who played an important role in exile like Auguste "Mukwahepo" Immanuel and Putuse Appolus.[507] Elsewhere it was noted that the inclusion of a female leader in a panel on resistance heroes is 'a must'.[508]

A second aspect of the struggle, which the stakeholders wished to see represented more thoroughly in the exhibition, was the role of religion. Even though Swapo's relationship with the churches is a complex and at times difficult one (Tötemeyer 2010; Hunter 2008: 109–115, 195–207; Lombard 2001; Steenkamp 1995), Namibia is a profoundly Christian society. In Mansudae's exhibition narrative draft of September 2000, religion was largely portrayed as a vehicle of German imperialism, which 'infiltrated' missionaries to oppress the Namibian people.[509] This one-sided representation was countered by the stakeholders in the ensuing committee sessions, where the important role of mission stations like Nakambale, individual clergy men like Reverend Hamutumbangela, or the Council of Churches in Namibia for the struggle against apartheid was highlighted and included into the exhibition narrative.[510] The combination of a blazing flame and a Christian cross in one of Mansudae's draft paintings was criticised as "worrisome" by the sub-committee, which recommended having it "deleted".[511]

A third collective that received highlighted attention was the group of former political prisoners, especially those who were on Robben Island. One recommendation was to build a model of Robben Island's reception area, where inmates could talk with relatives, to give visitors an impression of "how it was to travel thousands of miles and not be able to see the person in flesh but talk to each other through the phone behind thick glass".[512] Another recommendation was to highlight the 'struggle for political prisoners' as a source of moral legitimacy for the armed struggle, which ultimately led to victories in battles like Cuito Cuanavale.[513] In general, all stakeholders agreed that the history of the Robben Island veterans was supposed to find a particular

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[506] Notes from the Meeting of the Independence Memorial Museum Sub-committee, 6 January 2002.
[507] Independence Memorial Technical Team: Notes from the first meeting of 2002 held on the 6th of January 2002.
[508] Notes from the Meeting of the Independence Memorial Museum Sub-committee, 12 April 2001.
[509] Historical theory system and display drawing for the interior exhibition of the Independence Memorial Museum (Gallery 1).
[510] Independence Memorial Technical Team: Notes from the first meeting of 2002 held on the 6th of January 2002; Technical Committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Synthesis of comments arising from the presentation to the President and the Politburo, undated (first half of 2002). Independence Memorial Museum Committee: Notes from the meeting of 07/05/01.
[511] Independence Memorial Technical Team: Notes from the first meeting of 2002 held on the 6th of January 2002.
[512] Independence Memorial Technical Team: Notes from the first meeting of 2002 held on the 6th of January 2002.
[513] Independence Memorial Museum Committee: Notes from the meeting of 07/05/01.

representation in the exhibition display. This was to expand on the already existing Robben Island section in the permanent exhibition of the *Alte Feste* display centre, but also to include more research and interviews conducted with those veterans who were still alive.[514]

Other aspects pertaining to inclusivity involved the representation of the rural population in northern Namibia, which supported the guerrilla with food, shelter, and information, as well as of white Namibians who contributed to the liberation struggle like Anton Lubowski, Hanno Rumpf, Jan-Bart Gewald, Justin Ellis, Gerhard Tötemeyer, and John Liebenberg.[515] The inclusion of white Namibians who 'contributed' or 'sacrificed', was primarily seen as an acknowledgement of their struggle credentials. However, it also added another layer to the representation of national unity in diversity in the exhibition, which found its most poignant manifestation in the idealistic construction of precolonial 'peaceful coexistence'. As the sub-committee recommended, this should be represented by scenes depicting traditional pottery of various ethnic groups, showing the 'unity' of Namibian communities through the 'difference' of their craft, while a multi-ethnic dance scene should communicate the message, "that before colonialism there was peace".[516]

While these examples are only snapshots from a long and complicated process, they give an impression of how the contents of the permanent display in Namibia's most important museum project since independence were discussed and negotiated. By translating Mansudae's dogmatic exhibition narrative into a Namibian cultural and historical vernacular, the various stakeholders added what they considered as Namibian 'flavour'. At the same time, they did not challenge the underlying narrative structure of teleological and revolutionary history, with its privileged focus on armed liberation struggle. This might be due to the 'political nature' of the project, which made overtly criticism problematic. It might also be a result of the fact, however, that most of those responsible for implementing the IMM project were former exiles and war veterans, for whom this narrative was closely interwoven with their individual biographies.

Implementation and Design: The Influence of Political Decision-Making

The political nature of the IMM is not only reflected by the context of its origin, as explained in the beginning of this chapter, but also had an impact on the process of the exhibition design. In the beginning of 2002, the museum sub-committee presented its exhibition draft design to the President and the Politburo of Swapo. Both had comments and ideas for improvement, which were collected by the committee members and worked into the draft. This involved general details, like the

[514] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.
[515] Independence Memorial Museum Committee: Notes from the meeting of 07/05/01.
[516] Independence Memorial Museum Committee: Notes from the Meeting of 12/04/01.

recommendation to add a *knobkerrie* as an object to the exhibition,[517] to include the rebellion of the Bondelswarts and portraits of all petitioners to the UN, or how to spell *Omugulugwoombashe*.[518]

Other comments referred more directly to the party and its history, like the recommendation to make SWAPO's iconic torch symbol more visible throughout the exhibition and to highlight the cooperation with other armed liberation movements in exile. In general, the exhibition narrative as presented by the committee was approved by the ruling party's senior level and not confronted with fundamental requests for alterations. The only aspect which received criticism, according to the minutes, referred to the depiction of Namibian people in the 'Georama' gallery, who did not look Namibian enough. In the technical committee meeting of 7 May 2002, the museum sub-committee reported about its presentation and announced that the results had already been worked into the draft.[519] At the Annual General Meeting of the MAN in Outjo on 18 May, the representative of the National Museum confirmed that the exhibition design was approved by President Nujoma and the construction of the IMM was to commence in 2002.[520]

While this, as explained earlier, happened only with much delay, Mansudae timely began to produce display elements like paintings and murals. Finished exhibits were stored at the National Museum ACRE, where they were also inspected by Nujoma and representatives of party and government, who again could make recommendations for changes and alterations.[521] Ultimately, the head of state and the ruling party thus had a say in the final exhibition design, even though in its basic outline, the aesthetics and narrative of the display were met with general approval.

Implementation and Design: Research Activities and Cooperation with Mansudae

Mansudae was responsible for designing both the display centre's architecture and the exhibition. The latter included the technical implementation of the display design, which mostly comprised the production and mounting of murals, paintings, and thematic history panels with text and photographs. As explained before, Mansudae has experience with the building of museums. Still, its designers and artists require the close cooperation of their contracting client to provide the necessary information. While Mansudae could use publications of SWAPO for its initial drafts, the everyday routines of curatorial practice were more demanding, especially where it came to research.

Consequently, a lot of the work of the museum sub-committee members involved activities to generate data, like archival research, interviews with war veterans, or field trips to historic sites of

[517] A *knobkerrie* is a wooden baton and/or walking stick, common all over Southern Africa. In narratives about Namibia's liberation struggle it is often remembered as a weapon, which was used by apartheid authorities and collaborating traditional authorities against protesters and members of the liberation movement.
[518] Technical Committee on the Independence Memorial Museum: Synthesis of comments arising from the presentation to the President and the Politburo, undated (between January and April 2002).
[519] High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum: Agenda and Minutes for the High Level Technical Committee on the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum, 7. Mai 2002.
[520] Newsletter of the Museums Association of Namibia, No. 5, June 2002, p.13.
[521] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, 22 June 2012.

the liberation struggle. It also implied the challenge of translating this data into information, which could be understood, adapted, and transformed into exhibition display by the North Korean designers, who had little knowledge of Namibian history and society. As I was told repeatedly by people involved in this process, language barriers and the frequent rotation of Mansudae workers to other construction sites in Namibia, neighbouring countries, or back to North Korea, had a negative impact on the continuity of the curatorial work. Nevertheless, a close and interdependent working relationship with the North Korean team was part and parcel of the everyday work routines of the National Museum's committee members.

As can be gathered from the National Museum's documentation and my interviews with the committee members, a lot of the research for the exhibition took place at the NAN and the SPARC. The research activities listed in the three-monthly and annual reports of the National Museum's history department indicate frequent meetings with the Koreans, visits to archives, and several field trips".[522] Visits to the archives were mostly used to access photography and video collections and to compile information on historical figures and events. Less importance had the selection and acquisition of objects for display, which became more relevant only when the building was completed and the display centre approached its inauguration from 2012 onwards.

Curatorial collaboration also included field trips to familiarise the Korean team with the country and sites of historical significance for Namibia's liberation struggle. According to Fousy Kambombo, who often accompanied the Koreans, historic places connected with the 'early resistance', the genocide, popular resistance, and SWAPO's liberation struggle were visited in the course of several trips between July and August 2001.[523] In southern Namibia, these included visits to the church in Berseba, as well as the AME School in Gibeon, a hub of pro-SWAPO activity during the 1970–1980s.[524] Sites of 'early resistance' visited were the seat of the Bondelswart community in Warmbad and the mountain fortress of ǁKhauxa!nas, which is closely related to the history of Jacob Morenga, as well as Lüderitz and Shark Island.[525] The sub-committee's familiarisation trips were often accompanied by local oral history experts like Chief Hendrina Afrikaner, Joseph Witbooi, or a grandson of Bondelswarts resistance leader Abraham Morris.[526] In northern Namibia, the group travelled to places like Otjiwarongo, Namutoni, Ongulumbashe, Ondeshifiilwa, Endola, Epinga, and Eenhana, visited battle fields and mass graves, and interviewed former Robben Island prisoners.[527] Next to Fousy, other committee members of the National

[522] National Museum of Namibia, History Department: Three monthly report: Jan Feb March (2001); National Museum of Namibia, History Department: Annual Report 2001–2002.
[523] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012.
[524] National Museum of Namibia: Report on the trip to Karas region 25 to 28 July 2001.
[525] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.
[526] National Museum of Namibia: Report on the trip to Karas region 25 to 28 July 2001.
[527] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012; National Museum of Namibia: Report on research trip to Otjiozondjupa, Kunene, Oshikoto, Oshana, Ohangwena and Omusati Regions on 17 to 21 July 2001; Report on the trip to Oshikoto Ohangwena, Oshana and Omusati regions from 31 July to 4 August 2001.

Museum like Betty Hango-Rummukainen and Goodman Gwasira accompanied the Koreans, as did artist Joe Madisia on occasion.[528]

Since the memory of Robben Island was of particular importance for the IMM's exhibition, the group also facilitated a trip to Cape Town, during which they were accompanied by historian Ellen Namhila.[529] The trip was timed to coincide with a meeting of former Namibian prisoners at Robben Island, so the group had the chance to get first-hand information on the conditions of detention in apartheid-South Africa's most notorious prison.[530] In order to gather accurate information for the representation of Robben Island in the permanent exhibition, "all the sites were documented by means of sketch drawings and print photographs. This as a necessary exercise because we had ample time to identify aspects of the prison cells that will allow our representation in the museum to be authentic". As the report further documents, the team also received "a personal tour that was filled with passion", by former inmates Helao Shityuwete and Sakaria Nashandi. In their report on the trip, the National Museum delegates emphasised the importance of presenting the history of Robben Island at the IMM, but also lamented the state of neglect regarding the representation of Namibian history at Robben Island.[531] In addition to these familiarisation trips, between 1 June and 31 August 2001 the National Museum also employed students to conduct further interviews with veterans and ex-prisoners and to document events related to the armed liberation struggle in northern Namibia.

These examples demonstrate the efforts that were made by the technical committee and the National Museum to apply a research methodology in the development of the exhibition narrative and display design. It also gives an impression to what degree the North Korean team of artists and designers was involved in the daily routines of the museum work and in how far they were exposed to Namibian liberation struggle history, its actors, sites, and landscapes of memory. Ultimately, just like the Heroes' Acre, the IMM was translated from a North Korean model to fit a Namibian context, with the involvement of a broad range of actors and stakeholders.

Both Heroes' Acre and IMM constitute the central sites of state-sponsored liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia and as such represent the tangible embodiment of the liberation movement's aspiration to commemorate itself prospectively. In the final chapter, I will analyse this connection of translation and commemoration with a focus on the curation of the IMM.

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[528] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.
[529] Interview with Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012.
[530] National Museum of Namibia: Robben Island Familiarisation Trip 4 to 11 July 2001.
[531] National Museum of Namibia: Robben Island Familiarisation Trip 4 to 11 July 2001.

8. Heroes, Martyrs, Comrades: Curating the Independence Memorial Museum

It took close to a quarter of a century for independent Namibia, to get its first public museum dedicated entirely to the liberation struggle. The Okahandja Military Museum, which technically is the first such institution, was never opened, while the Outapi War Museum is private-owned. Until the IMM was opened in 2014, the only museum space which portrayed Namibia's struggle for national independence was the National Museum's *Alte Feste* display centre. In its permanent exhibition, *Alte Feste* represented a narrative of national history from precolonial times through anticolonial resistance, genocide, and the armed liberation struggle to national independence, with a noteworthy focus on the important role of international diplomacy and the UN' peace keeping mission UNTAG. In its second and third decade of existence, however, the permanent exhibition had become decrepit, outdated, and visibly marked by negligence. With the opening of the IMM, *Alte Feste* was closed as a display centre, earmarked for renovation, while large parts of the exhibition were transferred to the new display centre.

Fittingly, the IMM was officially inaugurated on Independence Day, 21 March 2014. In his speech on the occasion, President Pohamba highlighted its significance:

> On 21st March 1990, we became the masters of our own destiny. We assumed the duty of determining our own course of development and building a society where all our people can achieve their full potential. Similarly, we assumed the duty of recording and preserving our nation's history. The construction of this Independence Memorial Museum is part of the fulfillment of that sacred task to tell, record and preserve our own history, as we perceive it, as we experience it and as we see it with our own eyes[532]

With the IMM, he further emphasised, Namibia finally had a central site to commemorate its long history of anticolonial resistance and national liberation struggle. The construction of the display centre was accompanied by the relocation (2009) and subsequent removal (2013) of the contested equestrian monument, as well as the installation of a statue of Sam Nujoma and a genocide monument in front of the IMM, both produced by Mansudae, too. This underlines the significance of the IMM for reconfiguring and transforming the capital's memorial landscape (Kornes 2019a: 156–158; Becker 2018; Kössler 2015: 28–31, 147–168).

[532] Statement by His Excellency, Dr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Genocide Memorial Statues, the Sam Nujoma Statue and the Independence Memorial Museum, Windhoek, 20 March 2014.

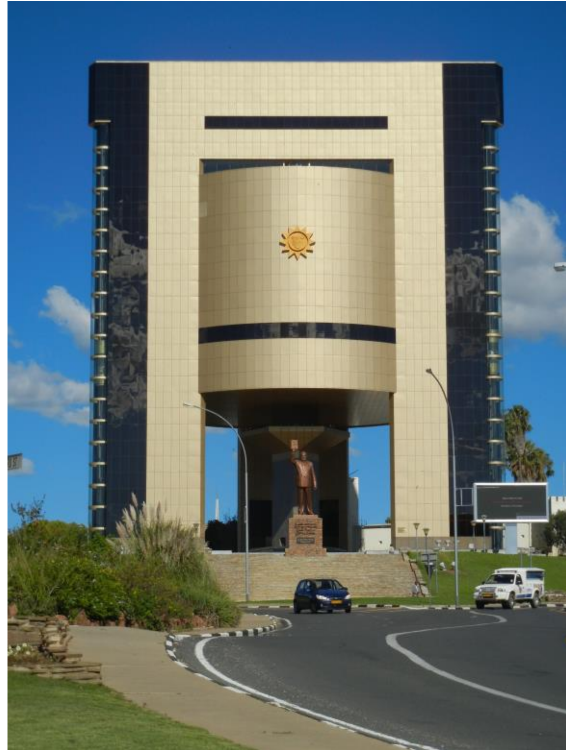

Fig. 43: Independence Memorial Museum and Sam Nujoma statue. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

Fig. 44: Genocide memorial in front of Alte Feste, Windhoek. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

Throughout its stages of planning and construction, the museum project stirred emotions and triggered fears, as reflected by the *Eyedias* performance in 2008 and the reactions to it. People employed in the museum sector referred to it as a ‘white elephant’ and criticised the lack of information made available to them.[533] Whenever I told them about my research, local historians were amazed about my level of access and lamented their own perceived exclusion as experts and the general veil of secrecy surrounding the project.[534] Likewise, journalists who got wind of my involvement with the IMM contacted me and tried to elicit information about its progress and the role of the North Koreans. This happened several times throughout my research and brought about ethical conflicts to navigate my roles as an independent researcher and quasi-employee of the National Museum. While I did not talk to the press about my work, I nevertheless faced the same dilemma in all my interactions with the general public.[535] Whether I engaged in small-talk at a private party, had an appointment with my hair-dresser, or went to renew my research visa: whenever people learned that I had something to do with the IMM, they were thrilled with curiosity and started to fire questions at me.

Public debate and controversy continued and expanded after the official inauguration, now supplemented by an assessment of the IMM’s architecture, display, and exhibition narrative. This dimension of public perception and criticism is important, for it helps to contextualise the museum within the framework of liberation memory in Namibia. Along the same lines, the significance of its architecture allows for reflections on the more recent postcolonial turn in Namibian memorial culture. Most scholarly contributions regarding the IMM published so far relate to these dimensions, in this reflecting media coverage and public opinion, often drawing on both as sources.[536] A tendency certainly exists to focus on the overwhelming aesthetics and materiality of the museum and to privilege its memorial aspect. At the time of writing, only one scholar had done research on the National Museum as the institution which is responsible for the curation of the IMM (Wessler 2007: 169, 191–192).

However, as institutions, museums are characterised by administrative routines, educational mandates, curatorial practice, and last but not least the imponderables of public service. It is this dimension of museum practice, of planning and curating the IMM prior to its inauguration in 2014, which forms an important setting of my research. Since I chose an internship at the National Museum as my way of establishing field access, I found myself in the privileged position as assistant to the director of the history department, who was responsible for curating the IMM. Through participant observation, I experienced this process from the perspective of an insider and as

[533] Informal conversations, May 2012.
[534] Informal conversations, April–May 2012.
[535] The work assignment letter for the curator highlighted that the IMM was a “high profile national project”, which attracted a lot of media attention. It clearly stated that no statements were to be made to the media without prior consultation with the director.
[536] See for instance Becker 2018; Kössler 2015: 30, 168, 227–228, 310–311, 324–325; Melber 2014: 29; Fox /Lühl 2013; Kirkwood 2013: 561–563, 2011: 39–43; and Zuern 2012: 504–505, 514–515.

a part of the curatorial team. In order to set the stage for my ethnography of Namibia's most controversial and contested postcolonial museum and memorial project, I will begin with an analytical description of the IMM's permanent display.

The Authoritative Account: The Permanent Display

The IMM has been built next to *Alte Feste*, exactly on the spot where until 2009 the equestrian monument used to stand. Because of its height and golden colour, it visibly dominates the erstwhile colonial cityscape and has become a distinctive landmark. The five-storied building has a triangular shape in which a cylindrical body is held by three legs, supported by an additional column under the main building's corpus. The legs contain elevators and staircases; the cylinder contains the actual museum. The first three floors are exhibition space, while the levels above accommodate offices and a restaurant with panoramic view. Due to its peculiar shape, the building has been mocked as a 'coffee percolator' with corresponding images shared in social media.

Exhibition Display: Aesthetics, Structure, and Mediality

Visitors enter the display centre past the Nujoma statue via a flight of stairs in front of the building, which leads to the entrance area where ticket booths and lifts are located. On the column under the main building, bronze reliefs have been mounted, which depict scenes from the student and labour union movement, including references to NANSO. The permanent exhibition has three levels, each themed after historical periods of time: "Colonial Repression", "Liberation War", "Road to Independence", the latter is also including a "History Panorama". Each level consists of several thematic galleries, which focus on specific aspects of liberation history like "Pre-Colonial Society and Peaceful Coexistence" or "Early Resistance against Colonialism". Most galleries on their part include one or more thematic panels, usually wall-sized, representing the particular topic through a combination of paintings and historic photographs.

As a matter of fact, the exhibition is largely dominated by these two media, i.e. large paintings of historical scenes produced by the Mansudae artists and corresponding photographs from the National Archives, often assembled as groups. Both media are mounted on the panels, which in turn are often imprinted with an image to provide a visual background. In some cases this is based on actual photographs, like the panel on "Early Resistance against Colonialism", in others symbolic images are used like in the panel on "The Role of the Church". Some galleries are entirely dominated by large-scale paintings, like the sections on Cassinga and Ongulumbashe or the "Long Live Namibian Independence!" display, with which the exhibition ends. Other panels, like the ones on "Petitioners to the UN" or "Racial discrimination" very much rely on numerous photographs to

represent their particular topic. Except for the captions, the exhibition has hardly any text. Some sections of the exhibition have screens to display video footage.[537]

The exhibition makes sparse use of objects, depending on topic and gallery. The section on "Pre-Colonial Society and Peaceful Coexistence" generously relies on the National Museum's ethnographic collection and includes several display cases showing adornments and handicraft, as well as pigments for colouring. Paintings depicting idealised scenes of precolonial rural life are combined with pottery, calabashes, baskets, or *poijkes*, a commonly used tripod cauldron for cooking over fire, as well as a wood-carved canoe from the Kavango region. The more recent, history becomes in the exhibition narrative, the less use is made of objects as media of representation.

However, an effort has been made to feature at least some objects in most galleries, be it memorabilia of Ongulumbashe veterans or UNTAG soldiers, an old German field gun and iron collars from the genocide era, a public bench marked *Nie Blankes* ("non-whites") from Walvis Baai municipality, or the model of a tank on display in front of the large 'Battle of Cuito Cuanavale' painting. Noteworthy, also for being a continuation of the former *Alte Feste* exhibition, is the display of Namibia's Robben Island prisoners. Like in the previous exhibition, their history has been accorded a separate room, filled with portray pictures of the former prisoners, photographs of Robben Island, display cases with personal items, prison garb, and blankets. To evoke a sense of captivity, the room is modelled after a prison cell, with door and window barred.

Artwork and ornaments feature prominently in the display, blurring the boundaries of the museological object-category. This includes bronze busts of 'early resistance' leaders like Jacob Morenga, Hendrik Witbooi and Samuel Maharero, as well as various busts and statues depicting Sam Nujoma. A statue of two women, one chained and in agony and the other one consoling her, has been placed in the genocide gallery. Also frequent are floral designs, in the form of stylised palm trees in the section on precolonial society or a flower bouquet in front of the mural, titled "Glory to the Heroes". Of special significance is the sculptured *Welwitschia mirabilis*, a national symbol of Namibia, placed beneath the portrait of Sam Nujoma in the first gallery. The floral symbolism is significant, as Kirkwood has emphasised with regard to Mansudae's work in the new State House (Kirkwood 2011: 34–36).[538]

Even more significant is the fact that Nujoma's portrait is the first impression that visitors encounter when they enter the first gallery of the exhibition. The image of Nujoma, who is smiling and dressed in camouflage, is mounted on a panel which is painted with the Namibian national flag.

[537] At the time of my research, screens still had to be mounted. Several people who visited the museum 2014–2018 told me that the screens did not work.

[538] Floral symbolism is an important element of North Korean propaganda art (Portal 2005: 90–91). In 2010, the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna dedicated a whole exhibition to this topic, "Flowers for Kim Il-sung", see: <https://www.38north.org/2010/08/kim-jong-il's-"flowers-for-kim-il-sung"/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

Two physical flags framing Nujoma and the *Welwitschia* plant complement this installation. Remarkably, the panels to the left and right are overwritten "Early Resistance Leaders" and bear a symbolic pantheon of bronze busts of Namibia's canonical anticolonial resistance heroes. This includes early nationalist Hosea Kutako and Uukwangali Queen Kanuni as the only woman. The arrangement of Nujoma, Founding Father of the Namibian nation, at the centre and flanked by the "Early Resistance Leaders", supports the canonical narrative according to which national independence was the logical conclusion of SWAPO's armed struggle, led by Nujoma who united the heroic, but fragmented ethnic resistance in one vanguard national movement. Consequently, Nujoma is not only the first historical signifier, visitors encounter when they enter the exhibition, but also the last, when they exit it. In addition, they encounter Nujoma throughout the exhibition on photos, in paintings, in bronze, and as a statue in front of the museum.

Due to their large number and elevated presence, the history paintings with their highly specific mediality clearly dominate the exhibition. Both photographs and objects rather appear as an addendum, supplementing authenticity as historic documents and artefacts. Still, it would be wrong to assume that the paintings do not claim authenticity themselves. As I explain in the following section, their mediality is closely intertwined with a particular North Korean tradition of visual representation, which was translated and adapted into a Namibian vernacular. This process of appropriation is effective due to the 'auratic' (Behrends /Park /Rottenburg 2014: 18) quality of the paintings, which appeals to its audience and reflects a widely shared notion of liberation memory. For this, the exhibition narrative corresponds with the three major tropes of liberation struggle commemoration in Namibia: suffering and martyrdom, resilience and heroic militancy, socialist solidarity and comradeship.

Exhibition Narrative: The Representation of Martyrdom, Heroic Militancy, and Comradeship

Large sections of the exhibition are dedicated to the representation of suffering, in often drastic and disturbing images. One example that stands out is the depiction of the genocide. In the panel on "Early Resistance against Colonialism", many iconic photographs from the time of the war 1903–1908 have been used to represent the militant resistance of leaders like Jacob Marengo and Hendrik Witbooi. These are contrasted with harrowing photographs of chained and emaciated prisoners-of-war, who are in the process of deportation to the concentration camps. One photo portrays !Aman resistance leader Cornelius Frederick in chains on Shark Island, another one depicts an iconic scene of hangings. Yet another contemporary photo shows one of the human heads, which was taken from a prisoner of Shark Island to Germany, where it was used in racist phrenology research.[539]

[539] The caption mentions that this particular head was among the human remains, which were repatriated by the Charité Berlin in 2011. Ever since then and in the wake of subsequent repatriations of human remains the question was discussed whether human remains from the era of genocide will be on display in the IMM. At its entrance, a note mentions that "no skulls or human remains are exhibited here". Instead, the human remains that were returned to Namibia and are in the heritage directorate's care are stored at the National Museum, inaccessible to the general public.

A particularly gloomy and graphic section of the exhibition is the 'Chamber of Horror' which links the "Early Resistance" gallery with the next one.[540] This section, which is veiled by a red curtain and dimmed, largely consists of a painted mural of a Schutztruppe commander, which is ornamented by a huge bronze relief. It marks the date of 2 October 1904, referring to the proclamation of von Trotha's 'extermination order', contrasted by an artistic representation of the aforementioned iconic photo of hanged prisoners. The remainder of the bronze relief shows in great detail the martyrdom of chained and emaciated prisoners and slave-labourers, like a disturbing rendition of Agamben's *Homo sacer*: a flayed and pitiful creature, downtrodden and at the hands of unmerciful masters. A video by Namibian vlogger Anna Vanessa gives an impression of the auratic quality of the exhibition, in capturing not only herself as overwhelmed by sadness and grief, but also the reactions of another visitor, who seems to experience an emotional breakdown while viewing the genocide display.[541]

Even though the genocide constitutes only a small part of the total exhibition, its drastic representation is significant for setting a tone in the subsequent exhibition narrative. Especially the section depicting the attack on SWAPO's camp in Cassinga in 1978, following on the second level, resonates with the iconography of the genocide. The attack is represented in form of a group of three large-sized paintings, the first of which shows the SADF's aerial bombardment of Cassinga, while the other two depict the suffering of the camp's population in graphic detail. Shredded corpses, torn limbs, agony-twisted bodies of women and children give a more than vivid rendition of excessive violence and of an event, which entered liberation memory mostly through the narratives of survivors and the iconic photographs of the mass grave. The representation of Cassinga in the permanent exhibition accordingly corresponds closely with the public commemoration of Cassinga in the form of Cassinga Day (4 May) and its ceremonial affirmation of martyrdom analysed in chapter three.

While the representation of suffering and martyrdom is a central feature of the IMM's exhibition narrative, its dominant theme is the liberation struggle: its precursor in the form of 'early resistance' against German colonial rule and ultimately, SWAPO's armed guerrilla war. Consequently, and in line with Swapo's heroic narrative of armed liberation and its prevalence in state-sponsored memorial culture, a significant part of the exhibition is dedicated to the veneration of heroic militancy. Despite the noteworthy representation of non-violent forms of resistance by means of mass protests, liberation theology, diplomacy, and international solidarity, the main part of levels two and three feature paintings, objects, photographs, and installations which portray warfare.

"The Attack on Omugulugwombashe", another central *lieu de mémoire* of Swapo's armed liberation struggle, is represented with a huge painting, six photographs and a display case with

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540 The name 'Chamber of Horror' established itself in public discourse when journalists began to write about the exhibition. It is beyond my knowledge who coined it first. It was not used as an official label during my research.
541 Anna Vanessa: "Independence Memorial Museum", uploaded on 11 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV_mcvZ_UhQ > [last accessed 15 October 2022].

memorabilia. The painting depicts a scene of intense battle, with a group of nine guerrilla fighters charging at a South African combat helicopter. The freedom fighters are dynamic, in the forefront, heavily armed with machine guns, and appear to have the upper hand against an enemy, which can hardly be discerned amidst the smoke and fire. In light of the existing narratives of 26 August 1966 discussed in the chapter on Heroes' Day, this representation is an idealised representation of a battle, which was far from heroic. Still, the accompanying photographs of the Ongulumbashe site and of the veterans imbue the panel with authenticity.

So does the model of the T-54/55 tank in front of the Cuito Cuanavale display, which not only emphasises the importance of this particular battle in the mytho-history of Swapo, but also underlines the transnational dimension of Namibia's liberation struggle. For the T-54/55 was a Russian battle tank, built after the Second World War and exported to allied socialist countries during the Cold War. The tanks were used by the Angolan army in their struggle against UNITA and South Africa throughout the 1980s, including the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. Tank commandos, operated by the Angolan and Cuban military, were a common sight and source of protection for Swapo in Angola. The ubiquitous representation of the tank in various segments of the exhibition is evidence of this. Through its omnipresence on the battlefields of the Cold War, the T-54/55 has itself assumed the status of a *lieu de mémoire* in the post-socialist memory-scape, commemorated in museums around the world.[542]

A significant feature of the representation of militancy in the exhibition display is the iconography of the 'comrades in arms'. This is exemplified by the sections dedicated to international solidarity, showing Sam Nujoma on state visit in Pyongyang, Namibians studying in Cuba, or military advisers from allied socialist countries in SWAPO's exile camps. A highly unique form of illustrating solidarity in the exhibition, however, is a particular category of paintings, which show panorama-like gatherings of armed combatants. These paintings are quite huge and resemble group pictures. While group photos were an established format of SWAPO's visual propaganda in exile, the paintings appear as decidedly idealistic, presenting an imagined history void of contradictions.

An example is a painting in the "Early Resistance" gallery, which shows a grouping of all resistance leaders of the various communities who were engaged in armed resistance against German colonial rule along with their fighters; men mostly, women are largely absent. A majority of the combatants wears uniforms. Some are dressed in traditional attire, signalling ethnic affiliation: Ovaherero in their characteristic uniforms, Nama on horseback with cloths pulled over their hats, Ovahimba with traditional hairstyles and leather accessories. The painting represents the explicit notion of "precolonial harmony" and "peaceful coexistence", which was introduced by Mansudae in its exhibition draft of 2000. This concept appears early on as a leitmotif in the display narrative,

[542] For instance, the tank is on display at the South African Museum of Military History in Johannesburg and the Vietnam Military History Museum in Hanoi. In front of the Okahandja Military Museum a historic T-34 is on display, which is another Russian-made tank widely used during the Cold War, especially by Cuban troops.

despite being largely ahistorical. For the advances of German imperialism into Southern Africa fell into a time of intense regional power struggles and armed conflicts between various factions, leading to temporal strategic alliances between Namibian Chiefs and the German Schutztruppe.[543] This complex history of precolonial interaction and political strife is completely absent from the exhibition narrative, as is the fact that Witbooi troops supported the Germans in their fight against Ovaherero at the battle of Ohamakari, the most central military episode related to the genocide (Hillebrecht 2015: 49).

Fig. 45: "Early resistance" mural, IMM, Windhoek. Photo: Markus Bayer (2016).

Instead, the display clearly reflects SWAPO's nationalist patriotic history, as as it was outlined by Sam Nujoma quite early during the struggle: "For centuries the people of Namibia of all ethnic groups have lived side by side in peace and harmony. Warfare and strife was unbeknown to them. It was only at the advent of German colonialism, with its usurpation of our land and property, that we began to taste the bitter fruit of discord and conflict".[544]

Almost exactly the same heroic and masculine pose is presented in a painting in the section on the armed liberation struggle, even though in this case, unity and comradeship are represented by the grouping of various categories of military personnel, including different generations of freedom fighters and also civilians. The painting depicts a reunion of the veterans of Ongulumbashe, portrayed as old men in their brown uniforms, and the younger generation of PLAN in camouflage,

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[543] See Hillebrecht 2015 on the ambivalent relationship between Hendrik Witbooi and Samuel Maharero; Wallace 2011: 59–73 and Lau 1987: 32–40 on the rise and demise of the Afrikaner clan's hegemony in central Namibia 1820–1870; and Lau 1987: 41–73 on the impact of the Oorlam's predatory commando economy.

[544] Statement by Mr. Nujoma, President of SWAPO, Before the United Nations Security Council on October 5, 1971.

including several women this time. At the right outer edge of the picture, children and adults in civilian clothes are pictured. This can be seen as a reference to the sizable civilian population in exile, which however appears as significantly marginal in comparison to the dominant presence of the military. In the background, more combatants can be discerned, some of them waving SWAPO flags, surrounded by heavy military vehicles such as motorised missile launchers and battle tanks. The painting suggests an impression of overwhelming heroic determination and unwavering combative readiness, which is clearly attributed to SWAPO, even though SWAPO did not own the illustrated military armaments. The historical context, of SWAPO in exile as a subset of a globalised military conflict and powerful allies in the background, is blurred in favour of a vision of an invincible and militarily successful liberation army.

Fig. 46: SWAPO mural, IMM, Windhoek. Photo: Markus Bayer (2016).

The element of the permanent exhibition, which combines the motif of heroic militancy and the format of painted group and history collages most poignantly, is the room-sized battle cyclorama on the third and final level. Here, after having walked through the previous two levels and looking down from a balcony, visitors are presented with a huge panoramic mixed-media display of the liberation struggle in its entirety. The cyclorama has the form of a triptych with one large painting as its central panel and two side panels, which constitute collages, pieced together from individual paintings with different formats, edge lengths and sizes, interspersed with bronze reliefs. The central panel shows an open field battle scene of PLAN, armed guerrilla fighters on foot charging decisively, supported by battle tanks and helicopters, all guns blazing.

Fig. 47: Cyclorama (detail), IMM, Windhoek. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

Fig. 48: Cyclorama (detail), IMM. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

The cyclorama is supported by a multi-media installation with light and sound effects, as well as video projection of battle scenes, used to enhance the sensual experience of a war situation. The left side panel shows emblematic scenes of Namibia's history of armed resistance, e.g. the attack of Ndonga warriors against the German fort in Namutoni in 1904 and the mass protests of workers at the Lüderitz harbour. Another scene is a collage of Schutztruppe soldiers in front of the equestrian monument, heaps of bodies of genocide victims, and two men in the attire of German colonial anthropologists, cutting off a prisoner's head.

Some paintings appear to be without explicit context and seem rather symbolic, such as the scenes depicting a group of people who are burning to death in terrible agony, which most likely refers to the Cassinga attack. The bronze reliefs revisit artwork elements presented in earlier sections of the exhibition, such as the motif of the hanging of prisoners and the busts of 'early resistance' leaders. The right panel includes paintings of veterans standing at attention, a scene depicting the capture of South African soldiers by PLAN,[545] as well as several idealistic scenes representing peace, harmony, development, and prosperity in independent Namibia. Remarkable here is the representation of inclusivity, in terms of age, gender, profession, and ethnicity – except for the conspicuous absence of whites.

Saturated with images of war, violence, oppression, suffering, but also resilience, endurance, resistance, and victory, visitors reach the end of the exhibition, with one final painted mural left. Under the heading "Long Live Namibian Independence!", a group of ten ideal-type Namibians is looking towards a bright and promising future under the benevolent smile of the Founding Father, Sam Nujoma. A blurred scene of a mass protest in the background indicates some historical context. The group consists of four women, including a young girl in a school uniform, a nun, a nurse, and a woman in characteristic Tswana attire, while the men consist of a soldier, a priest, a worker, a business man, a man in a wheel-chair, and, significantly, a white farmer who carries a crate filled with fresh fruits and vegetables. Despite the stereotypical representation of gendered professions, which somehow ignores the strong female presence among the workforce and the military, the painting is an ideal-type representation of unity in diversity and national reconciliation in the Namibian context. It is this image of an ideal society, characterised by tolerance, inclusivity, and optimism, which evolved out of a history of violence, colonial repression, and victorious liberation, with which the exhibition narrative closes.

[545] One of the prisoners resembles Johan van der Mescht, who was captured by a PLAN commando, led by Ruben "Danger" Ashipala in 1978. However, in contradistinction to the painting, which shows a group of seven men taken prisoner, van der Mescht was the only South African captured. Neither were South African tanks destroyed nor airplanes shot down during the raid, as the painting suggests.

Fig. 49: "Long live Namibian independence mural!" IMM. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

Curating the Independence Memorial Museum

During my fieldwork, I worked closely with the curatorial team of the National Museum, the representatives of Mansudae, staff of the NAN and SPARC, and the small but vibrant community of Namibia's historians and museum practitioners. My research largely coincided with the appointment of Gerhardt Gurirab as curator of the IMM in April 2012. This created a perfect learning environment for me, since he had to familiarise himself with the mandate and terms of references of his new position. For the twelve months of my stay, we formed a cordial relationship as colleagues, embroiled by the same professional challenge to make sense of the IMM. This entailed negotiating positions, responsibilities, and professional latitudes both within the National Museum as an institution and as representatives of the National Museum within the complex apparatus of Namibia's party-political state-bureaucracy. My research took place in an institutional environment which was characterised by multiple and often conflicting affiliations, while dealing with a highly contested and politically charged subject matter under constant public and professional scrutiny.

Institutional Background: The National Museum of Namibia

The National Museum of Namibia was established during German colonial rule in 1907 as the *Landesmuseum*.[546] In 1926, the South West Africa Scientific Society was tasked with administering

[546] On the history of the National Museum and its eventful history; see National Museum of Namibia 2007 and Wessler 2007: 54–88, 156–200.

the museum, which was renamed to South West Africa Museum. During the Scientific Society's custodianship, the museum faced severe challenges regarding the lack of financial and logistical resources and personnel. In 1957, the museum was renamed State Museum and taken over by the South African administration for South West Africa. Since independence in 1990, the museum is administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture, now Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. In 1995, it was finally named National Museum of Namibia.

Today, the National Museum is spatially separated. Since 1993, office spaces, collections, storage rooms, and the library are located in the so called Museum ACRE (Administration, Curation, Research and Education) at Robert Mugabe Avenue. Parts of the structure was built during German rule in 1907 and used to accommodate various schools. In 1990, the building was made available to the State Museum.[547] *Alte Feste*, which was built during 1890–1893 by the German colonial administration and is located just opposite of the ACRE, used to house the old display centre as well as the offices of the museum's history department and the historical collection. The fort became part of the museum infrastructure in 1962, followed by extensive renovations. From 1963 onwards, it accommodated museum staff (National Museum of Namibia 2007: 19–20; Vogt 2004: 117–199).[548] *Owela Museum*, further down Robert Mugabe Avenue, is another display centre of the National Museum dedicated to ethnography and cultural history.[549] It was opened in 1958 by the South African administration and accommodated the ethnology, geology, and archaeology collections of the State Museum, parts of which were also stored at the facilities of the Namibia Scientific Society. The *Owela* display centre got its name in 1996, based on the popular game with pebbles, which can be played in front of the building. The *Independence Memorial Museum*, finally, is the latest display centre which also contains a restaurant and more office spaces.

As an institution, the National Museum' mandate is "to preserve, understand and explain the material heritage of our country for present and future generations, that they may study, enjoy, take pride in and learn from these assets" (National Museum of Namibia 2007). This involves curatorial

[547] National Museum of Namibia: "Museum ACRE" (undated information leaflet).

[548] The archive of the Schutztruppe stationed at *Alte Feste* was transferred to Germany in 1919, where it was completely destroyed during the Second World War; see National Museum of Namibia: "Alte Feste" (information leaflet, 2006).

[549] See National Museum of Namibia: "Owela" (information leaflet, 2008); and Kanyimba 2016: 39–40. The history of ethnographic display practices at Owela is closely entangled with colonial and apartheid anthropology in Southern Africa. Owela can be characterised as a more conventional ethnological museum with a dated, and in light of apartheid history problematic representation of Namibia's ethnic groups as distinct cultural entities; see Erichsen's insightful critique of the permanent exhibition in "Namibians on display: a tour of the Owela Museum", *The Namibian*, 23 April 1999, and the reply by Eugen Marais, "In Perspective – The Owela Museum", *The Namibian*, 30 April 1999. The permanent exhibition was revised, to get rid of some of its more outright colonial perspectives and artefacts, including so called 'Bushman casts'. The exhibition now includes information on colonialism, the genocide, and practices of commemoration – albeit still rendered through a dominant 'colonial gaze'; see National Museum of Namibia 2007: 26; Wessler 2007: 34–47; and Marais and Visser 1991: 19. A critical tour of Owela was part of the annual conference of ICOM's International Committee for Museums of Ethnography, convened in Windhoek on 12 September 2012, which I attended.

work and collection management, research activities and museum education, within the framework of national culture and heritage policy. The three major collections of the National Museum are the social sciences section (archaeology, ethnology, and history), the natural sciences section, and the library.[550] With *Cimbebasia*, established in 1962, the National Museum of Namibia has its own scientific journal, covering a broad range of topics relevant to its curatorial and research activities, from social anthropology to entomology. This was supplemented by *Cimbazine*, a short-lived annual news bulletin. Institutions like the National Museum's educational service and the mobile museum service provide extension services which cater for public education, visiting schools as well as the provision of museum services and mobile exhibitions in Namibia's regions (Nias 1994). Since 1996, the National Museum is headed by Deputy Director Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, who is one of Namibia's most influential state bureaucrats in the museum and heritage sector.[551]

During my fieldwork, I was officially attached to the museum's history department, located at *Alte Feste*, which then was still open as a display centre. Since independence, one focus of the history department's activities has been to research, document, and exhibit the history of Namibia's liberation struggle. The department occasionally held special events for days of national commemoration like Heroes' Day, mostly addressing school children who got the chance to put together their own exhibition, debate heroism, or meet war veterans like Helao Shityuwete.[552] The first history curators after independence, Elina Shali Nujoma (1991–1993) and Valentina Mulongeni (1991–1995), were both war veterans and involved in the history department's research project "Liberation Struggle of Namibia"; Nujoma working on the 'early resistance', Mulongeni on the national liberation movement (Mulongeni 1991: 27). Both curators shaped the postcolonial transformation of the history display at *Alte Feste* towards its focus on the liberation struggle (Wessler 2007: 191).

Mulongeni, together with Barbara Böhlke, Jutta Visser, Eugene Marais and John Mendelsohn was part of the team that produced the landmark independence display in 1990.[553] The exhibition was supplemented by a permanent display on Namibia's national symbols in 1991 (van Graan 1991:

[550] The archaeology collection contains and manages approx. 350,000 objects and documentation for some 3,500 archaeological field sites; the ethnographic collection contains 4,400 objects and 8,000 photographic documents. The Natural Science section includes sizable collections of sub-disciplines like arachnology, entomology, herpetology, ichthyology, mammalogy, and ornithology. The library has its origins in Windhoek's first library of 1924, which was managed by the South West Africa Scientific Community 1926–1962. Since the 1960s, it is headed by a full-time librarian and contains some 6,600 books and 1,550 journal copies (all figures of 2005).

[551] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013. She is also Acting Director of the Directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programs at the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Vice Chairperson of the NHC, as well as National Commissioner of Culture, responsible for Namibia's cooperation with UNESCO. Her predecessor John Mendelsohn apparently quit his position, after conflicts erupted regarding the museum's policy of accessioning and displaying colonial-era objects and representing colonial history in the years of institutional transition after independence; see National Museum of Namibia 2007: 41–42; Schildkrout 1995: 75—76; and the editorial of *Cimbazine* Nr. 2, 1992.

[552] See National Museum of Namibia: "Annual Report 1997/1998" and "Annual Report 2007/2008"; interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 30 May 2013.

[553] On the creation and curation of the exhibition; see Wessler 2007: 169–200; Schildkrout 1995: 76; Mulongeni 1991: 26–27; State Museum of Namibia 1990; and National Museum of Namibia 2007.

16). In 1992, an exhibition on “Solidarity with Namibia: in exile and today”, financed by the Norwegian government, was inaugurated by President Nujoma on Independence Day. Three years later, an exhibition on the role of the UN in Namibia’s independence struggle followed, which became part of the permanent display (National Museum of Namibia 2007: 45).

In 1996, Betty Ndauapeka Hango-Rummukainen became Senior Curator of History, a position she held until her retirement in February 2012. Her biography is quite significant in the context of her work at the department. She was born in Onamunama in Ohangwena region in 1952 and went to exile after finishing secondary school at Döbra in 1973. She worked as a primary school teacher in SWAPO’s ‘Old Farm’ and Nyango camps in Zambia (1975–1976) and as a passport officer in SWAPO’s administrative office in Lusaka (1981–1985). In 1976–1979, she studied for a diploma in management and development studies at UNIN in Lusaka. She advanced her studies in Benin (1979), ex-Yugoslavia (1980), the Netherlands (1986) and achieved a masters’ degree in cultural anthropology and European folklore at the University of Joensuu in Finland (1987–1991). After independence, she returned to Namibia and worked as a researcher for the University of Namibia (1992–1994), followed by a short stint at the Ministry of Fisheries (1995–1996), before she joined the National Museum.[554] Noteworthy projects during her tenure were a joint exhibition project with the Älvsborg museum in Vänersborg, Sweden, on gender aspects of contract labour during apartheid (“Missing Man”), as well as research into the history of Namibia’s Robben Island prisoners. In 1999, she accompanied a delegation of Namibian ex-prisoners to Cape Town to locate graves of two fellow prisoners and to advise the Robben Island museum on the representation of Namibian history. Her research activities also led to an exhibition on Namibia’s Robben Island prisoners which was opened in 2003 (“Footprints of the Namibian political prisoners on Robben Island”) and became part of the permanent display at *Alte Feste*.

Ms. Hango-Rummukainen’s biography is an impressive example for the cosmopolitan character of Namibian exile experiences. At the same time, it highlights a significant presence of (female) former exiles and war veterans at the National Museum. For not only her two predecessors Valentina Mulongeni and Elina Nujoma are former exiles and veterans, but so is fellow IMM committee member Fousy Kambombo from the archaeology department. In addition, Deputy Director Moombolah-ǁGoagoses was one of the group of Namibians who received scholarships to study in Cuba (1978–1988 and 1990–1993), where she received degrees in history of art and museology.[555]

The process of planning the IMM and its exhibition narrative was strongly influenced by National Museum staff, many of which are former exiles and war veterans. This imprint of the liberation movement is indisputable, even though one should make the effort to differentiate between the various degrees of identification involved. It affects peoples’ affiliation to the party

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[554] Interview, Windhoek, 5 July 2012; additional information from her personal curriculum vitae.

[555] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.

differently, whether they are seasoned ex-combatants, party functionaries, or civilian exiles, who had the chance to acquire a stipend for professional training or studies abroad. I constantly experienced people negotiating their biographic relationship to the liberation movement with the mandate of their status as civil servants and their profession as museum practitioners, with which they identified. At times, museum staff that lacked the experiential status as former exiles would emphasise their struggle credentials in informal conversations with me, be it through narratives of their individual contribution to the liberation struggle or simply by showing me their Swapo Party membership card.

The Curatorial Team

When my application for research on the IMM's curation was accepted, the Deputy Director referred me to the Curator of History, Gerhardt Gurirab. It was on 18 April 2012 when I met Gerhardt for the first time, who would become my supervisor and colleague for the coming twelve months. Gerhardt was born in Usakos in 1963 and attended school in Usakos and Uis.[556] Between 1982 and 1992 he worked as a teacher in Okombahe, followed by employments as pastoral counsellor for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia at Berseba (1993–1994), Fransfontein (1995–1997) and Tsumeb (1997–1998, 2003–2005). He studied at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he acquired a bachelor's degree in theology (BTh Hon), followed by a master's in history and political studies with a thesis on the role of the different Lutheran churches in Namibia during the liberation struggle. In 2006 he went to Cape Town, where he studied for a postgraduate diploma in museum and heritage studies at UWC as a student of, inter alia, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz. His studies included participation at the Robben Island training programme and also seminars on the history of social anthropology in Southern Africa.

He gained first experience with curatorial practice working as a voluntary curator for the Tsumeb Cultural Village (2005), followed by an assignment as museum curator at the Otjiwarongo Heritage Explorium (2007–2008). In 2007, he was one of the researchers of the joint project by the Namibia Institute for Democracy and the Namibian-German Foundation, which documented oral history on German colonialism and the genocide (Erichsen 2008b). In November 2008, he began working as a curator at the National Museum of Namibia, responsible for the management of the historical collections of the history department and the *Alte Feste* display centre. In April 2012, he was tasked with curating the IMM.

From the moment I stepped into his office at *Alte Feste*, crammed with files and layers of departmental history, I felt a profound sense of bonding among academic peers. Gerhardt presented himself as a dedicated historian, outspoken about political issues and the manifold professional challenges for university graduates in Namibia's public service and heritage sector. While he did not

[556] This and the following are based on interviews of 31 January and 30 May 2013 and his personal curriculum vitae, as well as numerous informal conversations between April 2012 and June 2013.

hide his affiliation with Swapo, he never appeared to me as someone who was dogmatic in his political convictions. Throughout the duration of my stay, Gerhardt was interested in my research topics and provided me with contacts and information. He was eager to hear from me about Germany's way of dealing with its colonial past, especially regarding the genocide, to which he as a Khoekhoegowab-speaking Namibian felt closely related. I, in turn, was intent on learning as much as possible about his work as curator for the IMM; a responsibility, he had only been given that very same month. In this context, my research provided useful information for Gerhardt's work as well, especially regarding the documentation and paper trail of the technical committee.[557] A 'mentor-protegé'-relation (Beek /Göpfert 2011: 200) emerged, based on good personal standing and characterised by mutual professional exchange.

Next to his role as curator, this involved also his biographical experience from the struggle days. He told me, for instance, about the time when he was attending secondary school at Uis, where he experienced the increasing political tension and unrest following the Soweto uprising in 1976, which politicised young people all over Southern Africa. For him, the early 1970s were an era that fostered his political awareness and brought him into contact with radical student politics and the activities of SWAPO. An event in this trajectory, which he remembered proudly, was the Cassinga Day commemoration which he and fellow students organised at Uis in 1979 and which turned out to become his first direct experience with school strikes: "We have been singing liberation songs, […] you could really see the spirit of our people, they were fired up, […] it was rewarding, there was anger […] we wanted freedom, that kind of spirit was there, among the students".[558] For him, one motive for resistance was the fact that South Africa deployed white teachers, who mistreated pupils and quite often carried weapons in school. His and his fellow students' commitment resulted in disciplinary action and police brutality, as they got chased, beaten up, and temporarily expelled, while the school had to close its operation for a while.

Spending a lot of my time with Gerhardt was not only helpful to familiarise myself with the practices and routines of his work assignment, but to sensitise me as well for other issues: the contribution of individual Namibians, who fought apartheid without leaving the country for exile; political perspectives from a historian, who identified with one of Namibia's ethnic minorities; or the difficulties of well-educated graduates to pursue professional careers in public service, with its heavy influence of party-political affiliation. First and foremost, however, I learned about the predicaments of curating a museum project that was burdened by its political significance. For the curator, this produced a situation of considerable stress.

When I began my internship in April 2012, Gerhardt told me that according to his work assignment the IMM was supposed to officially open on Heroes' Day, 26 August, meaning within a

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[557] As part of my research, I screened, sorted, indexed, and analysed all files related to the IMM, which were accessible to me and made the results available to the curator.
[558] Interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 31 January 2013.

time span of just more than four months.[559] He felt overwhelmed by this prospect, due to a general lack of information about the state of progress of the project.[560] Neither was he involved in the curatorial duties related to the IMM or invited to the committee meetings, nor felt he at liberty to confront the involved stakeholders with a plea for urgency.[561] His assignment included the completion of the exhibition, the training of exhibition officers skilled in liberation history, and to "put in place [a research programme] to capture the living memories of veterans of the Liberation Struggle".[562] The latter referred particularly to the documentation of oral history of former political prisoners and activists, which was supposed to be put on display as video material. Writing a project proposal, applying for funds and travel allowances, requesting technical equipment and a car, travelling through rural northern Namibia and conducting the interviews, all was time-consuming and difficult to realise in such limited time.

Furthermore, the complex array of external stakeholders complicated the curatorial process. Involved were, in different and often inconclusive capacities, the various Ministries of Work, Culture, Education, Veterans Affairs, and Defence, the Office of the President, and the City of Windhoek. Research activities had to be coordinated with the NAN and the SPARC, the NBC, veterans' organisations, as well as the North Koreans. The latter, finally, were not only producing the exhibition display but also building the entire structure, down to its electric wiring. This made Mansudae the most central stakeholder affecting the curatorial process, since all depended on the progress of their work. As it turned out, however, all cooperation with Mansudae had to be channelled through the position of their supervisor Mr. Choi,[563] who acted as gatekeeper for the North Korean workers who neither spoke English nor were at liberty to move freely and mingle with Namibians. It happened on several occasions that Mansudae staff was not available because they worked on parallel projects in northern Namibia or neighbouring countries.

As I gathered from conversations and the evaluation of the files, it would have been necessary for all these different stakeholders to coordinate their activities with the committee much more closely. Likewise, training and preparation for the opening should have begun much earlier, preferably in 2009. Already at the end of April, it became obvious that Heroes' Day 2012 as a date for opening could not realistically be met.[564] Seen from this angle, the IMM appeared as a black box which had to be unravelled; just how, we still had to figure out.

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[559] Informal conversation, 18 April 2012.
[560] Informal conversation, 23 April 2012; field notes throughout April 2012 and June 2013.
[561] Informal conversation, 23 April 2012; interview, Windhoek, 30 May 2013.
[562] Quoted from the curator's appointment letter of 4 April 2012. Gerhardt gave me a copy of the letter, as part of my assignment to develop a working plan for my internship.
[563] I changed his name, even though I can't verify that the name with which he introduced himself in the first place was his actual name. Other Mansudae representatives had business cards with their names and particulars.
[564] Informal conversation with Gerhardt Gurirab and Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, 26 April 2012; informal conversation with Gerhardt Gurirab, 21 May 2012. As of March 2013, it became clearer that the opening will happen towards the end of President Pohamba's tenure.

This "we" also included Foustina "Fousy" Kambombo, who worked as a technical assistant in the archaeology department since 1999 and who participated in the curatorial process as an expert due to her biographical connection to the liberation struggle. Throughout my research she appeared as the one person who was most responsible for dealing with Mansudae – an impression, she confirmed in our interview:

> I was the one who is delegated most of the time to contact the people here and there to work with the Koreans, to take them wherever they wanted to go. If they needed information, I have to do that; to arrange meetings, to make sure that people are coming to the meetings. That's what I was mostly doing and also to look for materials. I have to contact people; I have to take these Korean artists there where the information is[565]

She accompanied the Koreans to the relevant archives, facilitated joint meetings with stakeholders from the involved ministries, and kept an eye on the progress of the exhibition. It was largely her responsibility to appraise the artworks and designs of the display and to communicate specific requests for alterations or additions from the side of the National Museum to Mansudae. As explained in the previous chapter, she also accompanied the Koreans on their field trips throughout Namibia to visit historic sites of the liberation struggle. As in the case of Ms. Hango-Rummukainen, Fousy's biography, too, is interwoven with SWAPO's transnational history of exile.[566]

Born in 1956 in Epinga, she grew up with a father who was a teacher and artist, and also the adoptive father of John Ndevasia Mwafangejo, Namibia's most renowned artist. Epinga was one of the hubs of militant resistance against South Africa's foreign rule in northern Namibia and the scene of the so called Epinga massacre in 1972, where one of Fousy's uncles was killed. At the time, she was attending St. Mary's Mission School in Odibo, which gained a certain prominence in 1974, when a large section of the school population including teachers collectively joined the liberation movement in exile.[567] Fousy, however, left on her own in July 1974 together with her cousin and ultimately made the arduous journey to SWAPO's camp in Oshatotwa in Zambia. For Fousy, as for Gerhardt, the experience of attending school in a highly militarised environment and under constant threats from South African security personnel was the main reason for her political activism. In her

[565] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012.

[566] The following is based on our interview on 24 May 2013 and her autobiography (Kambombo 2014).

[567] Until today, the question is heavily contested whether the learners went voluntarily or were taken by SWAPO against their will. The latter version knows two different narratives, one arguing that the young people were evacuated to bring them to safety, the other insinuating that SWAPO either wanted to use the children as human shields in its camps, or to increase the number of its exile population in order to receive more material support from international donors. This was exploited by South Africa in its anti-SWAPO propaganda. Fousy maintains that she left voluntarily (Kambombo 2014: 17-19; interview, 24 May 2013). According to Titus Mathias, a war veteran who runs the private Outapi War Museum, SWAPO did conduct missions to "capture" school children, but took only those who volunteered to go to exile. According to him, SWAPO sent cadre to visit schools and try to convince pupils to leave for exile. He fondly remembered that his primary school in Okahao was contacted this way, resulting in a large segment of the pupils leaving, including him. At least one instance he recalled in Analenge, where SWAPO forcefully "evacuated" school children to bring them to safety before an impending military campaign; informal conversation with Titus Mathias, Outapi, 24 March 2013.

case, this meant crossing the border to escape from a life of hardship and danger, and to become part of Namibia's exile community.

In Oshatotwa, she received military training before she was sent to Nigeria to complete secondary school. She stayed there for five years until 1980, when she returned to Angola and settled in SWAPO's camp in Kwanza-Sul. A short stay in Güstrow (GDR) followed, where she expected to study journalism. To her disappointment, she wasn't able to study, but had to work in agricultural production instead, together with fellow students from Laos and Lesotho. When she got pregnant, she was ordered back to Kwanza-Sul. There and in Lusaka, she stayed for several years, working with SWAPO's media house to produce *The Combatant*. In 1985, she received a stipend to work in Finland with Otava Publishing, where she joined Lydia Shaketange to produce school books for Namibia's children in exile. In 1987 she returned to Kwanza-Sul. When the war came to an end, she was sent to Nyango in Zambia to work as a teacher, so the children in exile could finish their school education. It was in Nyango, where her pupils were trained by North Koreans to perform at the gymnastics display at the independence celebration in 1990, described in chapter two.

I often sat together with Fousy during lunch breaks or on the side-lines of our work assignments, and talked. She liked to reminisce about life in exile; and since she also wrote her autobiography at the time of my research, she welcomed the chance to talk about her past and thus to stir her memory. Like many other former exiles, she had an ambivalent relationship with independent Namibia, which turned out to be so different than she and her comrades had imagined it during the struggle days. Back then, "life had been better", she told me when we finished one of our interviews: "I prefer the life I had in exile".[568]

While not the same age, both Fousy and Gerhardt represent a younger generation of Namibians who experienced the liberation struggle. Gerhardt joined in rallies and school strikes as a radical student and joined SWAPO in 1977, Fousy left for exile during the "exodus" of 1974, trained as a combatant and engaged in SWAPO's proto-nation building project as a teacher. Both represent two complementary sides of Namibia's national liberation movement, the internal and the external resistance, which, at times, are at odds about the recognition of individual struggle credentials. It was a rewarding and interesting constellation to experience the curation of the IMM through the medium of Fousy's and Gerhardt's different perspectives on liberation memory.

Research Activities: Oral History and Archival Research

When it comes to participant observation, my research involved phases of different intensity. There were times when I was actively involved in curatorial practice and others when I primarily analysed data, updated my field notes, or read through the assortment of files, reports, and conference papers, which were available at the history department. A large part of my participation in curatorial tasks

[568] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 24 May 2013.

involved research activities for the permanent display, which can be divided into two areas. One was documentation of oral history, the other was archival research.

The documentation of oral history of former political prisoners and war veterans of the liberation struggle was the most extensive and time-consuming research activity we engaged in during my fieldwork. In the curator's work assignment, the focus on research was detailed and with an emphasis on the group of the former Robben Island prisoners as a priority, since they were "getting old".[569] Other categories of veterans like "internal and external activists, combatants of all sides" were also to be considered, even though "all sides" most likely did not refer to Namibians who fought for South Africa. The inclusion and representation of SWANU, Namibia's first genuinely national liberation movement, in the permanent exhibition was also intended.[570] This was remarkable and indicated that the curation had some leverage to offer more nuanced perspectives on Namibia's history of the liberation struggle, compared to the representation of history at the Heroes' Acre. However, I also learned that this would remain limited to SWANU and no mention was to be made, for instance, of SWAPO's human rights abuses in exile.

The curator was supposed to document "experiences and recollections of ordinary Namibians about the Liberation Struggle, and other historically relevant oral histories, photographs, and personal effects". He was to consult with other stakeholders like the Ministry of Veterans Affairs and the NBC whether they, in the past or at present, were conducting similar research. One focus was the production of video material, which showed the former Robben Island prisoners at their homes. In addition, once the IMM was opened, former prisoners were to be encouraged to actively participate as education officers and tour guides to narrate their histories to visitors, as it is done in the Robben Island museum.[571]

As mentioned above, the National Museum had earlier on conducted a series of interviews with Robben Island veterans and put together an exhibition on their ordeal in 2003. Transcripts of interviews and documentation from the exhibition were still available, yet scattered and unsystematised. Additional interviews, in the form of transcripts and audio recordings were stored at the National Archives. As part of my work as assistant of the curator, I began gathering the available information on veterans, the majority of whom lived in northern Namibia. As it turned out, a Robben Island veterans trust did exist, which was chaired by Helao Shityuwete, whom we contacted for further information. When we visited him at his home, he showed us two folders – one contained information about his living comrades, the other about those deceased; the latter was already quite voluminous. It was a vivid reminder that the communicative memory of the veterans was volatile and the museum's intention to record it for posterity therefore important. *Tate* Shityuwete was very

[569] Curator's appointment letter, 4 April 2012.

[570] Informal conversations with Fousy Kambombo and Gerhardt Gurirab, 24 May and 5 June 2012. In order to document the history of SWANU, we also interviewed Gerson Veii, a co-founder of the party (12 October 2012) and visited the party office to gather information on SWANU's history (28 February 2013).

[571] Informal conversation with Gerhardt Gurirab, 23 April 2012; see also Rassool 2000: 17–18 and Davison 1998: 154–158 on the Robben Island museum.

helpful and provided us with contact details for most of the former prisoners. The majority lived in northern Namibia, only a handful in the central and southern parts of the country.

In the following days, I began to design a questionnaire for our interviews with the ex-prisoners, which was supposed to focus on their political activism and imprisonment. In addition, I drafted a second, different questionnaire for interviewing the wives and widows of former Robben Island prisoners, since we agreed that their experience was an important but still marginalised aspect of liberation memory, too.[572] I also drafted a letter of consent to store our interviews at the National Archives, where they became accessible timely. It quickly emerged that a discrepancy existed between the pragmatic dimension of our mandate, to produce footage for the exhibition display, and the prospect to record the life histories of veterans, who in some cases would most likely be interviewed for the last time. This contradiction was particularly evident in the fact that we only had ten days to conduct interviews with an appropriate length, while we were on the road. Initially, interviews were planned to last about 30 minutes, after designing the questionnaire we envisaged 60–120 minutes.[573]

Since the interviews were supposed to be recorded on video, we had to use proper equipment. The National Museum owned a digital camcorder, which sufficed for the purposes of recording interviews, but would not provide the necessary quality to use the footage in elaborate multimedia display environments. For that reason, we inquired with different stakeholders who had professional equipment at their disposal. This included the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, the National Archives and a local film production company with ties to the SPARC. What we experienced in all instances was that equipment would not be available for various reasons and that several of the stakeholders were busy conducting similar projects of oral history documentation, with only very limited internal coordination.[574] The representative of the film company offered his services to the National Museum, to provide his professional equipment and also his services as cameraman. He showed us samples of his work, which were of impressive quality and compiled a quotation for his work. The curator promised to submit this to the directorate of the National Museum, even though, ultimately, his offer was declined.

The amount of existing video material of liberation struggle oral history was quite surprising, prompting questions about the level of cooperation between the parties with professional stakes in the IMM. When I talked to the different actors within this heterogeneous field of people and institutions who were invested in documenting and remediating liberation memory, rivalries, disputes over institutional boundaries, and even legal irregularities became visible. An image emerged of state institutions pursuing similar projects and competing over shares of struggle past and liberation memory. It also brought to light that the IMM was seen by some as biased in its representation of liberation struggle history. One person, who was professionally involved in official

[572] Field notes, 30 May and 4 June 2012.
[573] Field notes, 28–30 May 2012.
[574] Field notes, 28–31 May 2012.

veterans' politics, anticipated a dominant focus on Sam Nujoma in the exhibition, at the expense of veterans like Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, who would not receive the recognition they deserved.[575] Ultimately, we neither succeeded in requisitioning professional video equipment nor enlisting the services of people versed in producing high quality film footage. Equipped with two digital camcorders, including one borrowed from the National Archives, we embarked on our trip.

During 5–15 June 2012, Fousy, Gerhardt and I travelled through Namibia's central-northern regions Otjozondjupa, Oshikoto, Ohangwena, Oshaana, and Omusati, to interview former political prisoners of the South African apartheid regime. The majority of veterans we interviewed were Robben Island prisoners, now old men, who largely lived as subsistence farmers in rural Owambo. We also interviewed a number of women who were imprisoned in South Africa's Kroonstad prison for supporting the anti-apartheid struggle as political activists, to add a more nuanced gender perspective to the representation of political imprisonment in the exhibition. Additional interviews were made on several occasions in the following months with former prisoners who either lived in Windhoek or in the southern parts of the country.[576]

Even though Helao Shityuwete had provided us with contact details for his fellow ex-prisoners, it still proved difficult to locate some of the veterans who lived on homesteads in remote areas. As described in the chapter on Heroes' Day, we found a lot of them living in destitute and precarious conditions, yet most were eager and willing to narrate their histories to us. Simeon Shixungileni, the Second-in-Command at Ongulumbashe was the only one who was reluctant to be interviewed by us. His initial hesitation partly resulted from his frustration over the government's selective interest in the wellbeing of him and other veterans. What played an additional role was the fact that in the recent past, several people had visited the Shixungilenis to do interviews and also film the veteran. According to *Meme* Shixungileni, some of these people had claimed to belong to the National Museum, so she was a bit reserved at first when we approached her seemingly again with our request to conduct our interview.[577]

The information that there were people who claimed to represent the National Museum without proper credentials alarmed Fousy and Gerhardt. Later on when we had returned to Windhoek, we learned that this was a misunderstanding. The filming was done by Per Sanden and

[575] Informal conversation, May 2012. Similar sentiments were voiced repeatedly by other people close to the government, who often criticised the neglect of the ordinary veterans.

[576] We did interviews, in chronological order, with Betuel Nuunyango (Ondjeke, 7 June), Anna Haipinge (Ongha, 7 June), Justina Abraham (Endola, 8 June), Jesaya Nghidipo Haufiku (Endola, 8 June), Jacob Nghidinua (Ongenga, 8 June), David Namunime Shimwefeleni (Ohalushu, 9 June), Zacharia und Priskila Nashandi (Ondangwa, 10 June), Wilbard Sakaria (Okalambo, 10 June), Risto Nakayale (Onayena, 10 June), Naboth Imene (Omuthiya, 11 June), John Shiponeni (King Kauluma, 11 June), Malakia Uushona (King Kauluma, 11 June), Simeon Shixungileni (King Kauluma, 12 June), Rauna Nambinga (Grootfontein, 13 June), Lazarus Guiteb (Otjiwarongo, 14 June), Sakaria Ndeutepo (Windhoek, 19 June), Helao Shityuwete (Windhoek, 27 June), and Marten Kapewasha (Windhoek, 28 June). Additional interviews were done with Joseph Ndeshipanda Kashea (Windhoek, 9 October), Gerson Veii (Windhoek, 12 October) and Petrus Iilonga (Windhoek, 16 October). More interviews were done without my participation later on in 2012 and 2013.

[577] Informal conversation, King Kauluma, 12 June 2012.

Richard Pakleppa, who had visited the couple, apparently with the assistance of the Outapi War Museum. At the time, Pakleppa was producing the documentary film, *Paths to Freedom*, for which he interviewed Simeon Shixungileni, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and other veterans.[578] Again, the team of the National Museum had to find out that other people and institutions were doing similar work, without knowing of each other's research activities.

The interviews we conducted varied in length from fifteen minutes (Sakaria Nashandi) to two hours (Andimba Toivo ya Toivo). We mainly interviewed Robben Islanders, one of the wives (Ms. Nashandi) and a couple of female ex-Kroonstad prisoners. With our interviews, we generated a rich documentation of oral history about the founding of SWAPO, the beginning of the liberation struggle and the operations of the first guerrilla fighters, the Pretoria trial of 1968 and the hardships of torture and prison life. The interviews also added gendered perspectives on the anti-apartheid struggle inside Namibia and the political activism of women. Talking to younger Robben Island veterans like Ben Ulenga and Jerry Ekandjo, who joined the struggle in the late 1960s and 1970s, also documented the founding of the SWAPO Party Youth League and the central role of labour activism. With Gerson Veii, a founder of SWANU was also on our list of interviewees to highlight the fact that SWANU was the first national liberation movement in Namibia, whose members were also harassed, persecuted, and – in the case of Veii – imprisoned on Robben Island.

In conducting research on national history and interviewing veterans of the liberation struggle, the National Museum was complying with one of its major tasks as a heritage institution. It also laid a foundation for future research. The focus on former political prisoners who were detained at South African prisons on Robben Island, in Pretoria or Kroonstad, but also Namibian detention centres at Oshakati, Oniimwandi, Mariental and Dordabis, provided a more nuanced picture of the liberation struggle and widened the scope of the heroic narrative of armed resistance. The life stories we heard and recorded were histories of determination, suffering, and resilience; of people, who endured torture and in some cases decades of imprisonment for the liberation of their country.

The National Museum recorded the interviews primarily for inclusion in the exhibition display of the IMM, where they were supposed to be testimony of this history. At the same time, the interviews would be stored at the National Archives and thus enter the storage memory of the Namibian nation-state. What both modes of mediating and safeguarding memory obscured, however, was the frustration, many veterans voiced about their living conditions and the perceived lack of symbolic and material recognition for their contribution to liberation. As outlined in the

[578] Both men are veterans in their own right when it comes to mediating Namibian liberation memory. Richard Pakleppa is one of Namibia's most prolific film makers, producing documentaries and feature films which often focus on the silenced and marginalised aspects of the liberation struggle. Per Sanden, a Swedish journalist and film maker who lives in Namibia has played an important role in shaping SWAPO's visual representation as a liberation movement. In 1978, he accompanied PLAN units during operations in the Angolan-Namibian border region, which he documented in a film and accompanying booklet, *Inside the Liberated Areas* (1978) that contained a number of images which since have become iconic. Sanden also worked as Chief Technical Advisor and Acting Coordinator at the SPARC.

chapter on Heroes' Day, this experience was central to our interview trip. It posed a challenge to the official mandate, to capture and portray the veterans as national heroes and living heritage of the liberation struggle, vis-à-vis our experience that they felt side-lined and forgotten – by the very state, we also represented.[579]

Next to interviews, the second important area of research activities I was involved in was archival research. I spent a lot of hours in the National Archives, either with Gerhardt or on my own, to gather information and search for contemporary photographs of Namibian petitioners at the United Nations or female liberation struggle heroes. In one instance, the Mansudae team asked for information on the biography of Hendrik Witbooi to produce a short animated film about his life and his role as a resistance leader against German colonial rule. The exhibition design privileged visual forms of representation, in the form of photographs, paintings, and film.[580] Text to provide historical context was envisaged mostly in the form of captions and very limited summaries.

Another important resource for our research and for visual data in particular, was the SPARC, which has a notorious reputation for being inaccessible to researchers and the general public. On several occasions, I visited the archive together with Fousy, Gerhardt, and Mr. Choi. Doing research for the IMM on behalf of the National Museum was unproblematic. We accessed the archive mostly to look for photographs and film, depicting the armed liberation struggle, as well as SWAPO's activities in the field of political mobilisation and international diplomacy. Our contact in the archive was Veikko Silas, who was trained as an archivist at SPARC by Per Sanden, the archive's long-standing director.[581]

In his role as gatekeeper of the archive, Mr. Silas played an important role in providing visuals for the permanent display and thus shaping the aesthetics of the IMM. In our interactions, he appeared as a professional, experienced in the fields of producing, editing and processing film. He contributed a lot of his own ideas and expertise to the multimedia aspects of the display design and continuously insisted on the primacy of quality. During one of our meetings, he admonished that once the IMM was opened, people would look carefully on how history was represented and whether there were mistakes in the exhibition.[582] His professional demeanour at times collided with the mandate of the curator to finish the project as soon as possible, as well as with the practical approach of the Koreans, who were responsible for editing all visual materials. Professional differences emerged, for instance, on the question whether video clips in the display should be

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[579] This found an expression after the IMM's inauguration, when the Robben Island Political Prisoners Trust demanded financial recompense for the interviews, which were conducted with its members and used in the exhibition; see "Cash for Robben Island tales", *Namibian Sun*, 31 March 2014.

[580] See Becker 2018: 14 on the bewildering aesthetics of animated film in the IMM's display.

[581] I got to know both Per Sanden and Veikko Silas personally in 2008, when I (unsuccessfully) requested access to the archive for my research on Namibia's policy of national reconciliation (Kornes 2013, 2010a). At the time of my research in 2012–2013, Mr. Silas had established himself in the position of a gatekeeper regarding the archive and the information it stored. As he explained to me, he worked at the archive on a voluntary basis, since no one else knew how to do the job – and no one paid him; informal conversation, 31 May 2012.

[582] Informal conversation, 24 May 2012.

rather short and entertaining, as the Koreans suggested, or longer with more context and background information.[583] Another problem that emerged was the audio-quality of our interview recordings, which was unsatisfactory. Mr. Silas proposed to edit our recordings, but ultimately it was Mansudae who designed the audio-visuals, even though sources with insights on their technical approach characterised their work as sub-standard.[584]

Like in other aspects of the curatorial work, there was a certain redundancy in the research process at SPARC resulting from unclear responsibilities and communication deficits. At times, important stakeholders like Mr. Silas or Mr. Choi were absent for longer periods, which stalled our progress, due to the lack of people who could continue their work. In addition, working sessions were sometimes complicated when Mr. Choi brought Mansudae staff along who were responsible for the technical implementation of the audio-visual elements of the display, but didn't speak English. Mr. Choi would have to translate back and fro, everybody started talking, pointing out, advising and suggesting at the same time in English, Oshindonga, and Korean, and the atmosphere could get a little tense. Fousy had to remind everyone present that this assignment had top priority, unless the director of the National Museum was to get the impression "that we are not doing our work".[585]

Working with Mansudae

The professional relationship with Mansudae was definitely one important aspect of interaction with stakeholders, which produced institutional and technical challenges. Since the concept of the IMM was based on a model developed in the DPRK, the role of the North Koreans in the museum project was of fundamental importance. From its architecture to the exhibition design, from the production of display elements like paintings or information panels down to multimedia content: in every aspect of the creative process, Mansudae was involved. While those members of the National Museum who had been active in the technical committee were accustomed to working with the Koreans, for the incoming curator and me this was quite a novel experience. Like many residents of Windhoek, I had been accustomed to the sight of the Korean men in their grey overalls, working on the construction site next to *Alte Feste*. In 2010, I still encountered the Mansudae workers as a kind of mirage. Two years later, we were colleagues.

As mentioned above, interactions with Mansudae were largely channelled through the person of Mr. Choi, who acted as gatekeeper. I got to know only one other North Korean by name, who was one of the chief designers for multimedia content. Both men appeared as the only ones who were proficient in English. The majority of the Mansudae staff, including painters, sculptors, designers, and technicians, remained largely inaccessible and implemented the assignments they were given by their supervisors. The social space for interactions was quite limited, due to the

[583] Field notes, 19 June 2012.
[584] Informal conversations, 11 October 2012 and 12 March 2013.
[585] Field notes, 16 October 2012.

language barrier and the level of seclusion, which affected the workers. They were accommodated in a closed-off facility in an industrial area in town, from which they were collectively ferried to work and back. To what degree there was coercion and control enforced by the DPRK's state apparatus to protect workers from "spiritual pollution" (Noland 2014) and keep them at bay, was beyond my knowledge. Nevertheless, as workers of course they were present and had an impact on the curatorial process. They were around, when we had meetings on site to oversee the progress of the exhibition, just as there were brief encounters that allowed for a certain degree of speechless fraternisation.

A telling example for this happened quite early during my stay.[586] I was just on my way to the Museum ACRE, when I ran into a group of the Koreans who were waiting in the lobby of the building. They appeared slightly agitated and kept pointing to their watches. Apparently, they had an appointment or expected to meet someone about something. I tried to communicate with them by gestures to find out what they wanted. At some point, one of the men started to draw something that looked like pots into his note book. I then realised that most likely they referred to calabashes from the museum collection, which were supposed to be used as objects for the display on precolonial society. I remembered that this was something that was talked about and phoned Fousy, who then came to take care of the men. When this situation finally was sorted out, the Koreans were visibly happy and enjoyed a smoke in front of the museum. One of the men, who wore a pin with the face of the Great Leader on his shirt, offered me what appeared to be a North Korean cigarette. This was the degree of bonding that was possible with the ordinary Mansudae workers. While this was a welcome intercultural experience for me, I was repeatedly told in informal conversations with museum staff how the language barrier negatively affected the curatorial process. So did the fact that the Mansudae workers were busy on several sites at the same time in other parts of Namibia and neighbouring countries, not to mention that they were exchanged in regular intervals, too. Especially the latter affected the committee work, since this interrupted work flows, caused a loss of information, and made it necessary to explain basic things over and over again.[587]

At least during my research stay, Mr. Choi was available most of the time and our most important contact with Mansudae. He clearly was in a different, more privileged position than the other Koreans. Unlike the regular workers, he had a cell-phone, was free to move and had a company car at his disposal.[588] He would frequently take us along when we went to the SPARC, entertaining us with Korean pop music.[589] Mr. Choi appeared to us as the person responsible for the various construction projects, with which Mansudae was involved in at the time, i.e. the IMM, the

[586] Field notes, 29 May 2012.
[587] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012; interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 30 May 2013.
[588] The car he used most likely was provided by the government, even though it had a regular, civil license plate. One source who got to know the Korean workers a little better, told me that they weren't allowed to own private cell-phones. As with most information concerning the inner workings of Mansudae, all this is hard to verify.
[589] Field notes, June – October 2012.

genocide memorial and Nujoma statue in front of the museum, and also the monuments at Ongulumbashe. Throughout the time of my work at the National Museum, plaster models of the Ongulumbashe memorial landscape and the Windhoek genocide memorial were stored at the Deputy Director's office. Details about the design of the statues were discussed with Mr. Choi, the curatorial team and the Deputy Director, who always had a say in the final decisions.[590] A model of the Sam Nujoma statue in front of the IMM, depicting the Founding Father with civilian clothes, appeared in the first half of 2013.[591]

Since the exhibition was largely based on visual elements, like film and photographs, the North Koreans made extensive use of existing archival resources. As explained above, during my stay I was repeatedly involved in aiding their research activities, together with the rest of the team. As I learned, however, over time the Koreans had amassed a huge and fairly unsystematic collection of historic photographs, which they found at various archives and sources. Quite often these images had been detached from their proper context and documentation, resulting in both faulty captions and sometimes even wrong history representations. One example was a photograph from the time of the genocide, which was included into the 'early resistance' display because it allegedly depicted Namibians fighting German colonial troops. What it actually showed, however, was Nama combatants fighting on the side of the Schutztruppe against Ovaherero troops. Other examples were photographs of SWAPO members and PLAN combatants in exile, which had randomly been inserted into the display, regardless of spatial and temporal coherence or who was portrayed.[592] Eventually, cross-checking the display and its captions was an elaborate and time-consuming work for which an external expert had to be brought in.

Another issue that resulted from this approach were legal conflicts. While in many cases, copyright was with the institutions that held the images, like the National Archives or the SPARC, in some instances photographs were used without necessary additional authorisation. One example that even made headlines concerned works of the photojournalist and veteran anti-apartheid activist John Liebenberg. As he told me, in the 1990s he had struck an agreement with the National Archives that some of his work should be accessible for research purposes, but only to be used or reproduced with his consent.[593] That Liebenberg pictures were kind of restricted was pointed out to me by one of the archivists, when I did my own research at the national archives in 2011. Apart from the issue of protecting his rights as the photographer, he also had been trying to negotiate the sale of his personal photo archive to the Namibian state for some time. Since the images played an important role in the anti-apartheid struggle and should be available for the born free generation, he considered the National Archives as the best institution to purchase them. His offer to sell was valid until end of September 2012, but according to him, neither the National Archives nor the

[590] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.
[591] It was first mentioned to me in March, while I saw the model for the first time at the end of May. It was officially inaugurated together with the opening of the IMM on 21 March 2014.
[592] I was made aware of these examples by a source close to the NAN, May 2012.
[593] Personal communication with John Liebenberg, 29 April 2014.

government showed any interest in acquiring his collection.[594] Since Liebenberg suffered from permanent health problems, which also partly resulted from a car accident he had during one of his field trips in the 1980s, he needed the money to pay for medical treatments.[595]

When the IMM opened to the public, he realised that Mansudae had reproduced some of his photographs from the National Archives and included them as artwork into the exhibition display without his consent.[596] The Deputy Director of the National Museum rejected this allegation. According to her, proper procedure had been followed and the images were paid for. Furthermore, the Koreans had not 're-copied' Liebenberg's photographs. Instead, she explained that "[t]his is a Namibian museum with Namibian exhibitions that were developed by Namibians way before the museum [the IMM; G.K.] was built".[597] As a consequence, Liebenberg instituted legal action against the Namibian government, the National Museum, and the national archives in 2014, which was settled out of court in January 2015. All elements of the display, which contained copyright infringements, including two large murals, had to be withdrawn from the permanent exhibition. Likewise, this decision also negatively affected the availability of his work for research purposes, as Liebenberg points out: "The archive presently holds none of my photographs, and that's not what I and a lot of researchers and historians wanted".[598] In 2016, the murals representing "Youth Resistance" and "The Struggle of the Workers" were still veiled, with a note that the display was "under rehabilitation".[599]

The conflict with John Liebenberg was the result of a complex interplay of factors, which affected the curation of the permanent exhibition. As analysed in the previous chapter, the exhibition narrative and display were drafted by Mansudae based on materials provided by the Namibian side. Throughout the years, information, photographs, videos and other data travelled between Namibia and North Korea on USB sticks, mobile phones, and hard drives, shared and distributed by different people involved in the design process. Photos were taken to North Korea, turned into artwork, paintings, and murals by Mansudae's designers, returned to Namibia, examined and altered.

[594] See statement by John Liebenberg in public Facebook group *Politics Watch Namibia*, 5 September 2012.
[595] In light of this, it is a tragedy that John ultimately died in 2020 as a result of his health issues and the lack of funds for proper treatment, for which many of his friends and struggle-era companions had donated money.
[596] Personal communication with John Liebenberg, 29 April 2014; see also "North Koreans plagiarize", *Informanté*, 10 April 2014.
[597] "Museum pleads innocence in war pictures saga", *Namibian Sun*, 7 May 2014.
[598] "Govt defaults on damages payment", *Namibian Sun*, 15 July 2015.
[599] Information and photo kindly provided by Markus Bayer, who visited the exhibition on 29 March 2016.

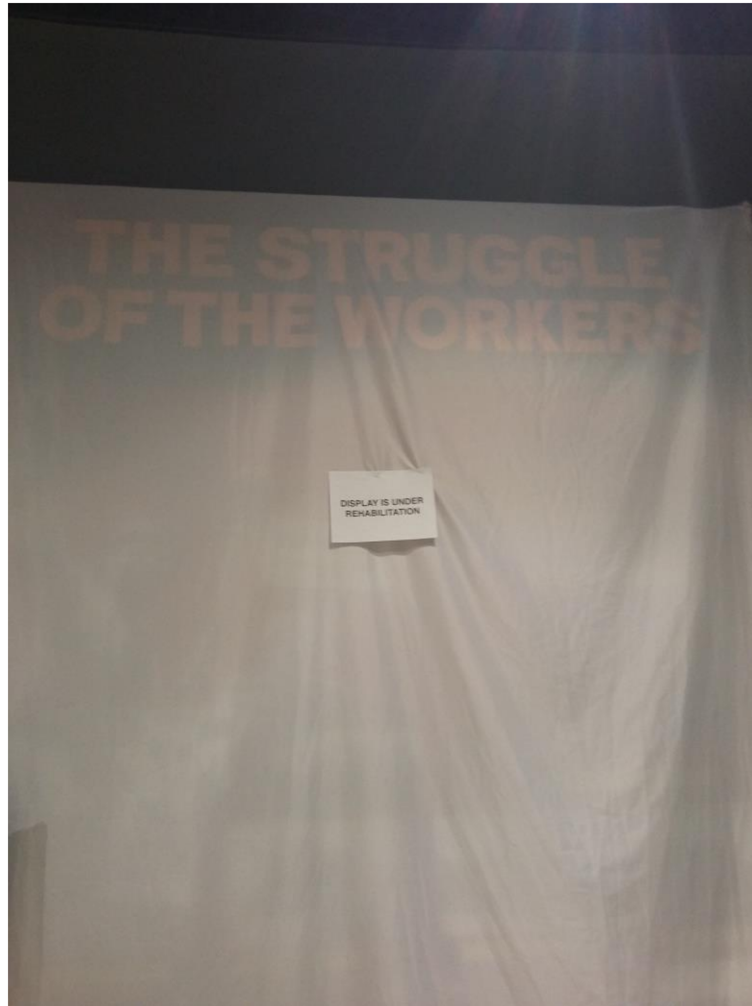

Fig. 50: "The struggle of the workers" mural, veiled, IMM. Photo: Markus Bayer (2016).

In many cases, Mansudae used historical photographs as models for paintings and artworks, e.g. in the depiction of the genocide, described above. From the perspective of the North Korean artists, the legal concept of copyright may have had a different meaning. While that is a question that goes beyond the scope of my research, I want to maintain that it is important to take the Mansudae designers serious in their professional roles as artists. Not only do they represent a renowned meritocratic art education system (Kornes 2019a: 148; Portal 2005: 124–169), but they were also lauded for their professionalism and dedicated work ethos by all those involved with them.[600] The question of copyright thus affects primarily the Namibian side of the creative process, meaning the people in the committee who evaluated and authorised the artworks to be put on display. This highlights, once more, the process of translation, which led to the final exhibition as it was officially unveiled in 2014.

[600] Interviews with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012; Betty Hango-Rummukainen, Windhoek, 5 July 2012; Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 30 May 2013; Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.

On-Site Inspections[601]

My first chance to visit the exhibition prior to its opening was on 27 April 2012, in the second week of my internship at the National Museum. For years, I had anticipated that moment and when the curator finally told me that we would visit the IMM for an on-site inspection, I was thrilled, to say the least. Being able to see the inside of the building felt like a state secret was unveiled to me. This impression was reinforced by Gerhardt's instruction that I was not to take any photos while we were inside. As the incoming curator, Gerhardt, too, had to accustom himself with the building, its architecture, and the still emerging exhibition. One of the purposes for the meeting was to link up with Mr. Choi, who was supposed to provide the curator with more information, files and documents about the exhibition. This was needed to produce leaflets, promotional and educational material by the National Museum. On this occasion, I got to know Mr. Choi who not only was the first North Korean I ever met, but also turned out to be a pleasant fellow, who was dedicated to his work and did not mind my presence.

My first encounter with the exhibition was quite impressive. I tried to gaze as comprehensively as possible and take notes while we walked through the building and its display. Even though I knew the exhibition narrative and draft design from the files and documentation, seeing it for real still overwhelmed me. Looking at it for the first time with only a theoretical knowledge put me in the position of an anticipated regular visitor. The aesthetic character of the exhibition with its focus on dramatic paintings, murals, and photographs, was captivating, yet also bewildering. For lack of better concepts at the time, I described it as "socialist realist" in my notes, even though already then I grappled with the notion of realism.[602]

Walking through the exhibition, I recognised a lot of images that have an iconic quality for representing the Namibian liberation struggle, both as photographs but also in the paintings and murals. Sam Nujoma was clearly omnipresent in the exhibition, in his established dual iconography as guerrilla leader and Founding Father. Represented, too, however, was Hidipo Hamutenya, who in 2012 still was persona non grata for the ruling party. While a strong emphasis on heroic militancy was obvious, the exhibition ended with a vision of national reconciliation and unity in diversity, explicitly including white Namibians. At the same time, the focus on the genocide was notable and surprised me in its scope and drastic imagery. This also refuted allegations, voiced consistently throughout the duration of the museum's construction period by members of the political opposition and representatives of the genocide committees, that the genocide would be marginalised or misrepresented.[603]

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[601] This section is largely based on my field notes of 27 April 2012, 24 May 2012 and 30 May 2013.

[602] Portal maintains that the dominant style of North Korean propaganda art is not socialist realism per se, but best described as a combination of twentieth century totalitarian functionalism and the idealism of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, with its emphasis on the cult of paternalistic descent (Portal 2005: 21–30).

[603] This of course does not imply that from a historiographical perspective the depiction of the genocide in the permanent exhibition is accurate.

It was clear to me that I needed more visits to familiarise myself with details of the exhibition and to understand its systematics. Still, my first inspection was overly impressive and gave me an idea of how the IMM would appeal to a Namibian audience which was receptive for the heroic narrative and aesthetics of the display. This was especially interesting where the representation of violence and suffering was concerned. Regarding this, one aspect of the exhibition in particular made a strong and lasting impression on me, even until today: the graphic intensity of suffering in the Cassinga display.

As I described above, the Cassinga triptych is characterised by a display of excessive violence. It was especially at this point of the exhibition that I struggled with the notion of 'socialist realism'. The depiction of harm, mutilation, and bodily disintegration was 'realistic' to a degree that reminded me of video game aesthetics, rather than the well-established representations of war and combat scenes, which play an important role in North Korean propaganda art. What particularly disturbed me, while standing in front of the large-sized paintings, was the fact that some of the women who were portrayed as suffering and violated were partly naked and depicted in a way that had a certain pornographic quality.[604] I was not sure what to make of it and decided to talk about my perception at some point with my colleagues from the curatorial team.

The opportunity for this arose about four weeks later, when we went for another on-site inspection of the exhibition. This time, there was a larger group of people present, including Gerhardt, Fousy, Mr. Silas, Mr. Choi and four of Mansudae's artists and designers. The purpose of this visit was to go through the exhibition and highlight elements and details which needed alterations or corrections, based on recommendations that were made by the museum directorate and different stakeholders, who had examined the display. Fousy was leading our delegation and pointed out the respective parts of the exhibition. This included missing or faulty captions, names of 'early resistance' leaders which were spelt incorrectly, or minor details in paintings, which needed to be changed.

One example for this was a painting which depicted mounted Nama warriors, whose characteristic pointy hats did not look authentic enough. Fousy explained how they were supposed to look, while the Koreans were busy making notes and sketching the corrections in their note books. Another example concerned the genocide section and the bronze relief, which represents von Trotha's extermination order. As explained above, a contemporary photograph of hanged prisoners of war has been used as a model for the design of the relief. Both Fousy and Mr. Silas pointed out that in the Mansudae version, the hanged people wore clothes, which did not correspond with the original image but were too modern and did not reflect contemporary gendered dressing habits. What they did not discuss, was the fact that in the original photograph there were no female

[604] This is quite interesting, since according to Dannatt (2009), nakedness appears to be rather taboo as a topic in North Korean propaganda art.

prisoners hanged. This is one example, where the North Koreans had made changes which corresponded with the client's request for a gendered representation of the genocide.[605]

A third example was even more instructive regarding the emphasis on authenticity. When we had finished our inspection of the exhibition, we arrived at the last mural ("Long live Independence!"), which shows a group of Namibians representing unity in diversity. Standing in front of the mural, Fousy pointed at the white farmer, who is depicted with a crate of fruits and vegetables in his arms (see fig. 49). As it turned out, the Mansudae artists had painted the man with rubber boots, even though in an earlier version he wore a combination of shorts, knee-socks and *veldskoene*, traditional leather shoes. This look, which represents a well-known cultural cliché about the dressing style of white men with a rural background, was to be restored. Fousy then started to explain to the North Koreans how they should depict a proper, authentic white farmer.

With her pencil, she marked the farmer's legs: the shorts, they had to be shorter, much shorter! The designers, who had to wait for Mr. Choi to translate this instruction, took out folding rules and started to measure and mark. It appeared that the concept of the 'very short shorts' was confusing to them, but even more so was that of the socks. Fousy pointed to her feet and legs and tried to visualise the idea of knee-socks. The Koreans started to discuss among themselves what she meant, also pointing at their feet, apparently exchanging concepts of socks and stockings. While this turned out fairly successful, the shoes finally brought the potential of cultural translation to its limits. Both Fousy and Gerhardt struggled with explaining *veldskoene* and finding an English expression, which might help to narrow it down, but to no avail. Instead, they recommended for the Koreans to go to town and look at shops which sold these particular shoes.

This episode, apart from its situational humour, is quite symptomatic for the process by which the exhibition came to life. First of all, the essentialism is remarkable, of how a highly stereotypical image is used to represent white people and include them into the national vision of reconciliation and unity in diversity. A lot of Namibians, black and white alike, will inevitably recognise the allusion to this popular and frequently mocked cultural cliché. At the same time, however, choosing a white farmer is also remarkable for the role he plays ex negativo as the 'boer', the malicious antagonist in Swapo's heroic narrative of liberation. In the mural, he is turned into a positive symbol

[605] What also wasn't discussed, or even mentioned: the genocide mural in the 'Chamber of Horror' does not depict Lothar von Trotha, even though it refers to the extermination order, but Victor Franke. Franke (1866–1936) made a military career and joined the imperial Schutztruppe for South West Africa in 1896. He served in various positions and was involved in the war 1903–1908 in the rank of *Hauptmann*. In November 1914, he was promoted to *Oberstleutnant* of the German military in SWA. In this capacity, he surrendered to the advancing troops of the Union Defence Force on 9 July 1915, marking the end of German colonial rule in Namibia. The fact that the mural shows Franke and not von Trotha, was one of the points raised by the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in its devastating critique of the exhibition; see below for references. I must confess that during my visits, I did not look at the mural as a representation of von Trotha, but rather as one of the German colonial military, responsible for committing genocide. So will many other visitors, too, most likely. Still, the presence of Franke is not self-explanatory. For versions of the 'hanged prisoner' image, see fig. 48 for the cyclorama section and fig. 44 for the genocide monument.

of nation-building, as the provider of food. Given the conflicts over land and social inequalities, which result from Namibia's history of white minority rule, this is a significant statement.

On the technical level, however, this episode also highlights the challenges of the transnational and intercultural process of translation, which informed the development of the exhibition. The language barriers were evident, resulting in communication deficiencies, next to cultural differences which were aggravated by the peculiar background of the North Korean artists. The fact that the exhibition was designed over such a long period of time, with frequently changing personnel on Mansudae's side, contributed to redundancy. Artworks had to be changed and changed again, as a result of a long and fragmented work process, in which knowledge was constantly lost. Finally, though, the example shows the degree to which the exhibition display was vernacularised through cultural translation and brought into a form that was congruent with emic concepts of cultural and historical authenticity.

With a last example from this process of vernacularisation, I will return to my initial state of bewilderment about the violent imagery of the exhibition. During the same tour, our group inspected the room with the Cassinga display. When we had gathered, Fousy stepped in front of the triptych, pointed at the painting at the centre, and questioned us: "What do you think?" Something apparently was wrong with this image. She seemed to enjoy the moment and made us guess. According to her, representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister and Office of the President had inspected the paintings and there was something very particular to which they objected. I was anticipating to finally hearing a critique of the images' explicit representation of violence, but I was mistaken. With her pencil, Fousy pointed at a small detail of the painting. Again, she asked: "What do you think?" People started to laugh.

As it turned out, the offending object was the penis of a small naked boy, who was depicted crying amidst the pandemonium of dismembered bodies, torn limbs, and agony-distorted faces. Amongst our group, a discussion began about the degree to which a representation like this could claim to be realistic. One participant cautioned that no one could know whether this scene actually happened and how the boy looked like. Another referred to Cassinga survivors' memories, adding that it had a close resemblance to what they said. A third reminded that the nakedness of a little boy was a regular sight "in the village", and people would not be offended by it. However: as Fousy maintained at the end, the painting had to be altered and the boy had to be dressed. At a later stage of our inspection in a different room, Mr. Silas made Fousy aware of a photograph of a little boy in a SWAPO field-hospital, who was wearing a loincloth. It was then decided and explained to the Koreans, to use this as a model for the naked boy in the Cassinga painting.

We then talked about the naked breasts of the women in the painting, which also irritated another participant in the group. The person remarked that the breasts looked "too fresh", which was inadequate for the context of a massacre. The person wondered why the representatives of the government didn't object to this. This led to a discussion about the public perception of naked

female breasts – in Namibia a fairly common sight, not only “in the village” but even just a hundred metres away from the museum down Independence Avenue, where Ovahimba women use to sell their craft. Still, in this case, too, it was decided by the curatorial team that the painting had to be altered. Interestingly, only one of the two women with naked breasts got ‘dressed’ with a rather anachronistic red string top, while the other woman remained naked. The exhibition thus kept at least one Namibian *Marianne*.

Fig. 51: Cassinga mural, IMM. Photo: Klemens Wedekind (2014).

For me, this was a very insightful experience and, in hindsight, also one of the most important moments of comprehension during my fieldwork. I had wondered whether the representation of violence might be inappropriate content for underage school children, who would be the major target audience of the museum. Instead, the bone of contention turned out to be nakedness, reflecting a moral code which was conservative where it came to concepts of appropriateness regarding gender, age, and sexuality, but lenient in its tolerance of violence and militancy. The drastic display of violence in the IMM, especially in the context of Cassinga but also the genocide, reflects a common sense shared by many Namibians of how the liberation struggle, apartheid, and colonialism, ‘really was’.

A vivid example for this happened during my last on-site inspection, shortly before my internship ended. On 30 May 2013, our regular team, consisting of Fousy, Gerhardt, Mr. Choi and myself, met with a representative of the NHC in front of the IMM. We were waiting for Steve Katjiuanjo, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture who had requested a guided tour of the exhibition to familiarise himself with the project’s progress. When Mr. Katjiuanjo arrived, he was in the company of another North Korean man and seemed agitated. As it turned out, his

agitation resulted from the fact that he had walked past the equestrian monument in front of *Alte Feste*. In his hand, he carried a sizable stack of prints. On closer inspection, I could see that it was a print-out version of Casper Erichsen's and David Olusoga's book about the Namibian genocide, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* (2010). Mr. Katjiuanjo had obviously prepared himself very well for his visit. When we entered the 'Chamber of Horror', he waved the book in the air and furiously explained how von Trotha's "generals [had] formed the Nazi party". The display had visibly affected the Otjiherero-speaking public servant, foreshadowing the general public's reception of the IMM.

Unfortunately, the tour went by rather quickly and in haste, and there was no time to talk with Mr. Katjiuanjo about his impressions. Later that day, I incidentally met the woman of the NHC again, who had accompanied us on our tour. I asked her, what she thought about the exhibition. Interestingly, one of the first impressions she shared with me was the fact that there was no pedagogical content offered specifically for children. What would they learn in the museum, and how? She also would like to see more opportunities for visitors to engage with the exhibition, for example by being encouraged to identify people on photographs. She then returned the question: what was my impression? I used the occasion to reflect on the question of violence again and told her my concerns about the suitability of the graphic displays for school children. I asked whether she had children. Yes, she said, two daughters, age nine and ten. Wouldn't she be concerned to visit the exhibition with them? No, her children were well prepared; they had grown up with stories about the war and were curious to learn more about it. I also asked her about that one particular painting of the Cassinga attack but for her, too, it was realistic: "That's how it was", she said.

Again, I was confronted with local perceptions of the exhibition which put my erstwhile bewilderment into perspective. The salience of violence, also noted by other professional visitors of the exhibition (Becker 2018: 14), of course resonates with well-established tropes, topoi, and narratives of liberation memory in Namibia. For the technical committee of the IMM, the representation of violence was a central element of the exhibition design. Regarding the genocide, it was noted that "[t]his gallery must leave the visitor with a feeling of the cruelty of colonialism and set the tone for the following displays that show the reasons for armed struggle".[606] The sound effects in the 'Chamber of Horror', of people screaming in agony, and the images of the hanged prisoners, are supposed to give visitors an impression of "the reality, what people were experiencing that time".[607] South African human rights violations and massacres should be depicted with "an effect that causes goose bumps".[608] I experienced this effect; filtered, of course, through my knowledge of the curatorial background. Nevertheless, the exhibition profoundly affected me on a sensual and visceral level, appealing first to my affectivity before my analytical apparatus began to process and contextualise what I had seen. In an understanding of the IMM in its dual function as a

[606] Independence Memorial Museum Committee: notes from the meeting of 12 April 2001.
[607] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.
[608] Independence Memorial Museum Committee: notes from the meeting of 7 May 2001.

memorial museum, this effect is significant and should be investigated more thoroughly in future research.

What fascinated me as the subject of my research, of course caused considerable distress to a lot of historians in Namibia, who anticipated a distortion of history. Throughout my research, I experienced the process of cultural translation, which turned a North Korean model into a Namibian one and people's perception of this process, as complimentary. Historians, museum and heritage practitioners, politicians, genocide activists, journalists: all and sundry had opinions about the IMM. Some of these were informed, some based on assumptions; some were favourable, some full of rejection. In the following, I will provide an evaluation of public and scholarly perspectives on the IMM, in order to assess its position within the framework of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia. To this I will add the perspectives of those involved in the curatorial process.

The Independence Memorial Museum in Perspective

Since it was conceived as an idea in 1997 and until its inauguration in 2014, the IMM had remained a phantom; anticipated by some, feared by others. When its construction commenced in 2009, especially after the removal of the equestrian monument, it immediately became the object of contestation. Seeing it in context with the Heroes' Acre, people questioned whether the new museum would have a national or political agenda, how inclusive its representation of liberation history would be, and why on earth it was built by North Koreans. The level of secrecy, which accompanied the whole process until 21 March 2014, did not help to answer these questions and alleviate existing concerns. For different actors and different reasons, the IMM became a projection screen that illuminates their positionality within and towards Namibia's postcolonial society.

Public Opinions about the Independence Memorial Museum

When the building began to rise, people started mocking its architecture and called it a 'coffee percolator', caricatures made the rounds on social media. Even a usually sober commentator of Namibian affairs like Henning Melber called the building a "post-modern monstrosity" (Melber 2014: 29). As mentioned in the previous chapter, already in its planning stage its design was labelled as "oriental" by committee members. This reflects a reoccurring critique of Mansudae's artworks as 'un-African' in other countries on the continent, next to frequent claims that people represented in statues or murals looked too 'Asian' (Kornes 2019a: 142). In a feature for *Insight Namibia*, Brigitte Weidlich characterised the aesthetics of the IMM as "neither Western nor African" and even called it an "alien monolith".[609] She also cited a statement by architect Jaco Wasserfall from 2010, who had been involved in the technical committee at an early stage but withdrew, when the "disastrous"

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[609] Behind the Colossal Korean Kitsch, *Insight Namibia*, March 2014.

decision was made to build the museum on the site of the equestrian monument. Furthermore, the government had missed an opportunity to involve Namibian architects and artists "to design a more appropriate building […] in a uniquely Namibian way" for a museum about the liberation struggle. He referred to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg as an example for a museum that succeeded in implementing such a concept.

Critique of this kind often came from white Namibians, who cited the expenditure of the project, its "foreign" architecture, or the perceived political nature of the museum as reason for their dismissive attitude. Especially the latter, in combination with the removal of the equestrian monument, was a reoccurring bone of contention. For Andreas Vogt, the decolonisation of memorial culture, as epitomised by the removal of the equestrian monument, seemed to amount primarily to an attack on white, German culture.[610] Others saw the replacement of the monument with a liberation struggle museum as evidence that the Namibian government had identified whites as its postcolonial other and enemy image.[611] In informal conversations with white Namibians, face to face or in digital media discourse, the topic of the IMM often brought hardly veiled contempt for the postcolonial government to the fore; the museum was "theirs", not "ours".[612]

One of the most ferocious critiques of this kind, a tantrum rather, came from the editor of the German-language *Allgemeine Zeitung* Eberhard Hofmann. For him, the IMM was "a propaganda site for the demonstration of current power relations and authoritarian self-discovery", and an expression of the government's "totalitarian arrogance". The exhibition was characterised by "exaggeration, propaganda and hate" and glaring factual errors. It was built not for historical education, but to serve the "craving for recognition of the erstwhile exile-elite". What irked Hofmann in particular, was the "blanket demonising" of the German Schutztruppe and the "one-sided and racist criminalisation" of the German settler-colonial society.[613]

It is not my intention to generalise the cited opinions as representative for the whole of Namibia's white society. However, strong-worded statements like these have found their audience and influenced the discourse on the IMM. In his speech on the occasion of the inauguration, President Pohamba made reference to sentiments among the German-speaking community and called for empathy:

> Some members of our population have objected to the removal of the Rider Statue from this location. To them, I would like to say: take a few minutes, and reflect on the horrors of that

[610] "Reiter und Statuen: Wird Namibia eine Kulturdiktatur?" *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 September 2013; "To move or not to move: on the relocation of the Equestrian Monument in Windhoek", *The Namibian*, 18 July 2008; "Seltsame Erinnerungskultur", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 Dezember 2012.

[611] "Ein Denkmal als Feindbild", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 March 2014.

[612] See the debates on Facebook discussion group *Politics Watch Namibia* in March 2014, for instance, as well as "Gegen Arroganz und Ignoranz", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 March 2014.

[613] My own translations from German: "eine Propagandastätte zur Demonstration aktueller Machtverhältnisse und autoritärer Selbstfindung", "totalitäre Arroganz", "Übertreibung, Propaganda und Hass", "dem Geltungsbedürfnis der ehemaligen Exilanten-Elite"; see "Gegen Arroganz und Ignoranz", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 March 2014.

war. Take a few minutes and think about the victims of the genocide and the descendants of those victims. Yet again, take a few minutes and put yourself in the shoes of the victims and their descendants. Is it right for a statue of that nature to be located on top of the human remains of our people? Is it right for a statue of that nature to be located on the spot of the concentration camp where our people were held and died horrible deaths? In good conscience, the right decision by this nation was to remove the Rider Statue and all that it represents from this prominent location[614]

His tone became different, though, when it emerged that a group of German-Namibian cultural organisations threatened to sue the government to disassemble the genocide monument which, according to them, had been put in place of the equestrian monument illegally.[615] In a statement, the President declared that if necessary, Namibians still knew "how to make war".[616] In this he was seconded by the SPYL, which announced that they were ready to "operate the bazookas and machine guns".[617]

This Namibian version of a "monument war" (Savage 2009) overshadowed the opening of the IMM. It is important to take into account, though, that it wasn't only white Namibians who voiced their concern about the emerging memorial landscape. Criticism came especially from Otjiherero-speaking members of the political opposition who anticipated a marginalisation of genocide memory in the new museum (Becker 2018: 8–9). For Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako the removal of the equestrian monument was amounting to a silencing and 'wiping out' of Ovaherero memory, since it had "point[ed] out to the world the people that nearly killed us off".[618] He also voiced his scepticism about the legitimacy of the genocide memorial.

The Secretary-General of the DTA Youth League Bensen Katjirijoro criticised an excessive veneration of Nujoma and blamed it on government's selfishness. According to him and his party, removing the equestrian monument was wrong, while the Nujoma statue was just another 'statue from the colonial period'.[619] Already in 2011, the President of Swanu Usutuaije Maamberua had tabled a motion in parliament to have the IMM renamed as Genocide Remembrance Centre.[620] Prior to the inauguration, rumours had been making the rounds that even more statues of liberation

[614] Statement by His Excellency, Dr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Genocide Memorial Statues, the Sam Nujoma Statue and the Independence Memorial Museum, Windhoek, 20 March 2014.
[615] "Battle over statues", *The Namibian*, 24 March 2014. The three groups Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen, and the Memorable Order of Tinheads were represented by lawyer Andreas Vaatz, who has a track-record of seeking legal confrontation with the Swapo government.
[616] My translation from Afrikaans: "maar ons weet hoe om oorlog te maak al wil ons dit nie hê ni"; "Gedenkmuseum vir onafhanklikwording geopen", *Republikein*, 24 March 2014.
[617] "SPYL accuses Vaatz of colonial arrogance", *Namibian Sun*, 27 March 2014.
[618] "Monument war", *Informanté*, 13 March 2014.
[619] "Nujoma statues criticised", *Namibian Sun*, 1 April 2014.
[620] "Independence museum opens today", *Informanté*, 20 March 2014.

struggle heroes were going to come.[621] Already in 2013, Minister of Works and Transport Erkki Nghimtina was cited that government was investigating the possibility to put up nine additional statues in front of the museum. The news report also mistook the Nujoma statue as a monument to commemorate the genocide.[622] In March 2014, the rumours resurfaced, only to be dismissed by Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses in her capacity as chairwoman of the NHC.[623]

While these rumours reflect persistent fears of a one-sided representation of history based on Swapo's heroic narrative, the concern about the statues also highlights another issue. A lot of people took offence that tenders for national projects of such high symbolic value were awarded to a North Korean company – at the expense of Namibian experts, architects, and artists who were not overwhelmed with public contracts. This critique had already been brought forth when government commissioned Mansudae with building the new State House[624] and it resurfaced when the inauguration of the museum approached. Anton von Wietersheim, for instance, a member of the RDP criticised the side-lining of Namibian artists in producing these national monuments, which should 'reflect our own culture' instead.[625]

His critique has to be seen in context with a statement by Ms. Moombolah-ǁGoagoses earlier that same month, where she explained that Namibian artists did not have the means at their disposal to produce such artwork. According to her, people objected because the North Koreans were associated with socialism: "If it were South Africans or Germans given this task, no one would complain about it".[626] In the same article, the Director of the National Art Gallery of Namibia Hercules Viljoen refuted her statement: Namibian artists were capable of producing high quality artworks and involving them would "create a sense of pride and ownership". His statement is significant, since he was the sculptor who crafted the statues of national heroes Hosea Kutako, Hendrik Witbooi, and Reverend Theofilus Hamutumbangela, which were erected in the Parliament Gardens in 2001.[627]

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621 As so often, peddled by *Informanté*; see "Statue u-turn", 23 July 2013.
622 "Extra museum statues create confusion", *Namibian Sun*, 9 August 2013.
623 "No additional statues coming - Heritage Council", *Namibian Sun*, 12 March 2014.
624 "A slap in the face for local artists", *Insight Namibia*, February 2013.
625 "Eigene Künstler verachtet", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 September 2013.
626 "Koreans cash in on statues", *The Namibian*, 6 September 2013.
627 It is noteworthy to highlight the Eenhana Shrine as an example of a high profile national monument that was designed by a Namibian architect, Marley Tjitjo. As Heike Becker (2011) has analysed, its aesthetics reflect an emerging trend towards cultural nationalism, advanced by the government. Likewise, its gendered representation of civilian and military contribution to liberation deviates from the masculine militarism of the Heroes' Acre. As a war memorial, however, it still fits neatly into the heroic nationalist paradigm of Swapo's liberation memory; see also Lentz /Lowe 2018: 145–147.

Fig. 52: Hendrik Witbooi statue, Parliament Gardens, Windhoek, inaug. 2001. Photo: Godwin Kornes (2008).

Ultimately, as explained in the previous chapter, the decision to award tenders to North Korea was political and this implied that all designs and artworks were produced by Mansudae. As the only Namibian artist of renown who was involved in the museum project, Joseph Madisia primarily had a role as consultant. He processed his experience in his own way in form of his painting *The Tower of Babel*, in which he portrayed the IMM as a gigantic drill. The building is crowned by the symbol of the power salute, which was included in one of the earliest architectural drafts but then rejected, and surrounded by vultures and ominous clouds.[628]

While at first glance, in its gloomy aesthetics the painting may suggest a critique of the IMM, his example is instructive to change the narrative at this point. He published a photo of his painting on Facebook, accompanied by a poem, which contextualised his artwork. In this text, he described the IMM as "patriotic" and a worthy intervention, to remember the martyrs of the liberation struggle

[628] Posting by Joe Madisia in the public Facebook group *Rebellion Against Municipal Abuse in Namibia!*, 6 August 2019: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1068690879994924/permalink/1148707148659963/> [last accessed 15 October 2022].

and especially those who perished in the concentration camp, for which 'no one ever apologised'. At the same time, he highlighted the golden colour of the building and cautioned to be aware of the poverty in Namibia. Madisia's artistic representation allows refocusing on perceptions of the museum, which considers it not as "theirs", but "ours", without necessarily being uncritical of its aesthetics, design, or contents.

From the very beginning of my fieldwork, I was confronted with Namibian perspectives on the museum which showed such a diverse range of opinions. A few days after I had started my internship, three Oshiwambo-speaking friends of mine visited me at *Alte Feste*, all of them students of history at UNAM. When I asked what they thought of the IMM's architectural design, they were all quite enthusiastic. For one of them, it even was the "most beautiful building in Windhoek".[629] While only an anecdote, it helped me to develop an understanding for different ways of seeing in my field, which was strongly shaped by the gaze of museum and heritage practitioners. Another interesting encounter was a talk with my visa accountant, a white Afrikaans-speaking woman, who was always curious to hear about my research. For her, the building's architecture was an "abomination"; it was too modern and she would have liked to see "Namibian elements" used, like natural stone. On the other hand, it was important to have such a museum since there was a "different history" now, which needed to be told. She came from a liberal family and of course there were other whites who thought differently. In Namibia, though, people had reconciled and it was important to acknowledge that.[630]

I had many similar encounters, where people voiced their curiosity about the new museum, seeing it as a welcome addition to Namibia's sights and cultural institutions, while they were aware of its political nature. One young woman, a representative of Namibia's black urban professional middle-class, was appalled by the fact that Mansudae built the museum, since she was aware that many North Korean expats have to do forced-labour. She also wondered whether the representation of precolonial history was factually accurate, since she had read a lot about the wars between Ovaherero and Nama in the 19th century.[631] In yet another example, my hair-dresser, a middle-aged German-Namibian man, was wondering whether the museum would depict the history of Swapo's dungeons in exile. If they were bold enough to do so, he mused, there would be controversy, but after a year or so, no one would care about it anymore.[632] While the emphasis on Swapo's human rights violations is a prevalent discursive strategy for white Namibians to deflect their own community's historical implication with apartheid and colonialism, his line of reasoning was persuasive. Not surprisingly, however, the 'dungeons' are not represented in the exhibition.

When the museum finally opened, public interest was expectably huge. During the first week, the National Museum recorded 1,800 visitors; of these, 80% were Namibian citizens and roughly a

[629] Field notes, 13 May 2012.
[630] Field notes, 19 March 2013.
[631] Field notes, 26 May 2013.
[632] Field notes, 5 September 2012.

quarter were under 14 years old. According to exit surveys, a majority of the visitors registered 'satisfaction' with the exhibition.[633] Throughout the following weeks, visitor numbers remained high.[634] Journalists, who visited the exhibition either prior to its opening or in the course of the official inauguration gave largely positive feedback and noted the affective quality of the representation of violence.[635] Even Chief Kuaima Riruako voiced his satisfaction about the genocide memorial and the representation of the genocide in the museum.[636]

Critical voices, too, were of course not long in coming. Eberhard Hofmann's damnatory critique has already been mentioned. In addition to his reading of the exhibition as political propaganda, he highlighted "an excessive exaggeration of the dark sides of the colonial war" and "massive factual mistakes". Significantly, he cited the image of the hangings, used several times in the genocide display, to prove this point. In the museum version, the hanged prisoners included women, while the authentic photograph showed only men, who – according to Hofmann – where executed in line with contemporary martial law.[637] As analysed before, the Korean artists did not reproduce historic photographs as facsimile, but rather used the visuals as inspiration for their artwork. One wonders whether Hofmann would have preferred a true-to-life reproduction of the hanging, which is historical evidence of the Namibian genocide.

Reports about factual mistakes in the exhibition, especially regarding the German colonial era, continued to be a preferred genre of dealing with the IMM in the German daily *Allgemeine Zeitung*.[638] This zeal for fact-checking highlights once more the restraint within certain sections of the German-Namibian community to reflect on the colonial past and to engage with the majority population's perspective on the genocide (Kössler 2015: 118–168). At the same time, however, it also shows that there were indeed a lot of mistakes and blank spots in the exhibition.

In a letter to *The Namibian*, a certain Mr. Shitumbapo demonstrated how a critical engagement with the exhibition could move beyond mere fact-checking. While he also bemoaned the number of spelling-errors and the general lack of contextual information in the display, he particularly pointed out the absence of the political youth organisations of the 1970s as displeasing. Especially the contributions of SPYL, SWANU, and women were underrepresented. Instead, the exhibition had a problematic focus on militarism and the Founding Father. The museum, he concluded, was an expression of "narcissism and self-veneration" of the Swapo government.[639]

[633] "Over 1.800 visit new museum in first week", *Namibian Sun*, 27 March 2014.
[634] "Museum shares historical experiences public", *New Era*, 6 May 2014.
[635] "Safeguarding our history" and "Inside the new Independence Memorial Museum", *Namibian Sun*, 13 March 2014; "From despair to victory", *Namibian Sun*, 23 March 2014; "President unveils Independence Memorial, Nujoma Statue", *New Era*, 24 March 2014; "A Trip through Namibia's History at the Independence Memorial Museum", *The Namibian*, 5 August 2014.
[636] "Pohamba unveils new statues and memorial museum", *The Namibian*, 24 March 2014.
[637] My own translation from German: "der maßlosen Übertreibung der Dunkelseiten des Kolonialkriegs", "Massive Sachfehler"; see "Gegen Arroganz und Ignoranz", *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 March 2014.
[638] See for instance: "Es wimmelt von Fehlern", 25 March 2014; "'Einige wesentliche Lücken'", 30 October 2017; "Vom Umgang mit der Geschichte", 31 October 2017.
[639] "Letters of the week: Museum of Narcissism and Self-Glorification", *The Namibian*, 4 April 2014.

Between the lines, his critique resonates with the conflicts that exist between different generations within Swapo and also between those who remained and fought inside of Namibia and those who went to exile. Against this background, his critical intervention is significant since it was largely former exiles who determined the outlook of the exhibition, as it was the old guard of the party that commissioned the museum.[640]

In another critical review of the exhibition, the editor of *Insight Namibia* characterised is as "an opportunity missed […] to tell a more nuanced and revealing account of the liberation struggle".[641] He highlighted the number of factual errors and historical omissions, the focus on militarism and the peculiar mediality of the display, which made him wonder about the intended target audience of the museum. If it was built for the born free generation, the lack of contextual information clearly would leave them 'mystified', the same with tourists. He concluded: "Only those already schooled in Namibian history and the exile generation will come away with a general understanding – being able to fill out the context with their own knowledge and memories." He also highlighted the violent imagery of the exhibition as "disturbing", wondering whether it was suitable for children. The only element which found his approval was the section on Robben Island, with its replica of a cell and the memorabilia of the prisoners on display. For this author, too, the IMM was a monument, which Swapo's exile generation had built for itself, amounting to "brazen propaganda".

Scholarly Perspectives on the Independence Memorial Museum

In his speech for the inauguration, President Pohamba had emphasised that the purpose of the IMM was to fulfil the "sacred task" of writing "our own history": "With the completion of this Museum, Namibia now has a central place where our nation's long history of anti-colonial resistance and the national liberation struggle is being told".[642] There are few statements, I have heard more frequently during my research than the categorical imperative that Namibians should write their own history. It was usually said by politicians during speeches, emphasising the need for the decolonisation of memorial culture, heritage policy, or history education. However, more interesting and illuminating was this statement when it came from Namibia's historians.

During a discussion at the workshop "Priorities in Namibian Historiography" at the University of Namibia in 2011, Dr. Martha Akawa underlined that she felt "obliged to rewrite the Namibian history". Her statement was significant since she spoke as head of the history department, at an event which brought together the aspiring young guard of Namibia's historians and also

[640] My research ended with the inauguration of the museum. It is a question for further research, in how far the National Museum is making use of the IMM as a space for public history. Already in 2014, survivors of the Cassinga attack were invited to visit the museum on Cassinga Day and narrate their experience to the public; see "Museum shares historical experiences with public", *New Era*, 6 May 2014.
[641] "From North Korea with weirdness", *Insight Namibia*, June 2014.
[642] Statement by His Excellency, Dr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Genocide Memorial Statues, the Sam Nujoma Statue and the Independence Memorial Museum, Windhoek, 20 March 2014.

included the official launch of Marion Wallace's *A History of Namibia*.[643] She also made her statement in the presence of the Dean of Humanities Kingo Mchombu and two 'elders' of the struggle generation: Peter Katjavivi, the doyen of Namibia's nationalist historiography and Elia Kaiyamo, who attended in his capacity as chairperson of the Namibia Library and Information Council. What the three men witnessed at that event, was a young generation of historians who fervently discussed critical topics and questioned established truths, beyond the confines of patriotic history. At the same time – and this is where Dr. Akawa's statement became political – the young historians also criticised the challenging conditions under which historians had to work and do research in Namibia and the damaging effects this had on historiography. Or, as another young Namibian historian told me at a different occasion: "They tell us to write our own history, but our historians don't get any jobs. How can we write our own history?"[644]

Throughout my fieldwork, I was in constant interaction with this new school of historians and this topic kept reoccurring. People took offence with the downsizing of the history department at UNAM,[645] mismanagement at heritage institutions, underfunding, and bureaucratisation of research. According to them, history was in the firm grip of the struggle generation and so were public museums. As became obvious during the Annual General Meeting of MAN in 2012, the young historians were eager to engage with public museum projects like the Okahandja War Museum and the IMM. Still, they weren't included.

When I first mentioned to Martha Akawa that I was going to do research in the new museum, she bemoaned that hardly anyone had any knowledge about it. Like most of her Namibian colleagues, she hadn't seen it from the inside and hadn't been considered as an expert.[646] Another historian called the Mansudae artworks "postmodern", which was not meant as a compliment, emphasising that "we have a problem with telling history as it is".[647] Like many others at the time, he was struggling to find employment in the museum and heritage sector. An experienced museum practitioner, with whom I talked on the side-lines of the MAN meeting, said a near similar thing; adding, that he hoped the new museum would not be too dominant in its veneration of Nujoma.[648] At the second day of that event, a young and well-educated woman who was employed in the public

[643] The workshop was organised by the South African Empire Working Group and took place over two days. At the time, Kaiyamo was also Deputy Minister of Home Aaffairs and Immigration. During the discussion which followed Wallace's presentation, Kaiyamo criticised her for not putting the memories of war veterans like Sam Nujoma or Jerry Ekandjo at the centre of her book. The confrontation of national and nationalist historiography, alluded to by Wallace during her talk, was palpable; field notes, 15 November 2011.
[644] Informal conversation, Windhoek, May 2012.
[645] I cannot validate for what reason the department lost its status and became merged with geography, environmental studies and tourism management. Most of the people I talked to deplored this re-organisation. Some explained to me that the cause was political, resulting from research activities that too courageously challenged dominant historical paradigms. While this may border conspiracy theory, I did hear it a lot.
[646] Informal conversation, 9 May 2012.
[647] Informal conversation, May 2012.
[648] Informal conversation, 18 May 2012.

culture and education sector put it bluntly over a glass of wine at the evening reception: the old guard was stuck in the past; it was about time to give the younger generation a chance.[649]

One of Namibia's more seasoned historians told me that to his knowledge none of his colleagues had been involved in the IMM project. For him, the lack of historical expertise throughout the largest part of the curatorial process was the main reason for the high number of factual errors and inconsistencies. However, even if there had been more professional input – for him, the IMM remained a political project, as selective as the Heroes' Acre. The contribution of ordinary people and combatants to liberation was marginalised in favour of a monument to Sam Nujoma, built in the North Korean 'Great Leader' style. Like many of his colleagues, he preferred not to be associated with such a museum.[650]

In their assessments, the historians and young professionals cited above were on the same page as most scholars who have since written about the IMM. For Becker, the museum represents a "North Korean Stalinist realism" (Becker 2018: 7), which neatly fits into Swapo's militaristic nationalism, dominated by "aggressive imagery of war scenes" (Becker 2018: 14). Kössler highlights the discernible political message of "unity" in the exhibition, which is pushed through "even where the facts need to be bent to achieve such an image" (Kössler 2015: 311, also 227–228, 324–325). Regarding the representation of genocide, Kössler conceded that seen as an ensemble, museum, genocide monument, and Nujoma's statue mark "the suffering of the African majority by the colonial war" (Kössler 2015: 168). Likewise, Becker recognises a new public and political acknowledgement of the genocide by the government, while cautioning that the genocide monument is also an expression of heroic nationalism, rather than a site of mourning (Becker 2018: 15–17).

Authors, who commented on the IMM without having seen its exhibition, tend to emphasise the symbolism of its architecture and location. In one of the earliest contributions on the museum's exterior aesthetics, Kirkwood described it as "an aggressive symbol of nascent nationalism and the Namibian government's triumph over the colonial regime" (Kirkwood 2011: 39). For Zuern, it underlines "Swapo's role as liberator of the nation, and therefore its position as the dominant party (Zuern 2012: 504–505), while Melber identifies "a claim to history defined by the modern anti-colonial struggle led by SWAPO" (Melber 2014: 29). In a similar fashion and in affirmation of the 'orientalism' discourse, Fox and Lühl considered the building's significance for Namibia's emerging postcolonial architecture: "the modern state seeks to redefine an image of itself in terms of grandeur and assertiveness through an imported monumentality. This is a paradoxical choice for a young country with a national identity still in the process of consolidation" (Fox /Lühl 2013: 5). Next to their problematic affirmation of a 'national identity', the question posed by Fox and Lühl may not be so paradoxical after all, if one considers the allure of North Korea's modernist monumentalism for the post-socialist liberation movement in power.

[649] Informal conversation, 19 May 2012.
[650] Informal conversation, May 2012.

Perspectives of the Curatorial Team

The curatorial team was of course aware of the contested nature of the IMM and the public interest in their work. At the heart of the project, Gerhardt and Fousy had to implement the practical steps necessary for opening the museum. While Fousy was basically volunteering to participate in the curatorial work and had less professional commitments and liabilities, as the curator, Gerhardt was responsible for the completion of the exhibition. Even though he entered the project in its final stages and had only little influence on the final form of the exhibition, it was his name on the assignment. He constantly had to navigate different roles and positionalities, which sometimes contradicted each other: as curator, historian, museum practitioner, public servant, citizen, remainee, and Swapo member. Throughout the time of my research in the museum, I witnessed how this interplay of commitments was an issue that affected Gerhardt, both on a professional and personal level, not least regarding his health. On the day we first met, I had asked him about the IMM and what it meant for history and memory in Namibia. His answer was equivocal: "In the museum, you will see how we depict our history, if it is one-sided".[651]

He summarised his understanding of museum practice and history as critical forces of social emancipation in the following words: "If a Namibian comes to a museum, then he has to feel included, he has to feel Namibian".[652] He was aware that many people considered the IMM a 'Swapo museum', long before the museum was even opened. He tried to explain it to me like this: "The Independence Memorial Museum is a highly politically charged institution. [It] is an institution which is celebrating the history of the liberation struggle. [No museum is ever neutral], it always has its point of view, and that's exactly what this museum is telling us". The focus of the museum was on the modern liberation struggle, on Swapo, and the Founding President. Other aspects of liberation struggle history were told as well, even though the historic site of the concentration camp should have been represented in more detail. There still was a need for a museum dedicated entirely to the history of genocide, he added, maybe in Swakopmund or Otjinene.

It was obvious to me that at times it was difficult for him to reconcile his identity as a trained museum and heritage practitioner with his mandate as curator of the IMM, due to the political nature of the project. For those who were involved in the curatorial process and who saw their own biographies reflected in the museum, this was a different thing. When I asked Fousy, whether she thought that her own experience of exile was well-represented in the exhibition, she affirmed:

> yeah, looking at the whole story that is being depicted in the new museum, I'm quite happy, because looking at the early resistance, what people have been struggling for, and looking at myself, somebody who also participated in the liberation struggle of the country, and somebody who was in exile, who has experienced all those hardships and everything; yeah,

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[651] Informal conversation, 18 April 2012.
[652] This and the following quotes, interview with Gerhardt Gurirab, Windhoek, 30 May 2013.

> for me it's quite a good thing, I feel very much represented there. […] it covers what I went through[653]

She was thankful for having been given the opportunity to contribute to this project. A lot of people from the government had inspected the museum and praised the work that she and her colleagues had been doing. When I asked her about the anticipated critique, that the museum was one-sided in its representation of the liberation struggle, she conceded that not everyone could be satisfied: "[T]hings have to start somewhere and we have started somewhere. If there is something to be built later, maybe in some years to come, the young generation will come up with something different that will satisfy the minds of other people". Still, she said: "I think it covers what we have been fighting for and I think Namibians, to be honest, they should be happy".

In similar terms, the Deputy Director answered my question. For her, the very idea that the IMM could be conceived of as a 'Swapo museum' was absurd: "It's not only the history of Swapo, it's the history of how we obtained independence as Namibia".[654] The IMM represents "the history as it is, from the beginning, from early resistance, to independence", and that obviously includes history before the founding of SWAPO. If people objected or thought that aspects of history were missing, it was always possible to revise, change, or adapt parts of the exhibition. Still, she maintained, the museum was conceived of and built by the government to explain to the young generation, "where this independence, they are enjoying, came from, […] so that people can acquaint themselves with the history of the country". Seen in context with the critique, which the exhibition has faced since the display centre's official opening, the Deputy Director's emphasis on "history as it is" is significant. The IMM clearly has a focus on the particular history of a particular group of people, who will see their biographical experience and memories represented, as an edifice to the liberation movement in exile.

Making Sense of the Independence Memorial Museum

The permanent exhibition of the IMM is based on a teleological narrative of liberation, which is deeply rooted in the nationalist historiography of the former liberation movement and represented in a form and medium that was adapted from North Korea. The latter is particularly evident in the mediality of the exhibition, with its focus on large-scale oil paintings, murals, and bronzes, as well as its emphasis on revolutionary struggle. The notion of authenticity and "history as it is", as it is applied in the exhibition, is not synonymous with historical accuracy. Rather, it is an expression of patriotic history, which values "force and simplicity" (Ranger 2004: 231) over facticity, rendered

[653] Interview with Fousy Kambombo, Windhoek, 22 June 2012.
[654] Interview with Esther Moombolah-ǁGoagoses, Windhoek, 28 May 2013.

through the DPRK's model of socialist revolutionary history, which permeates the regime's propaganda art (Portal 2005; see also Kornes 2019a: 148; Nasr 2014: 35–42).

The narrative of the exhibition reflects the historiographical prism of Swapo's nationalism, with its categorical differentiation into a heroic, yet necessarily deficient 'early resistance' of tribal groups and a genuine armed national liberation struggle, championed by the liberation movement. 'Early resistance' and the genocide, but also the experience of political prisoners, the role of the churches and civil resistance in the struggle against apartheid all have their place in this narrative, yet are superseded by the authority of SWAPO's armed struggle. Sam Nujoma, in his duality as guerrilla leader and benevolent national father figure, is the emblematic symbol towering above all else. Seen from this angle and also in light of the North Korean influence, the exhibition narrative of course corresponds with Melber's assessment that Swapo's post-colonial nation-building is based on "the reinvention of tradition as a liberation gospel of patriotic history" (Melber 2014: 25). From a perspective of ideology critique, this assessment is comprehensible. Still, as I argued in this and the previous chapter, there is a more nuanced institutional history to be discovered when it comes to the process of planning and curating the IMM. This history is as closely interwoven with Swapo, as it highlights the complexities and ambiguities of liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia.

To a large part, criticism of the IMM focussed on its connection to North Korea, a totalitarian dictatorship with a serious track record of human rights abuses. For many Namibians, the bilateral relationship between both countries, however much based on a history of socialist solidarity, was not self-explanatory. Mansudae's presence raised questions, not only internationally, but especially in Namibia (Kornes 2016a, 2016b). Accordingly, people questioned the motives of their government, the lack of transparency, the exclusion of local experts, artists and historians, while hardly anyone had doubts about the need for a museum dedicated to the history of the liberation struggle. The North Korean factor beckoned further questions about the influence of politics in the new museum: Was it going to be a Swapo museum; a monument, to glorify Sam Nujoma? How inclusive or exclusive was the narrative of liberation, represented behind its golden walls?

For the visitor who is standing in front of the IMM at Robert Mugabe Avenue, the North Korean element may be obvious, due to its peculiar aesthetics and architecture. First and foremost, however, he or she is standing in front of an institution, which represents the heroic memory of a Southern African liberation movement with a decisive influence on the IMM's creation. Mansudae was commissioned to implement a very specific project with great symbolic value, which was done to the satisfaction of its client within the means available.

Just like with the Heroes' Acre, Mansudae implemented demands, made corrections, and participated in the process of translating aesthetic and technical content. Mansudae provided a service, which was requested by the Namibian government. Together with a broad range of Namibian actors and stakeholders, Mansudae contributed to transfer the North Korean museum model into a Namibian vernacular. Against this background, the three major registers of critique,

levelled against the IMM – its totalitarian background, its import of “foreign” aesthetics, and its exclusion of Namibian perspectives – have to be seen in the context of this process.

As I argued in this and the previous chapter, the IMM should not be seen as an “alien monolith”, which was teleported from North Korea to Southern Africa. While tender procedures and the work of the committee may have been disappointingly non-transparent, the IMM nevertheless is the result of a contract. This was awarded to a world leading manufacturer of memorial culture by a national liberation movement, eager to see itself prospectively remembered. Even though the North Korean model set certain limits, due to its architecture and the format of the permanent display, the process of translation was largely shaped by the Namibian side, in particular the members of the National Museum. Contents of the exhibition were continuously negotiated, adapted, modified, reviewed and evaluated, and finally translated into a form that corresponded with “the ontological, epistemic, normative and material orders of the receiving site” (Behrends /Park /Rottenburg 2014: 18). For after all, the IMM mirrors the historical, cultural, and political characteristics of liberation memory as it is popularised by the former armed liberation movement in power, Swapo, and its members in the museum and heritage sector.

The analysis of the curatorial process demonstrates how a North Korean variation of the global model *memorial museum* (Williams 2007) has been transferred within the post-socialist memory-scape to a Southern African and Namibian context, involving a broad range of actors. This makes the IMM an essentially Namibian museum, just like it is also an embodiment of Swapo’s transnational liberation struggle history. With Clifford (1997: 121–122), one can accordingly characterise the IMM as a ‘majority museum’, representing a dominant narrative of national history. In how far the IMM has the potential to provide a platform to engage with the Namibian people and especially the born free about this narrative and its manifold contradictions, remains to be seen.

In its unique mediality, the IMM blurs the boundaries between museum, monument, and memorial site, as maintained by Borsdorf and Grütter (1999: 6). It integrates all three modalities in one hybrid medium of memory. It is a museum, in the sense that it represents a narrative about colonial history and liberation by means of a curated exhibition, with the intention to educate; it is a monument, which symbolically inscribes and re-appropriates a colonial space; it is a memorial site, which forces visitors to reflect about the past and the present, and the price that was paid for national independence. In its totality, it embodies the memory politics of the liberation movement in power, which however is a heterogeneous collective of people who have made very different biographical experiences when it comes to liberation: as war veterans and radical students; as exiles, remainees, and struggle children; as descendants of the victims of the genocide; as *the sons and daughters of the soil both fallen and alive*. Ultimately, the IMM’s central ambivalence lies in its claim to represent the liberation of a nation, in a form devised by a dominant liberation movement, which in itself is characterised by the polysemy of liberation memory in Namibia. It is this claim against which the work of the Independence Memorial Museum as an institution will have to be measured.

Conclusion

My investigation of liberation memory in Namibia is structured along the different formats of its public mediation. On the one hand, this includes the commemorative calendar of political national holidays, which narrates Swapo's dramatic narrative of the nation in carefully selected episodes. On the other, it involves the memorialisation of the liberation struggle in the form of museums, monuments, and memorial sites. In addition, I discussed the significance of reburials and heroes' funerals, as well as communal commemorative practices. My analysis started with the hypothesis that both the nation as a 'locus of belonging' (Brubaker) and national commemoration have a persistent relevance in Namibia.

My study took place at a crucial moment in time for Namibia. Twenty years after independence, a first generation of Namibians has been born and grown up into voting age without the lived experience of apartheid, exile, and the hardships of the liberation struggle. Namibia's born free have differing opinions about the meaning of independence and the history of liberation, challenging the modalities of liberation memory. For the custodians of state-sponsored liberation memory, who often belong to the struggle generation, this means that new formats have to be devised to attract a younger generation to engage with the history of liberation. The increasing turn to popular culture at the Independence Day celebration is one example, the dramatised history narrative at the IMM another.

At the same time, generational differentiation also had a recognisable and decisive impact also within the collective of the struggle generation itself. While this has tangible consequences for the way, commemorative practices like Cassinga Day allow for the performative constitution of mnemonic communitas, it also puts the notion of Swapo as a coherent ideological entity into perspective. If I learned one thing during my fieldwork, it is that there is no such thing as "Swapo" as an integrated organisation. Rather, Swapo is a continuum of actors and agencies, generations, collectives, mnemonic communities, biographical trajectories, organisational frameworks, and political convictions.

At times, these can be heavily embroiled in their antagonisms, as nearly all of my case studies demonstrate in some way: whether it is the born free, oversaturated by the struggle nostalgia of their elders; Cassinga survivors and war veterans, who lament their neglect by the government; southern Namibian genocide activists, who feel marginalised in their quest for restitution and acknowledgment of historic suffering; or the different perspectives of remainees and exiles on the status of the armed struggle for the attainment of independence. Despite all of these differences, however, most people would readily agree that the struggle for liberation and national independence is at the core of Namibian nationness and the sacrifice of those who died and suffered worth remembering.

Any discussion of the one-sidedness of Swapo's dramatic narrative, its staging of national events in party-colours, or the militaristic narrative of liberation in the Heroes' Acre and IMM has to take into account this simple fact: that most Namibians positively identify with the struggle for liberation. Where they differ, is the question what liberation means in independent Namibia and who has the right or the means to monopolise it. This question has been a dominant thread throughout all of my case studies and it finds its most poignant expression in the unceasing debates and contestations about the commodification of struggle credentials and hero status.

The Swapo government has put into place an elaborate bureaucratic apparatus to officially recognise individual contributions to liberation, which has created categories and hierarchies of veterans and heroes, both among the living and the dead. For the living, recognition implies certain privileges or the lack thereof, fuelling a contestation over struggle credentials as a scarce resource. As the case of the Ongulumbashe veterans demonstrates, even those who are accorded recognition can find themselves at odds with the government's politics of hero commemoration. For those who died and carry names, a pantheon of national heroes allows for eternal veneration, while the nameless dead with their scattered and entangled bones in the shallow graves of unsettled liberation struggle history are declared national martyrs. As the example of Lüderitz and Bethanie highlights, this can run counter to the claims of local and/or traditional communities to represent the dead as custodians of a different struggle past.

This finds a tangible expression in the politics of the dead of funerary and burial practices. Whether in the case of the Cassinga mass grave in Angola, the two reburials in Lüderitz, or the burials at Heroes' Acre and Ongulumbashe: liberation memory in Namibia is inevitably interwoven with the presence of the dead, who continue to challenge the living. In particular, the status of unburied bones from the era of the genocide, whether in the Namib Desert or in German anatomical collections, is a focal point of contestation. At times it was the sheer unsettling materiality of human remains, surfacing on construction sites as evidence of genocide and mass violence, which unveiled the intricate complexities of Namibia's fragmented liberation struggle past.

It is tempting to narrate the two reburials of Lüderitz primarily as an example of contestation and counter-memories. However, as I tried to argue with emphasis on the multitude of intersecting affiliations of the actors involved, the traditional authority acted within the framework of the state's bureaucratic logic of status recognition. There were competing interests at play, especially in regard to communal power struggles and regional feelings of marginalisation, yet at no point did the traditional authority question the legitimacy of the formal recognition of struggle credentials per se. Again, it was the degree of acknowledgment of a particular southern contribution to liberation, tied to protracted and ongoing struggles for restitution, which led to dissent.

This calls into question the notions of contested vs. multidirectional memory. In all of my case studies, liberation memory unravelled as a multifarious, dynamic, and inherently polysemic phenomenon. In the case of Lüderitz and Bethanie, the bone(s) of contention was the ability of state-

sponsored liberation memory to accommodate a southern perspective, without disintegrating that which is necessary to furnish the 'revindicatory politics' (Kössler) of the traditional authorities: the memory of genocide. The conflict arose regarding the re-categorisation of human remains as 'national martyrs', where the traditional authority considered them as material evidence of the genocide. While from its very beginning, Swapo emphasised the importance of the genocide and the 'early resistance' as a source of legitimacy for its liberation struggle, its relation to the communities of the descendants of the genocide has always been ambivalent. This is exemplified by the ceremonial nationalisation of the dead in Lüderitz.

Given the long-durée of categories of apartheid in Namibian politics, especially when it comes to traditional matters, the government's decision can be seen as a more comprehensible effort in nation-building. From the perspective of the traditional authority, this poses a dilemma since it equally represents the nation-state. Ultimately, it is not the dead, who need to be settled, but the living, whose memories conflict over matters tied to different historical experiences. In terms of multidirectional memory, there is ground for convergence where liberation is understood as a frame of reference that can accommodate all these different claims and experiences as a shared history within a national framework. The politics of accommodation, signalled by President Pohamba's alterations to Heroes' Day, indicate that this is possible – within the confines of the ruling party's dramatic narrative, of course.

Clear and unmistakable limits to multidirectional memory were demonstrated when it comes to the integration of Namibians who served in South African police and military units into the state's economy of entitlement. Since veteran is an official category, legitimised and administered by a line ministry and a number of acts and policies, which regulate the conversion of struggle credentials to material benefits, this means that a sizable number of Namibians is excluded. Their efforts for self-organisation and calls for acknowledgement are routinely rejected by the government, as the Cassinga Day commemoration showed. Significantly, their claims were dismissed by the President and other Swapo representatives with explicit reference to the memory of the Cassinga survivors. In this particular case, liberation memory clearly is mono-directional and exclusive. Despite the 'ritual hollowness' (Shigwedha) of Swapo's Cassinga commemoration, the wounds are obviously still all too fresh and the communicative memory burdened by the traumatic experience of the attack.

The same can be said regarding the uneasy relationship between white Namibians and the majority population. As a former settler colony in transition, whites find themselves in a difficult position, especially those of German descent. The absence of white Namibians on national events is a reoccurring matter of contention, which however has to be put into perspective. While white Namibians do of course participate in national events like Independence Day, the politicised nature of Cassinga Day commemoration with its othering of 'boers' and 'traitors' is an oft-cited repelling factor. However, as the examples of Anton Lubowski's burial on the Heroes' Acre, the 'unity in diversity' display at the IMM, or my own 'inclusion' in the community of survivors at Cassinga Day show, there is a place for whites in the symbolic order of liberation memory. In how far this

translates into the material reality of Namibia's socially fragmented post-apartheid society, is a different question. All of this highlights the complexities and intricacies of liberation memory and national commemoration in Namibia.

This leads to one final aspect of significance for liberation memory that informed all of my case studies: whether it is the commemoration of political national holidays or the memorialisation of the liberation struggle in the form of museums, monuments, and memorial sites – liberation memory in postcolonial Namibia is inextricably interwoven with the experience of exile and the transnational memory-scape of states, organisations, and actors who supported Namibia's liberation struggle. Regarding the commemoration of Cassinga Day and Heroes' Day, these media of memory have a long history of proto-national commemoration in exile, which imbues the Namibian national imaginary with a profound sense of transnational history and solidarity with the frontline states. In the case of North Korea, this solidarity has found a remarkable expression in the emergence of memorial culture throughout the country, embodied by the Heroes' Acre and Independence Memorial Museum. By translating these North Korean, resp. Zimbabwean models into a Namibian vernacular, the Swapo government has created a lasting and monumental edifice to its own liberation struggle.

While many Namibians have levelled criticism against these sites with its authoritative claim over the history of liberation, they were planned, curated and filled with meaning by fellow Namibians. Therefore, these sites should rather not be conceptualised as an 'imported monumentality' of a 'foreign' aesthetics, but as an expression of the internal differentiation and contradictions which characterise Namibia's liberation movement and postcolonial society at large.

Outlook

At the time of writing, Namibia experienced a resurgence of youth and land activism, unseen for a long time. To cover this development and include it in my analysis was not possible due to the conceptual limitations of this study. It was, however, foreshadowed by the instances of land-grabbing at the side-lines of the twentieth independence anniversary. Wherever I went and to whomever I talked: a deep-seated frustration over the level of social inequality and the decrepitude of Swapo's liberation politics was always palpable among young Namibians. In how far and by what means this movement with its glaring generation conflict will be able to challenge Swapo's monolithic economy of entitlement, is one of the most fascinating questions for future research.

Seen from the perspective of my field participants who are engaged as professionals in the history, museum, and heritage sector, this translates to the question of institutional transformation and the limits of patriotic history. Time and again, I was confronted with the zeal of young scholars to write and curate against the paradigm of heroic narratives and to challenge the grip of the old guard over public institutions of learning and heritage management. To "write our own history" was a reoccurring imperative, ambivalent due to its obvious structural limitations. Namibia has an

abundance of talented scholars, who deserve to leave their imprint on the country's history and its central sites of historic self-representation. Their professional trajectories, as well as the development of alternative museum spaces currently emerging, need to be followed-up in more detail. One example for the latter is the polyphonic Old Location exhibition in the Windhoek City Museum; another is the private-owned Outapi War Museum, run by a war veteran. These are sites indicative for the emergence of a pluralised liberation memory, which has the potential to transcend the dominant heroic narrative and show alternatives beyond patriotic history.

Finally, the transnational character of Namibian liberation memory calls for more research into the experiences, Namibians made in exile: as students in Cuba, Sierra Leone, or East Germany, as combatants undergoing guerrilla training in Algeria and North Korea, as diplomats in Zambia and New York. It is not possible to narrate the history of Namibia's long and protracted struggle for national independence without this dimension of transnational solidarity. In the face of the transience of the communicative memory of those who made these experiences, more research is urgently needed. This includes the global networks of veterans, liberation and solidarity movements, particularly in the (post-)socialist countries, which constitute active and dynamic memory-scapes, yet still remain largely under the radar of Western scholarly attention.

In Memoriam:

Simeon Linekela Shixungileni (1934–2014)

Gerson Hitjevi Veii (1939–2015)

Andimba Toivo ya Toivo (1924–2017)

Chief David Frederick (1932–2018)

Petrus Nangolo Iilonga (1947–2018)

Nickey Iyambo (1936–2019)

Mvula ya Nangolo (1943–2019)

John Liebenberg (1958–2020)

Samson Ndeikwila (1948–2021)

Dr. Jeremy Silvester (1963–2021)

Chief Petrus Simon Kooper (1950–2022)

Dr. Peingondjabi Shipoh (1958–2022)

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