Apartheid's African Soldiers:
A History of Black Namibian and Angolan Members of South Africa's Former Security Forces, 1975 to the Present

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Abstract

In this study, I examine the history of black Namibian and Angolan soldiers who fought in apartheid South Africa's security forces during the Namibian war of independence and the Angolan post-independence civil war from 1975 until 1989. I ask how and why these soldiers got involved in South Africa's security forces, and what the legacies of that involvement have been, in particular for the individual soldiers and their families. Based primarily on black former soldiers' own accounts, I argue that their experiences deeply disrupt dominant narratives of heroic struggles of 'national liberation' against colonial occupation.

While scholars have remained almost entirely silent on the histories of African soldiers of colonial and settler armies during the period of decolonisation, nationalist narratives have either ignored or denounced them as 'mercenaries' and 'collaborators'. I complicate such portrayals by highlighting the limits and divisions of the wars of 'national liberation' in Namibia and Angola. More specifically, I trace the long history of different forms of 'collaboration' during colonial conquest and occupation, and examine black soldiers' complex motivations for joining and remaining in South Africa's security forces.

Both during and after the war, many black soldiers repeatedly crossed boundaries between countries, liberation movements, and military units. I show how these soldiers' trajectories not only impacted the particular military cultures of the units they fought in, but their post-war claims of citizenship and belonging. Their history therefore provides new insight into the local, regional, and transnational dynamics of southern Africa's wars of decolonisation and liberation, which have shaped the region's political and military history to this day.

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AWOL	'Absent Without (Official) Leave'
CoD	Congress of Democrats (Namibia)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (Namibia)
FFF	Forum for the Future
FNLA	*Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* [National Front for the Liberation of Angola]
Frelimo	*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* [Liberation Front of Mozambique]
HPRA	Historical Papers Research Archive (University of Witwatersrand)
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
MPLA	*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]
NAMVET	Namibia War Veterans Trust
NDF	Namibian Defence Force
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organisation (Namibia)
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPC	Ovamboland People's Congress
OPO	Ovamboland People's Organisation
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles
RDP	Rally for Democracy and Progress (Namibia)
Renamo	*Resistência Nacional de Moçambique* [Mozambican National Resistance]
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SATRC	South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SWANU	South West African National Union
SWAPA	South West Africa Progressive Association
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation

SWAPOL	South West African Police
SWATF	South West African Territory Force
UDF	Union Defence Force (South Africa)
UN	United Nations
UNITA	*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola]
UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group
UPA	*União das Populações de Angola* [Union of the Angolan Peoples]
WHAM	'Winning Hearts and Minds'
WRP	Workers Revolutionary Party (Namibia)
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU(PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union(Patriotic Front)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZNA	Zimbabwean National Army

It was the first talk I had heard of treachery or divided aims. It set up in my mind the first vague doubts about this war in which, hitherto, the rights and wrongs had seemed so beautifully simple.

– George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*

Chapter 1 – Introduction

By the age of 20, Paulo Lukoki had been swept up in an extraordinary set of events: he had been conscripted in Zaire, had fought as a nationalist guerrilla in Angola before fleeing the country as a refugee, and then served in the military of apartheid South Africa in Namibia. Originally from Angola, Lukoki grew up in Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]) after his family had fled there during anti-colonial uprisings in northern Angola in the early 1960s. As a teenager, he was conscripted into one of the Angolan liberation movements, and returned to Angola to fight against the Portuguese colonial regime. In 1975, as Angola's liberation struggle turned into a post-independence civil war and proxy war, Lukoki became a refugee before he joined the South African military, which took him to northern Namibia. For the next 14 years, he fought against the new Angolan government forces and the Namibian liberation movement. In 1989, as Namibia gained its independence, the South African military withdrew from Namibia and took Lukoki to South Africa. With South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, Lukoki was then integrated into the post-apartheid military in 1994 before he resigned to work for various private security companies. Over the span of 20 years, Lukoki had covered thousands of kilometres, and repeatedly crossed boundaries of geography, ideology, and institutions.

Lukoki's trajectory is remarkable and somewhat perplexing but it is not unique: in all the wars of liberation in southern Africa, tens of thousands of Africans fought in the security forces of the settler and colonial regimes. In some

contexts, they far outnumbered those who fought in the armed wings of the liberation movements.[1] Despite their significant impact on southern Africa's military and political history, little is known about these soldiers. Nationalist discourses have either ignored them or disparaged them as 'traitors' and 'sell-outs', as they represent an 'anomaly' in the binary narrative between colonial oppression and the unified nation fighting for liberation.[2] Academic research, in turn, has largely neglected their stories and experiences. As Michelle Moyd notes in explaining why historians have been reluctant to study such soldiers,

> their [agency] disconcerts because it reminds us of our own conscious and unconscious imbrications and complicities in the various state structures and institutions endowed with responsibilities for protecting law and order and national security in our societies.[3]

How do we make sense of the histories of soldiers like Lukoki, which seem to jar with the common interpretation of southern Africa's wars as struggles of 'national liberation' fought by and for Africans against colonial and settler state forces?

Based largely on oral history interviews, this study explores the history of black Namibian and Angolan soldiers who served in apartheid South Africa's security forces from 1975 until 1989. During that time, these soldiers fought against the Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO, in two closely linked wars:

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[1] See A. Malache, P. Macaringue, and J.P. Borges Coelho, 'Profound Transformations and Regional Conflagrations: The History of Mozambique's Armed Forces from 1975-2005', in M. Rupiya (ed.), *Evolutions and Revolutions: A Contemporary History of Militaries in Southern Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2005), 158, 162; R. Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War: Reflections on the Namibian Experience, 1989-1993', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 3 (1997), 455-6; and L. le Roux, 'The Post-Apartheid South African Military: Transforming with the Nation', in Rupiya (ed.), *Evolutions and Revolutions*, 243, 254.

[2] L. Metsola, 'Out of Order? The Margins of Namibian Ex-combatant "Reintegration"', in H. Melber (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia: Which Changes for Whom?* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2007), 134

[3] M. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 35. See also D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonisation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 222.

the Namibian war of independence, and the Angolan civil war.[4] These wars, in turn, were closely intertwined with the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and the post-independence war in Mozambique. Building on a growing body of transnational and un-national literature, I argue that the experiences of these soldiers call into question the ways in which these wars have been understood and framed in dominant national histories, namely as glorious nationalist struggles of 'heroes' against 'traitors' and 'collaborators'. The case of these soldiers provides new insight into the divisions and fractures of national liberation, and the transnational dynamics that shaped the wars of decolonisation and liberation across southern Africa.[5] As Marion Wallace writes with regard to Namibia,

> It would be wrong … to cast this period [of Namibia's liberation struggle] as only one of polarisation between liberation and oppression, or between SWAPO and the South African administration. Much of the literature of the time … does just this. … Fuller social histories of the period are still to be written.[6]

This study's social history focuses on three units that were commanded by white officers but consisted predominantly of black troops: 32 Battalion of the South African Defence Force (SADF); the 'indigenous' battalions of the South West African Territory Force (SWATF); and the paramilitary police unit, Koevoet. I focus on these units for two main reasons. First, they not only came to constitute more than two thirds of South Africa's troops in Namibia and Angola but bore the brunt of the war as they formed the *skerp punt* ('sharp end') of the security

[4] SWAPO is the South West African People's Organisation.
[5] For a similar argument, see N. Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: The Soweto Intelligence Unit and Southern Itineraries', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 6 (2014), 1343-61.
[6] M. Wallace, *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990* (London: Hurst, 2011), 273.

forces.[7] In other words, these units formed an absolutely essential part of apartheid South Africa's military efforts in Namibia and Angola. Second, both during and after the war, many members of these units repeatedly crossed boundaries between countries, liberation movements, and military units. Their trajectories therefore further call into question the notion of national liberation, and shed new light on the making of military identities and cultures that persist to this day.

My research pursued two principal questions that speak to debates around 'collaboration', military culture, and veterans' politics: First, how and why were black Namibian and Angolan soldiers involved in South Africa's security forces? Second, what have been the legacies of that involvement, particularly for the individual soldiers involved? The first question aimed to investigate black soldiers' motivations for voluntarily joining and staying in the security forces, and their experiences of military service.[8] The second question sought to address the impact of the soldiers' military involvement on the post-apartheid contexts of Namibia and South Africa, in particular with regard to the their political engagement, and questions of citizenship and belonging. These research questions also informed my methodological approach, namely oral history interviews, which are central to this study and which I will discuss further below.

Through a new methodological and conceptual approach to the study of African soldiers in settler and colonial powers during decolonisation, this study situates itself at the intersection of scholarly debates on 'collaboration', and transnational and un-national dynamics of liberation wars. From this starting

[7] C. Doherty, *BOSBEFOK: Constructed Images and the Memory of the South African 'Border War'* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 2014), 155.
[8] Thus, this study does not consider Namibian soldiers from central and southern Namibia who were forcibly conscripted into the SWATF between 1980 and 1989.

point, it also makes a novel contribution to debates on the development of military culture, and the politics of citizenship and belonging in post-liberation contexts.

Collaboration

The motives of African colonial 'allies' or 'intermediaries' – those who aided and abetted the expansion of the colonial state – have been the subject of considerable scholarly debate.[9] At least until the 1960s, scholars had tended to portray, if not celebrate, colonial intermediaries as 'innovators' and 'modernisers'. Emerging from the anti-colonial struggles after the Second World War, a new generation of nationalist historians challenged such portrayals, and instead emphasised African resistance to colonial rule.[10] They hailed those opposed to colonialism as 'heroes', and denounced colonial intermediaries as 'collaborators and traitors to a larger nationalist or pan-Africanist cause'.[11] As mentioned above, such nationalist narratives of 'heroes' and 'traitors' persist to this day, particularly with regard to African colonial soldiers who fought in the wars of decolonisation and liberation. This study challenges these narratives by

[9] T.H. Parsons, 'African Participation in the British Empire', in P.D. Morgan and S. Hawkins (eds.), *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259.
[10] A.F. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique: Anti-Colonial Activity in the Zambesi Valley, 1850-1921* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 189; Parsons, 'African Participation', 259; B.N. Lawrence, E.L. Osborn, and R.L. Roberts, 'Introduction: African Intermediaries and the "Bargain" of Collaboration', in B.N. Lawrence, E.L. Osborn, and R.L. Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees on the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 6.
[11] Parsons, 'African Participation', 259. By then, the term 'collaborator' had assumed its current pejorative connotation and implication of moral failure following the Second World War, where it referred to the act of cooperating with Nazi occupying forces in Europe: E.I. Steinhart, *Conflict and Collaboration: Kingdoms of Uganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), vii-viii; Lawrence et al., 'Introduction', 6.

drawing on an historical literature that has sought to complicate the idea of the 'collaborator' in African colonial contexts.[12] Given the loaded and pejorative nature of the term 'collaborator', I generally refer to 'soldiers', 'troops', or 'members of 32 Battalion/SWATF/ Koevoet'.

In the 1970s, a small number of scholars began studying the dynamics of collaboration more critically.[13] In particular, they questioned the depiction of resistance as the 'normal response' to colonialism, and contested the crude binary between resistance and collaboration.[14] Edward Steinhart, for example, argued that the binary distorted 'the often complex behaviors adopted by African political actors' in response to colonialism.[15] Similarly, Allen and Barbara Isaacman insisted that 'the decision to collaborate was characterized by similar complexity' as the one to resist.[16] These scholars, in short, argued that there were various kinds of 'collaboration' with different motivations and intentions.

Other scholars, like Albert Boahen, denounced the term 'collaborator' not only as 'derogatory and Eurocentric' but, more importantly, as denying Africans' agency in pursuing their own interests and objectives.[17] In a more recent study

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[12] See also J. Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation: The Political Life of Zephaniah Moyo', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 11, 1 (2017), 168.

[13] See, for example, J.A. Dachs, 'Politics of Collaboration – Imperialism in Practice', in B. Pachai (ed.), *The Early History of Malawi* (London: Longman, 1972), 283-89; R. Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in R. Owen and R.B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 117-42; C. van Onselen, 'The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry, 1900-1935', *African Affairs*, 72, 289 (1973), 401-18. See also J. McCracken, 'Coercion and Control in Nyasaland: Aspects of the History of a Colonial Police Force', *The Journal of African History*, 27, 1 (1986), 127-47.

[14] A.F. Isaacman, and B. Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c. 1850-1920', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10, 1 (1977), 33; Lawrence et al., 'Introduction', 6. See also F. Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *The American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), 1532, 34.

[15] Steinhart, *Conflict and Collaboration*, viii.

[16] Isaacman and Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration', 57.

[17] Boahen argued that instead 'a collaborator is surely one who betrays the national cause by colluding with the enemy to pursue the goals and objectives of the enemy rather than the interests of his own nation': A.A. Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 11.

of the *askari* – black police and soldiers – in German East Africa, Michelle Moyd makes a similar case, arguing that the *askari* were 'agents of colonialism', and 'social beings engaged in projects that directly and simultaneously served their personal aspirations and needs, as well as those of the colonial state'.[18] This study extends these arguments about the complexity and agency of 'collaborators' – even 'agency in tight corners', in the words of John Lonsdale – to the period of liberation and decolonisation in southern Africa.[19]

As Daniel Branch observes, 'studies of collaboration during the decolonization period generally and anti-colonial rebellions specifically are rare'.[20] In the literature on African colonial contexts, the Kikuyu 'loyalists' during the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, and the *harkis* – Algerians who fought on the side of the French colonial military during the Algerian war of independence – have received the most scholarly attention.[21] In the context of decolonisation and liberation in southern Africa, only a handful of studies have sought to complicate the portrayal of African soldiers and policemen as 'collaborators' and 'traitors'.[22] Timothy Stapleton, for example, writes:

> It is important to understand that African recruits – even as late as the 1970s – did not usually see the contradiction in colonial military and police service that those looking back at the past do today. Although historians find it useful to generalize about why Africans joined the colonial security forces, when

[18] Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 31.
[19] J. Lonsdale, 'Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 1 (2000): 5-16.
[20] Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 220.
[21] In an extensive literature on both cases, see, for example, Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*; and M. Evans, 'The *Harkis*: the Experience and Memory of France's Muslim Auxiliaries', in M.S. Alexander, M. Evans and J.F.V. Keiger (eds.), *The Algerian War and the French Army: Experiences, Images, and Testimonies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 117-33.
[22] See, for example, P. McLaughlin, 'Victims as Defenders: African Troops in the Rhodesian Defence System 1890-1980', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2, 2 (1991), 240-75; J. K. Seirlis, 'Undoing the United Front?: Coloured Soldiers in Rhodesia, 1939-1980', *African Studies*, 63, 1 (2004), 73-94.

> looking at individual cases it is difficult to find any awestruck fools, greedy mercenaries, or clever manipulators of the colonial system.[23]

With regard to apartheid South Africa, Jacob Dlamini has examined the complex dynamics of collaboration through the case of *askaris,* here referring to so-called 'turned' former guerrillas who, often after being tortured, ended up working for the apartheid state. Their stories, Dlamini argues, upset the binaries of heroes and traitors, and victims and perpetrators, and therefore complicate how we think about apartheid and its legacies, in particular the nature of the post-apartheid political settlement.[24] However, as Dlamini points out, even more than two decades after the formal end of apartheid, 'virtually nothing is known' about black 'collaborators' during apartheid, despite 'South Africa's history of conflict and the centrality of treachery to that conflict'.[25] This observation also holds true for Namibia and Angola, and their histories of 'national liberation'.

Transnational and Un-National Dynamics of Liberation

A growing literature has begun to investigate the transnational and un-national dynamics – meaning dynamics across and/or separate from national boundaries – of southern Africa's liberation struggles. This work not only challenges dominant national histories but the analytical framework of 'national

[23] T.J. Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-80* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 44.
[24] J. Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2014), 260.
[25] J. Dlamini, 'Apartheid Confessions', *Interventions*, 18, 6 (2016), 775, 785.

liberation'.[26] In the words of Micol Seigel, it 'treats the nation as one among a range of social phenomena to be studied, rather than the frame of the study itself'. [27]

The framework of national liberation, as Luise White and Miles Larmer argue, has 'restricted the development of a more open-ended, fragmented and inclusive set of conflict histories' by obscuring how 'many players on both sides of the conflict … were motivated by – among other things – broader ideological notions of change, ethno-regional allegiances, personal advancement'. [28] Similarly, Jocelyn Alexander et al. argue against the assumption of 'the primacy (or homogeneity) of nationalist loyalties as they exist within the boundaries of today's nation-states', and emphasise the lasting legacies of 'the movement of ideas, people, institutions and goods across borders'.[29] Unsurprisingly, the bulk of this literature has been concerned with the liberation movements, their hosts, and allies.

In contrast, the histories of the settler and colonial security forces, many of which were also transnationally constituted, 'is a topic on which scholarship is almost entirely silent'.[30] As mentioned above and as David Anderson and Daniel Branch write, the histories of the African troops in these security forces in

[26] See, for example, H. Sapire and C. Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles*: *New Local*, *Regional and Global Perspectives* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2013), and references below. On transnational history more generally, see also C.A. Bayly, S. Beckert, M. Connelly, I. Hofmeyr, W. Kozol, and P. Seed, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *American Historical Review*, 111, 5 (2006), 1441-64.
[27] M. Seigel, 'Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn', *Radical History Review*, 91 (2005), 63.
[28] L. White and M. Larmer, 'Introduction: Mobile Soldiers and the Un-National Liberation of Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40, 6 (2014), 1271. See also C.A. Williams, 'Exile Biography and Un-National History: The Story of Kaufilwa Nepelilo', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 11, 1 (2017), 158.
[29] J. Alexander, J. McGregor, and B.M. Tendi, 'The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements: An Introduction', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), 1.
[30] Alexander et al., 'The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements', 9.

particular 'have remained obscure, often tainted or disparaged by a nationalist narrative that styles them as mercenaries or collaborators, and always as enemies'.[31]

Recent works on the above-mentioned Kikuyu loyalists and the *harkis* have stressed the need to understand the history of African colonial troops in light of the limits and fractures of the ideas of 'the nation' and 'national liberation'. Vincent Crapanzano writes that the *harkis* represented 'a division in the idea of Algerian nationhood, the fragility of that idea'.[32] Branch, in turn, argues:

> Only when we incorporate this much-maligned group [African 'collaborators' and 'loyalists'] into our histories of decolonisation can we begin to adequately understand the process and the violence of the end of an empire. But to do so necessitates the final abandonment of the nation as our unit of analysis during the study of decolonisation when viewed from former colonial territories.[33]

With regard to southern and central Africa, Larmer argues for the need to understand the region's nations and states as 'recent creations [whose] meaning is mutable and contested' in order to 'reach new historical understandings of movements and conflicts which are simultaneously local, national and transnational'.[34] Through the lens of a South African security police unit whose members and operations moved across southern Africa, Nicky Rousseau shows how the 'wars in [the region] were fought by a diverse group of men, often

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[31] D.M. Anderson and D. Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire – Loyalists, Nationalists and the Cold War, 1945-76', *The International History Review*, 39, 1 (2017), 2. See also N. Arielli and B. Collins, 'Introduction: Transnational Military Service Since the Eighteenth Century', in N. Arielli and B. Collins (eds.), *Transnational Soldiers: Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4-5.

[32] V. Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 95.

[33] Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 221.

[34] M. Larmer, 'Of Local Identities and Transnational Conflict: The Katangese Gendarmes and Central-Southern Africa's Forty-Years War, 1960-99', in Arielli and Collins (eds.), *Transnational Soldiers*, 160. See also M. Larmer, 'Local Conflicts in a Transnational War: The Katangese Gendarmes and the Shaba Wars of 1977-78', *Cold War History*, 13, 1 (2013), 89-108; E. Kennes and M. Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa: Fighting Their Way Home* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

crossing boundaries of race, nation and affiliation'.[35] As Rousseau notes and as we will see in the following chapters, this unit was not unique: 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF were also transnationally constituted, and its members similarly crossed lines of geography, affiliation, and institutions. This raises the question: how did the security forces form relatively cohesive units out of such a diverse mix of soldiers? I argue that part of the answer lies in the construction of military culture.

Military Culture

My research builds on an emerging literature on military culture that has sought more comparative and international perspectives on the term.[36] To date, many studies of military culture have relied on definitions similar to those given by Don Snider and James Burk. Snider conceptualises the term as a sort of 'glue' that holds units together by creating 'a distinctive source of identity and experience'.[37] Similarly, Burk defines it as 'the particular beliefs, values, and other symbolic productions that organize and sustain military organization'.[38] Burk further identifies military culture as composed of four elements: discipline, professional ethos, ceremonies and etiquette, and esprit de corps and cohesion.[39]

[35] Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare', 1358.
[36] Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 14.
[37] D.M. Snider, 'An Uninformed Debate on Military Culture', *Orbis,* 43, 1 (1999), 14.
[38] J. Burk, 'Military Culture', in L. Kurtz (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict* (San Diego: Academic, 1999), 447-62; A.D. English, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 6.
[39] As Burk acknowledges, his list is not exhaustive and there may be other aspects of military culture: Burk, 'Military Culture', 447-454.

I understand military culture, similarly to Snider, as the 'source' of institutional identities, practices, and experiences, and also consider some of the elements mentioned by Burk, namely discipline and cohesion. This study therefore presents not so much a critique of the above definitions but of two central 'cultural assumptions' underlying them.[40] These assumptions are the Eurocentric understanding of militaries as 'nations (united) in arms', and a top-down preoccupation particularly with the role of officers.

Historically, the two disciplines most concerned with the study of military culture have been military history and sociology. As Tarak Barkawi notes, these disciplines have remained largely Eurocentric, in the sense that they have derived their categories and assumptions from European histories, particularly the French Revolution's idea of the military as a 'nation in arms'.[41] As a result, debates over military culture have focused primarily on 'Western' national armies, namely those of the USA and Germany.[42] This study develops and goes beyond this existing literature by examining the specific development of the military cultures of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet.

Colonial armies were not united by a supposed national identity but marked by sharp social, religious, ethnic, and racial divisions, fostered and maintained by colonial rule.[43] The local recruitment of colonial armies, as Peter Wilson observes, therefore necessitated 'different methods … than those employed for national defence', and 'profoundly altered the social basis of colonial armies'

[40] See also Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries,* 14.
[41] T. Barkawi, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 41, 2 (2006), 325.
[42] See, for instance, K.O. Dunivin, 'Military Culture: Change and Continuity', *Armed Forces and Society*, 20, 4 (1994), 531-47; I.V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
[43] Barkawi, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies', 327.

from their European counterparts.[44] As a result, 'tension between "European" and "native" pervade[d] all aspects of colonial military culture [and was] marked by a corresponding degree of ambivalence' about hierarchies, objectives, and tactics.[45]

These broad generalisations are however backed up by little evidence from colonial soldiers themselves. As a result, the following observation by Douglas Wheeler from 1976 about African soldiers in Portugal's colonial armies remains the case for former colonial troops in southern Africa more generally: 'little is known about [their] morale, esprit de corps, promotion, discipline, and racial attitudes and conflicts among groups'.[46]

It comes as no surprise that in the case of South Africa, scholars have focused on the historical influence of white Afrikaner culture on the SADF's military culture, and the legacy of racial (and gender) discrimination in its successor, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).[47] Alon Peled, for example, observes how the SADF's military culture – narrowly understood in terms of racial segregation and discrimination – changed as a result of 'ethnic integration', leading to the gradual abolishment of formal inequalities and petty discriminations from the late 1970s onwards.[48] While my discussion will consider racial hierarchies and their ambivalences, I am also concerned with

[44] P.H. Wilson, 'Defining Military Culture', *The Journal of Military History*, 72, 1 (2008), 25. See also A. Peled, *A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multiethnic States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 70-6.
[45] Wilson, 'Defining Military Culture', 25.
[46] D.L. Wheeler, 'African Elements in Portugal's Armies in Africa (1961-1974)', *Armed Forces and Society*, 2, 2 (1976), 242.
[47] See, for example, J. Cock, '"Guards and Guns": Toward Privatised Militarism in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 4 (2005), 791-803; L. Mashike, '"Blacks Can Win Everything, But the Army": The Transformation of the South African Military between 1994-2004', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 601-18; L. Heinecken, 'A Diverse Society, a Representative Military? The Complexity of Managing Diversity in the South African Armed Forces', *Scientia Militaria*, 37, 1 (2009), 25-49.
[48] Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 70-6.

how they were closely linked with other elements, such as training and discipline, in order to better understand both the development and the legacies of military culture.

In addition to its Eurocentric focus, much of the existing literature has been limited by a top-down preoccupation with the role of officers, and the determinants of combat motivation and military effectiveness.[49] Building on anthropological and sociological research, my interest instead lies with soldiers and their experiences of military culture.[50] Eyal Ben-Ari, for example, examines the military culture of an Israeli army unit by concentrating on how soldiers, rather than generals and commanders, 'make sense of soldiering and commanding'.[51] This shift of perspective shines new light onto how and why individuals internalise or resist different aspects of military culture, and its internal ambivalences. As Moyd finds with regard to the *askari*, they 'identified with some aspects of German military culture but simply tolerated others in order to avoid punishment'.[52] In short, this study provides new insight into how military cultures develop, and how they influence military behaviour and loyalties, based on black soldiers' own accounts.

[49] See, for example, E.A. Shils and M. Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 12 (1948), 280-315; W. Murray, 'Does Military Culture Matter?', *Orbis*, 43, 1 (1999), 27-42; H. Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 2 (2006), 211-27.
[50] See also J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'Adelante!', forthcoming.
[51] E. Ben-Ari, *Mastering Soldiers: Conflict, Emotions, and the Enemy in an Israeli Military Unit* (New York: Berghahn, 1998), 4.
[52] Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 102.

Post-Liberation Politics of Citizenship and Belonging

Post-conflict contexts often see intense negotiations between governments, former combatants, civil society organisations, and various other interest groups.[53] In post-colonial societies, these negotiations have been closely linked to wider questions of citizenship and belonging, namely who qualifies as a full citizen of the new nation.[54] As Dorman et al. write, conflicts over legal and material resources 'are potent and meaningful for their contestants because they are framed and understood in terms of identity and belonging'.[55] In this study, I follow Rogers Brubaker's distinction between citizenship and (political) belonging:

> For some marginal or minority populations, there is no doubt or contestation about their *formal* state membership [but] in such cases, there often is doubt or contestation about their *substantive* membership or citizenship status – that is, about their access to, and enjoyment of, the substantive rights of citizenship, or about their substantive acceptance [i.e. belonging] as full members of a putatively national "society" [emphasis in original].[56]

In the post-liberation countries in southern Africa, citizenship and its associated material and symbolic benefits have often closely hinged on the commitment to the liberation struggle, and loyalty to the former liberation movement-turned-

[53] J. Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: The Post-War Politics of Demobilised Soldiers in Mozambique, 1975-1996* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), 6-7.
[54] J. Sumich, 'Tenuous Belonging: Citizenship and Democracy in Mozambique', *Social Analysis*, 57, 2 (2013), 99. See also, for example, I. Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'the People'* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007); S. Dorman, D. Hammett, and P. Nugent (eds.), *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
[55] S. Dorman, D. Hammett, and P. Nugent, 'Introduction: Citizenship and its Casualties in Africa', in Dorman, Hammett, and Nugent (eds.), *Making Nations, Creating Strangers*, 6, 21.
[56] R. Brubaker, 'Migration, Membership, and the Modern Nation-State: Internal and External Dimensions of the Politics of Belonging', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 41, 1 (2010), 63-4. See also G. Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 7-8.

ruling party, now in control of the state apparatus.[57] In these countries, ex-combatants have become a particular kind of citizen. As Metsola notes, '[they] have been identified as a special group for policy measures … with reintegration and veteran policies, associations and ministries institutionalizing the issue'.[58] As veterans make claims on the state, they therefore also raise questions about their citizenship and belonging.[59] Such questions are particularly complex for those who fought on the 'wrong side', namely black former soldiers who served in the security forces of colonial and settler states, and crossed boundaries of geography and institutions.

Both policy making and academic research have often fiercely debated who and what constitutes a 'former combatant' or 'veteran'.[60] With the exception of Namibia, the terms 'former combatant' or 'veteran' are generally understood as excluding former members of the security forces, and existing literature has usually referred to their post-war fate only in passing. Little is known about the post-war trajectories of former security force members in southern Africa, again in contrast to the cases of Algeria and Kenya.

In Algeria, the *harkis* were brutally persecuted by the new political regime, leading many of them to flee to France, whereas in Kenya, some former Kikuyu

[57] See, for example, L. Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues? The Spectre of Liberation, Memory Politics and "War Veterans" in Namibia', *Development and Change*, 41, 4 (2010), 589-13; and N. Wiegink, 'The Good, the Bad and the Awkward: The Making of War Veterans in Post-Independence Mozambique', paper presented at 'Ex-Combatant and Veteran Policies and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Perspective', University of St Andrews, 26 April 2018.
[58] L. Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition: Ex-Combatant and Veteran Politics in Namibia* (published PhD thesis, University of Helsinki, 2015), 32.
[59] M. Power, 'War Veterans, Disability, and Postcolonial Citizenship in Angola and Mozambique', in D. Cowen and E. Gilbert (eds.), *War, Citizenship, Territory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 178. See also Mann, *Native Sons*; and J. Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[60] See, for example, N. Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

loyalists seized control of the post-colonial state.[61] In southern Africa, many of their counterparts have 'disappeared' or 'remade' themselves, for instance, as nationalists or anti-government rebels – with the unique exception of Namibia where, since independence, former SWATF and Koevoet members have politically mobilised for government benefits (see Chapter 6).[62] In other words, the post-war trajectories of former soldiers and their impact on the post-colonial state have varied significantly across contexts.[63] What accounts for these differences?

In tackling this question in the southern African context, I explore the post-war politics of citizenship and belonging of black former 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet members in Namibia and South Africa. More specifically, I focus on how the categories of citizens and veterans have been created and negotiated.[64] In the case of Namibia, I examine how former SWATF and Koevoet members – unlike their counterparts in the rest of southern Africa – have been able to politically mobilise, and how they have sought to contest the ruling party's conceptions of citizen and veteran. I show that associations of former soldiers have formed significant alliances with opposition parties and civil society organisations in an attempt to challenge SWAPO's liberation narrative and idea of 'the nation'. In the case of South Africa, I discuss how former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members have found themselves 'stranded': while many of them have found employment in the private security industry, they feel they do not truly

[61] Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 8.
[62] For the cases of Angola and Mozambique, see, for example, P.A. Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War: African "Loyalists" in the Portuguese Armed Forces and Angola's Transition to Independence', *The International History Review*, 39, 1 (2017), 137-8.
[63] Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 220-2.
[64] See also Wiegink, 'The Good, the Bad and the Awkward'; J. McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State: Challenges of Reintegration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

belong to South Africa. At the same time, they and often their families have found it difficult, if not impossible, to return to Angola or Namibia due to various bureaucratic, legal, and economic issues concerning both their formal and substantive citizenship status.

In sum, I explore how the post-war lives of these soldiers have been shaped by the above aspects of their history: their 'collaboration' with apartheid South Africa, the trans- and un-national dynamics of the wars they fought in, and the military cultures they were part of.

Sources and Methodology

In contrast to much of the existing literature on local allies of colonial and settler armies, this study is primarily a work of oral history, both by design and necessity. With a few exceptions, such as Crapanzano's ethnographic work on the *harkis*, the existing literature has been limited by its reliance on archival sources. Through the oral histories of former soldiers, I explore topics that (military) institutional archives often do not record, such as the rank-and-file's experience of military culture or their claims of citizenship and belonging. This study therefore breaks new methodological and empirical ground through oral history interviews with former soldiers. Their history, I suggest, offers new perspectives on the dynamics and legacies of wars of decolonisation, the making of nations

and states, and the resilience of military identities across and beyond southern Africa.[65]

In order to interview former soldiers, I had to overcome a number of challenges, many of which are familiar to oral historians. These challenges included finding interviewees and establishing relationships of trust with them, navigating issues around the political sensitivity and ethics of my research, and tracing the various influences of the historical and political context on individual accounts.[66]

My own reliance on oral history was partly due to difficulties of accessing the SADF's archival records at the Department of Defence Archives (also referred to as the SANDF Archives) in Pretoria. The two main issues were the often close-to-impenetrable organisation of the archival groups, and the tedious declassification process under the Promotion of Access to Information (PAIA) Act. I am therefore especially grateful to Will Gordon, who kindly shared with me thousands of archival sources on 32 Battalion, some of which I have used in this study. With regard to SWATF and Koevoet, an unknown number of records, if not the vast majority, appear to have been destroyed or 'disappeared' in the late 1980s. According to Verne Harris:

> [The SWATF's] records were subjected to systematic appraisal in an exercise initiated in December 1988. Decisions on which records were to be destroyed were authorized by the commanding officer. … Records which survived this exercise were placed in the custody of the SADF Archives. … The records of Koevoet … were reported as having all disappeared in transit between Windhoek and Pretoria.[67]

[65] See also Williams, 'Exile Biography and Un-National History', 152; Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', 167.
[66] See also Alexander et al., 'The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements', 5.
[67] V. Harris, '"They Should Have Destroyed More": The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-94', *Transformation*, 42 (2000), 37-8.

In addition, I have relied on oral histories because there are no written accounts by black former soldiers with the exception of Sisingi Kamongo's *Shadows in the Sand*, co-written with Leon Bezuidenhout.[68]

The findings of this study are therefore based primarily on interviews that I conducted during a total of six months in Namibia in 2014 and 2016, and another seven months in South Africa in 2016. Overall, I interviewed 116 black former soldiers and seven white former officers of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF (see Table 1). In addition, I interviewed nine family members of former soldiers, two NGO representatives, two academics, two opposition politicians, one SWAPO politician, and three former PLAN commanders. The setting up of these interviews, particularly those with black former soldiers, presented a number of difficulties stemming from the political sensitivity of my research.

Particularly in the case of Namibia, the divisions and fractures of the liberation struggle remain a politically sensitive topic. During my first research stay in northern Namibia in 2014, the Namibian police shadowed my guide, Jabulani Ndeunyema of the Namibia War Veterans' Trust (NAMVET), and me. Ndeunyema is a former soldier of SWATF's 101 Battalion, and has been the chairperson of NAMVET, the most prominent association of former SWATF and Koevoet members, since 2012. On two occasions, police officers stopped us, took pictures of our IDs, and questioned me about my personal background, contact details in Namibia and abroad, knowledge of Namibia's history, interest in the former soldiers, and my connection to Ndeunyema. My answers – that I was a

[68] S. Kamongo and L. Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand: A Koevoet Tracker's Story of Insurgency War* (Pinetown: 30° South Publishers, 2011). However, as Kenneth Grundy notes in his review of the book, 'it is hard not to come away from this reading thinking that Kamongo's Afrikaner co-authors have added their spin to his text': K.W. Grundy, 'Book Review: *Shadows in the Sand*', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 45, 1 (2012), 130.

Swiss student from the University of Oxford and that Ndeunyema helped me interview former soldiers – seemed to sufficiently appease them. As Ndeunyema explained to me, we likely aroused police suspicion because he had been under surveillance for a few months due to false rumours that he had attempted to buy arms abroad, and that he had set up a military training camp in northwestern Namibia.[69] The state's concern with the stories and experiences of the former soldiers, I suggest, further underlines their political significance in contemporary Namibia.

During the first days of my second research stay in Namibia in 2016, I met a police officer at a public protest by former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers in Windhoek. This time, the officer, whom I had never met but who had heard of me, briefly questioned me after taking pictures of my passport and me. While I do not know whether I was shadowed, the Special Branch did not again question me or anyone I worked with. During my stay in South Africa, I did not have any such experiences.

It should come as no surprise that many former soldiers were reluctant to openly discuss their stories and experiences. During the war, the security forces committed acts of often-extreme violence against civilians, guerrillas, and members of liberation movements in both Namibia and South Africa. Since the war, black former soldiers have been stigmatised and marginalised by the ruling parties and large parts of the population in both countries. As a result, many

[69] A later article by the Namibia Press Agency (NAMPA) read that 'sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, claimed that the meetings with Bollinger [*sic*] were held secretly to exclude some [NAMVET] members as the meetings were apparently aimed at mobilising members to take up arms against Government': NAMPA, 'NAMVET Has No Intention of Going to War: Ndeunyema', 10 September 2014, available at https://www.lelamobile.com/content/32705/Namvet-has-no-intention-of-going-to-war-Ndeunyema, retrieved 7 June 2018. During his research on ex-combatants in Namibia, Lalli Metsola also came under police surveillance: Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 15.

former soldiers therefore seemed wary of negative consequences of talking to me. This was especially the case with those who had been reintegrated into the two countries' new military and police, and now had former SWAPO and ANC fighters, their former enemies, as superiors.[70] My assurances that I would anonymise the interview data often did little to assuage their concerns. On this point, I should note that my interviewees' names only feature when they gave consent or explicitly wanted to be mentioned by name.

Table 1: Breakdown of Interviews according to Unit and Country

		South Africa	Namibia	Total
32 Battalion	Black soldiers	46	-	
	White officers	2	-	
	Total	48	-	48
Koevoet	Black soldiers	12[a)]	15	
	White officers	2	-	
	Total	14	15	29
101 Battalion	Black soldiers	3[b)]	22[c)]	
	White officers	3	-	
	Total	6	22	28
102 Battalion	Black soldiers	-	11	11
202 Battalion	Black soldiers	-	3	3
701 Battalion	Black soldiers	-	4	4
Total		68	55	123

a): Two of these interviewees had transferred to Koevoet from 32 Battalion.
b): Two of these interviewees had transferred to 101 Battalion from Koevoet.
c): Four of these interviewees had transferred to 101 Battalion from Koevoet.

[70] On a similar 'veil of silence' among white former SADF soldiers in post-apartheid South Africa, see G. Baines, 'SADF Soldiers' Silences: Institutional, Consensual, Strategic', *Acta Academica*, 47, 1 (2015), 78-97.

Given the political sensitivity of my research, I found it essential to locate and establish contact with former soldiers through people whom they knew and trusted. In Namibia, the help of Ndeunyema, who took a personal interest in my research and became a good friend, was invaluable. In 2014, Ndeunyema arranged all interviews with former soldiers, which, of course, raises issues of selection bias. However, I was never under the impression that Ndeunyema selected interviewees or attempted to influence their answers in order to advance a certain agenda. In fact, both in 2014 and 2016, he put me in contact not only with ex-members of NAMVET, whom he had fallen out with over the organisation's functioning and political strategy such as Lazarus 'Uncle Mbwila' Petrus, but also rival associations of former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers.[71]

In 2016, Ndeunyema also introduced me to former SWATF and Koevoet members in South Africa, who had never been part of NAMVET but helped me with my research, namely Erasmus Hafeni, who had served in both Koevoet and SWATF, and left Namibia to South Africa in 1990. With regard to 32 Battalion, Chris Molebatsi introduced me to a community of former soldiers in the mining town of Dingleton in South Africa. Molebatsi had met them as part of his work for the Bench Marks Foundation, a South African NGO working on corporate social responsibility, with a particular focus on the mining sector.[72] Through these initial contacts, I also met my ad hoc research assistants and interpreters, who introduced me to other former soldiers (see below).

[71] See also L. Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers: The Case of Black Namibian Soldiers in South Africa's Former Security Forces', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), 195-214.
[72] See Bench Marks Foundation, 'Dingleton relocation severely affecting community', 3 June 2015, available at https://www.bench-marks.org.za/press/gap10/dingletonrelocationnotagreatcasestudy.pdf, retrieved 10 June 2018.

My research was further influenced and complicated by former soldiers' view of me as a privileged, white, foreign PhD student. Many people thought that I would be able to establish connections between them and other researchers, politicians, and/or aid organisations across the world, and hoped that some form of financial or material assistance would result from my research. Several times, I was told to retell the stories of former soldiers in order to clear their name so that other people would learn about their fate and come to their help.[73] As a result, I was careful to explain that I was not affiliated with any political or aid organisation, and that I did not want to give anyone false hopes or expectations about my work's ultimate impact. Instead, I emphasised that, as part of my studies at the University of Oxford, I was writing a book focusing on the history of former soldiers through which I hoped to more widely share their stories and experiences in Namibia, South Africa, and beyond.

Since I wanted people to feel (more) free and comfortable, the interviews were conducted in people's primary language.[74] Except for a few cases where the person preferred to speak in English, I therefore relied on 'on the spot' interpreters. In Namibia, the interpreters were all former soldiers: Jabulani Ndeunyema and Lazarus 'Uncle Mbwila' Petrus for interviews in Oshiwambo in northern Namibia; and Uapiruka Papama, Harold Tjihoto, and Burden Muharukwa for interviews in Otjiherero in Windhoek. In South Africa, the interpreters were young family members of former soldiers: Naftali 'Simi' João for interviews in Portuguese, Chokwe, and Ganguela in the case of former 32

[73] For a discussion of a similar experience in research on the so-called 'dirty war' in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, see A. Robben, 'Ethnographic Seduction, Transference, and Resistance in Dialogues about Terror and Violence in Argentina', *Ethos*, 24, 1 (1996), 71-106.
[74] See J. Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 3.

Battalion members; and Cecilia Paulus for interviews in Oshiwambo in the case of former SWATF and Koevoet members.

While these interpreters lacked professional training, their work was essential not only with regard to translation but establishing a relationship of trust. They usually knew the interviewee personally, introduced me, and helped explain my research project to them. Through our conversations beyond the interviews, they also helped me to better understand the context of my research, and the people I was speaking to. Professionally trained translators later transcribed and translated selected interviews that I had tape-recorded, which allowed me to double-check the interpreters' translations.

The interviews were of course the result of an interactive process between the interviewee and myself, the interviewer (as well as the interpreter). On my part, I usually started the process by asking people about their life history before posing some broad questions, such as why they joined the security forces, and asking them to elaborate on certain answers they gave.[75] As much as possible, I tried to remain conscious of the extent to which my questions reflected my own research agenda and methodological biases, and therefore gave priority to what my interviewees wished to tell.[76] As a result, I often adjusted or discarded particular questions, while formulating and adding new ones. Furthermore, I was particularly sensitive to people's experiences of traumatic wartime events, such as accounts of battle, especially because I have had no psychological training.[77] I

[75] Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 3-4.
[76] L. White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 22-3; A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 103.
[77] Compare to S. Onslow and A. Berry, *Why Did You Fight? Narratives of Rhodesian Identity During the Insurgency, 1972-1980* (Bristol: University of West England, 2010), 5. My application to the South African San Council to conduct interviews with former members of the SADF's 31

therefore never probed into such experiences, and instead tried to let the interviewees set the boundaries of the interview.[78] These concerns were also the reason why I decided not to push or argue with interviewees in order to find out what they 'cared enough about to defend', as some oral historians, such Luise White, have advised and as some readers might think I ought to have done.[79]

With regard to my interviewees' influence on the interview process, I have paid particular attention to three interrelated factors: understanding the personal and social agenda of their stories; discerning collective trends across individual accounts; and situating both within the larger historical and political contexts.[80] I discuss these influences in more detail at the beginning of each chapter. Critical awareness of these dynamics was particularly important because, as Leigh Payne writes, collaborators and perpetrators of violence tend to 'portray themselves as forces of "good" against the forces of "evil" [and] blame their enemies … for the violence'.[81] However, like other researchers of collaboration, I have sought (and sometimes struggled) to avoid both simple condemnation of my interviewees' choices and actions, and moral relativism toward them.[82] As Sharika Thiranagama and Tobias Kelly argue, collaboration 'is reproduced in the "grey zones" of political life, destabilizing the rigid moral binaries of victim and perpetrator', and its study therefore requires 'fine-grained

'Bushman' Battalion was not approved because 'the proposed research is very traumatic': L. Snyders, Director of the South African San Council, personal communication via email, 18 July 2016.

[78] See Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique*, 17.

[79] White, *The Comforts of Home,* 26.

[80] J. Sangster, 'Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History', *Women's History Review*, 3, 1 (1994), 7; E. Jessee, 'The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings', *The Oral History Review*, 28, 2 (2011), 300.

[81] L.A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 21. See also L.A. Payne, 'Collaborators and the Politics of Memory in Chile', *Human Rights Review*, 2, 3 (2001), 8-26.

[82] See, in particular, Dlamini, *Askari*. 1-10.

descriptions of the dilemmas and choices faced by people who are accused of acts of treason'.[83]

In order to further supplement and situate the interviews, I also consulted a number of archives: the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek; the Historical Papers research archive at the University of Witwatersrand (specifically the collection of the 'Missing Voices' oral history project); the online archives of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC); and the online archives of various South African and Namibian newspapers (in particular those of *The Namibian* newspaper). In addition, I have made use of written accounts by white former commanders, in particular of 32 Battalion. These sources provided not only further interview material but critical context for interpreting and understanding my interviewees' stories and experiences. Taken together, the interview and written material allowed me to address and navigate the biases in both these sources. At the same time, my interviewees' stories complicate discussions by traditional military historians focused on military campaigns and exploits, and call into question the often-glorifying accounts written by white former soldiers. Instead of adventure, camaraderie, and heroism, their stories speak of hardship, abuse, and abandonment.

In sum, I do not claim that the stories and experiences explored in this study are representative of those of all former members of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF. However, these oral histories are crucial to broach topics that archival sources often cannot, such as the histories of former soldiers before they joined the security forces or their subsequent experiences of 'soldiering' and military

[83] S. Thiranagama and T. Kelly, 'Introduction: Specters of Treason', in S. Thiranagama and T. Kelly (eds.), *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1, 22.

culture. More broadly, my interviewees' accounts shed new light onto southern Africa's liberation struggles and their legacies, and wider trans- and un-national processes that have shaped the region's political and military history to this day.

Thesis Outline

The rest of this study is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I present a historical overview of 'collaboration' spanning from the beginnings of German colonial rule in Namibia in the late 1880s until the country's independence in 1990. The chapter's focus is on the long history of African soldiers' involvement in different colonial armies, as well as the fractures between and among political groups that were exploited by the German and South African colonial regime. I argue that these divisive dynamics – often along ethnic, regional, trans- and un-national lines – are central to understanding the recruitment of black Namibians into South Africa's security forces from 1975 until 1989. As Tara Zahra notes, 'we cannot write history from multiple "sides" without questioning how those "sides" were first constituted'.[84]

In the following two chapters, I discuss how and why black Namibians and Angolans came to fight in South Africa's security forces. Their accounts complicate their popular portrayal as collaborators and mercenaries, and show that the notion of national liberation often had limited relevance to their motives and actions.[85] In Chapter 3, I explore the diverse and complex motivations for

[84] T. Zahra, 'Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis', *Slavic Review*, 69, 1 (2010), 116.
[85] See also White and Larmer, 'Introduction', 1271.

why black Namibians enlisted in SWATF and Koevoet. I argue that understanding their 'voluntary' decision to join requires the examination of non-economic motivations, largely disregarded in previous research, as well as broader social and political divisions that emerged in the context of war. More specifically, I discuss three factors: the role of traditional authorities in military recruitment; the alienation by and search for protection against guerrilla violence; and the influence of South African propaganda. In addition, I argue that the reasons for joining the security forces were the same as those for remaining in them.

In Chapter 4, I turn to Angola to examine the transnational origins and formation of the SADF's 32 Battalion, which consisted predominantly of black former guerrillas from Angola. My argument is two-fold. First, the common depiction of these soldiers as 'mercenaries' fails to capture the sheer mobility and contingency of their transnational trajectories from anti-colonial guerrillas to SADF soldiers. Second, these troops' transfer of allegiance to the SADF must be understood in the context of the fractures of Angolan nationalism, and the country's chaotic decolonisation process.

In Chapter 5, I compare the military cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF, in particular its 101 Battalion. I show that, contrary to their frequent depiction as one static, undifferentiated group, these units developed distinct military cultures. The units' military cultures differed, often drastically, with regard to the training and enforcement of discipline among troops, the relationship between black soldiers and white officers, and the troops' understanding of their unit's military and political mission. I argue that these aspects and their differences were shaped by the units' original formation and leadership, and in turn influenced the ways in which they operated during the

war. The units' culture and organisation also deeply impacted their members' post-war trajectories, which I will discuss in the following two chapters.

In Chapter 6, I examine the post-war politics of associations of black former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia. Unlike their counterparts in the rest of southern Africa, they have not been persecuted or silenced. In fact, different groups of former soldiers have repeatedly and publicly demonstrated for recognition by the government led by their former enemy-turned-ruling party, SWAPO. In doing so, they have sought to contest the ruling party's official history and its conception of citizenship rooted in the participation in the liberation struggle. I argue that two main factors explain the former soldiers' particular position: SWAPO's approach toward them, characterised by both reconciliation and disregard; and significant support for the former soldiers' grievances by opposition parties, civil society organisations, and wider parts of the Namibian population.

In Chapter 7, I turn to the very different post-war trajectory of former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members who moved to South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After South Africa's transition from apartheid, the majority of them left the security forces, and have since ended up working in the private security or military industry in South Africa and around the globe. I argue that their employment in this industry must be understood not simply in terms of the marketability of their military skills but in the context of two wider interrelated legacies of transnational war and military culture: the post-war continuation of organisation and power relations among former security force units, and the social and economic isolation of former soldiers in South Africa. In a sense, the

former soldiers, and their families, have become stranded in a country whose former regime they had fought for but where they felt they did not truly belong.

Chapter 2 – A History of 'Collaboration' in Namibia from Colonial Conquest to Independence, 1884-1990

In this chapter, I present a historical overview from the beginnings of German colonial rule in Namibia in the late 1880s until Namibian independence in 1990 with a critical focus on 'collaboration'. I argue that various divisive dynamics along social, political, regional as well as trans- and un-national lines – some of them tracing back to German occupation – are essential to understanding the recruitment of black Namibians into South Africa's security forces from the mid-1970s onwards. As Jan Gross points out with regard to Europe during the Second World War:

> What we conceive today as akin to treason … makes reference to a vastly more complex set of behavioural options as they were perceived at the time. There is … a social history of collaboration that precedes and illuminates collaboration as a political phenomenon – and makes it intelligible.[1]

There are two central aspects to the social history presented here, which I want to highlight. First, there was a long, often 'transnational' history of African troops who, for diverse reasons, fought in and alongside colonial militaries in today's Namibia, which preceded the recruitment of Namibian soldiers during the South African occupation. Second, the periods of both German and South African colonial rule were characterised by fractures between and among different African groups, geographical differences in the experience of colonial occupation, and competing political aspirations. Contrary to the dominant nationalist narrative, as Metsola stresses, 'encounters with colonial practices and the degree

[1] J.T. Gross, 'Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration', in I. Deák, J.T. Gross, and T. Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28.

of support for Swapo varied in different parts of the country [as] multiple divisions opened up within Namibian society' during decades of war.[2] These divisions, including within the ruling party, have continued to play a crucial part in debates around citizenship and belonging in post-independence Namibia (see Chapter 6).[3]

German Colonial Rule, 1884-1915

The German colonial conquest of Namibia, then South West Africa (SWA), relied heavily on local allies and recruits, and was marked by shifting divisions, fractures, and alliances among and between political groups. 'Colonialism', as Timothy Parsons writes, 'created new social divisions and centres of power in local communities, and so the targets of African resistance … were never clear'.[4] Like during the later struggle against South African occupation, people often faced 'multiple and conflicting pressures, producing particular mixtures of complicity and ambiguity', in the words of Thiranagama and Kelly.[5] People, in short, did not simply face a binary choice of 'resistance' or 'collaboration'.

Namibia was declared a German colony at the Berlin Conference in 1884, and a first contingent of German troops arrived in the country four years later.[6] Germany made no attempt to occupy northern Namibia as it considered the Ovambo kingdoms in the region too 'populous and well-armed … to be easily

[2] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 84.
[3] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 591.
[4] Parsons, 'African Participation', 260.
[5] Thiranagama and Kelly, 'Introduction', 17.
[6] P. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (London: James Currey, 1988), 7.

subdued'.[7] North of the so-called 'Red Line', the colonial administration relied on 'protection' treaties with local leaders that ensured migrant labour to the mines in the south of the territory.[8] In southern and central Namibia, termed the 'Police Zone', Germany established and consolidated colonial rule as much through its superior military power as its policy of divide and rule, exploiting existing tensions among and between political groups.

In 1890, for instance, German colonial authorities directly intervened in the succession struggle for the Herero paramount chieftaincy after the death of Chief Maharero. His son, Samuel Maharero, successfully appealed to colonial authorities to back his claim to succession, emphasising his support for German authority.[9] From 1892 onwards, troops of Maharero joined the German army, the *Schutztruppe*, in the violent suppression of armed resistance against German colonisation by various groups, such as Khauas, Mbanderu, Swartbooi, as well as eastern Herero, whose resistance Maharero perceived as a direct challenge to his own authority.[10] Like other rulers in Namibia and other African colonial contexts, Maharero recognised that the alliance with the colonial authorities could facilitate his own political objectives.[11] The *Schutztruppe* also directly employed substantial numbers of Herero men in both combatant and non-combatant positions. 'Indeed, ever since the arrival of the *Schutztruppe*', as Jan-Bart Gewald writes, 'Herero had been involved and associated with the German military'.[12]

[7] The Berlin agreements of 1884 had divided the Ovambo region, which straddled southern Angola and northern Namibia, between Germany and Portugal: P. Hayes, 'Order Out of Chaos: Mandume ya Ndemufayo and Oral History', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (1993), 90.
[8] Hayes, 'Order Out of Chaos', 90.
[9] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 7; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 134-5.
[10] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 8; J.B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 204.
[11] See Isaacman and Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration', 58.
[12] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 204.

In 1895, Maharero accompanied the German colonial military, the *Schutztruppe*, to delineate and enforce the northern frontier of so-called 'Hereroland'. According to Gewald, German authorities were 'anxious to prevent contact, and thus the development of an alliance between the Herero chieftains of Hereroland and the Ovambo kingdoms that lay to their north'.[13] As for Maharero, his cooperation in the enforcement of such new boundaries not only earned him a salary from the German administration but enabled him to establish his authority over political and economic rivals.[14]

From 1895 onwards, German military campaigns also comprised the troops of Chief Hendrik Witbooi from southern Namibia. In the 1880s, Witbooi had become a leading Nama chief and military figure through cattle raids on other Nama clans and Herero settlements before being forced to sign a protection treaty with Germany in August 1894.[15] As Wallace writes, African soldiers formed 'a significant element of the early German military campaigns in Namibia', who, like their later counterparts during South African occupation, supplied 'both vital local knowledge and the skills to survive in the arid bush'.[16]

In January 1904, rising conflict and tension caused by the expansion of German settler colonialism erupted in the so-called German-Namibian War.[17] The Germany military's response to armed attacks and insurrection by African forces was brutal and devastating. In August 1904, Herero forces under Maharero suffered a decisive defeat at Otjozondjupa (Waterberg), and the

[13] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*,, 92.
[14] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 138.
[15] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 7-8; Wallace, *A History of Namibia,* 139-40, 146.
[16] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 134.
[17] For the origins and course of the war, see Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 141-191, and Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 155-61.

survivors fled into the Kalahari Desert pursued by German troops.[18] Unlike the vast majority of the Herero, Maharero and some of his followers reached safety in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (today's Botswana), where their descendants have continued to live since.[19] By the end of the war in 1908, the German forces had committed genocide against the peoples of southern and central Namibia, having killed, according to some estimates, 75-80 per cent of the Herero population, 35-50 per cent of the Nama population, and an unknown number of other groups.[20] Those who survived battle, flight, and imprisonment in concentration camps 'were left propertyless, landless, and leaderless'.[21]

Divisions and alliances had often shifted during the German-Namibian War – as they would during the later war of independence.[22] After initially fighting on the German side, the troops of Hendrik Witbooi turned against their former ally in October 1904. Some Damara groups fought on the Herero side while others sided with the Germans, remained neutral, or fled from the fighting.[23] Again, people's motives for siding with the Germans were varied and complex. Among the Herero, for instance, some prisoners of war were forcibly recruited by the Germans, and 'sent out to persuade Herero remaining in the field to come into collection points or to hand themselves over'.[24] Following the war, substantial numbers of Herero orphans, who had been taken into German military service as mascots, servants, and labourers (so-called *Bambusen*), became regular soldiers

[18] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 171.
[19] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 176.
[20] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 155; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 10. With the exception of the Ndonga King Nehale, who aided refugees fleeing north, the Ovambo kings did not attempt to intervene directly in the war: Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 178.
[21] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 192; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 155.
[22] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 156.
[23] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 156-161.
[24] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 204-5.

in the *Schutztruppe*.[25] After the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, some Herero soldiers briefly fought alongside German troops against invading South African forces.

South African Rule, 1915-45

After the *Schutztruppe*'s defeat and the end of German rule in July 1915, South African forces, representing Britain, occupied the territory.[26] From the beginning, South Africa enforced and consolidated its rule in Namibia through violence as well as alliances with local and 'transnational' allies, soldiers, and informers. During the fighting in 1914-15, various groups of African soldiers in Namibia sided with different colonial forces. However, these groups were not motivated by a sense of colonial loyalty but rather by more local and immediate concerns.[27]

In Kavango in northern Namibia, the Kwangali king and his troops successfully assisted the Germans in the fighting against approaching Portuguese forces, and obtained full possession of their land after the German withdrawal.[28] At the same time, Vita Tom, a warlord also known as *Oorlog* ('war' in Afrikaans), and his followers attacked German forces, assisting the Portuguese, under whose rule they had previously engaged in plunder and cattle raids in southern

[25] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 205.
[26] R. Dale, 'The Armed Forces as an Instrument of South African Policy in Namibia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 18, 1 (1980), 59-60.
[27] Compare to M. Thomas and G. Curless, 'Introduction: Decolonization, Conflict and Counter-Insurgency', in M. Thomas and G. Curless (eds.), *Decolonization and Conflict: Colonial Comparisons and Legacies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 8.
[28] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 206.

Angola.[29] South Africa's forces, meanwhile, included Herero soldiers, who had been dispatched by Maharero but fought under South African command in hopes of regaining control of their land.[30] In short, these actors did not 'collaborate' but formed strategic alliances with colonial forces, pursuing their own specific objectives.

After assuming control in 1915, South Africa began to rule Namibia under martial law, enforced by the Union Defence Force (UDF), and turned towards northern Namibia, which had not experienced direct colonial occupation by Germany.[31] The UDF 'was to complete the task of colonisation begun by the Germans' by bringing the north under South African indirect rule.[32] The largest Ovambo kingdom in the north at the time was the Kwanyama kingdom, divided between Namibia and Portuguese-occupied Angola and led by King Mandume ya Ndemufayo.[33]

When a devastating famine ravaged the Ovambo region in 1915, Portuguese forces seized the opportunity to attack and defeat Mandume's forces in northern Oukwanyama, forcing the king to move his capital south into Namibia. South Africa, whose forces had simultaneously and without force occupied southern Ovamboland, granted Mandume 'protection'.[34] When Mandume increasingly defied the terms of protection, South Africa began preparations to depose him,

[29] Vita Tom's followers also included refugees form the German-Namibian war: J.B. Gewald, 'On Becoming a Chief in the Kaokoveld, Colonial Namibia, 1916-25', *Journal of African History*, 52 (2011), 28.
[30] Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 231.
[31] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 205-6.
[32] Dale, 'The Armed Forces', 61.
[33] J. Silvester, M. Wallace, and P. Hayes, '"Trees Never Meet": Mobility and Containment: An Overview, 1915-1946', in P. Hayes, J. Silvester, M. Wallace, and W. Hartmann (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility and Containment, 1915-46* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 9.
[34] Hayes, 'Order Out of Chaos', 91.

relying on information provided by local allies, such as the Ndonga King.[35] In February 1917, Mandume, the last king of the Kwanyama, died in battle against South African colonial forces sent to remove him.[36] The Ovambo famine, as Gewald writes, had 'spelled the end of the independence of the Ovambo chiefs and their politics'.[37]

The following two decades saw the first emerging ideas of 'African' nationalism, a growing crisis of legitimacy of traditional authorities, and severe political repression. From this period, a sustained nationalist movement would emerge after the Second World War.[38] In January 1921, South Africa, on behalf of Britain, began to govern Namibia on the new legal basis of a League of Nations mandate.[39] The South African regime systematically continued and extended the land expropriations of Germany, introduced forced labour practices, and, as part of its policies of racial segregation, instituted pass laws and established 'native reserves' for Africans.[40] In the 1920s and 1930s, both armed and unarmed resistance to South Africa's policies were met with violent suppression by the UDF, such as in the case of rebellions by the Bondelswart community in 1922, the Rehoboth community in 1925, and Ukwambi King Ipumbu in Ovamboland in 1932.[41]

At the same time, the colonial regime began to increasingly supplant ageing traditional leaders, who had derived their legitimacy from pre-colonial or early colonial times, with a new generation of younger rulers deemed more

[35] P. Hayes, *A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c. 1880-1935* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), 223-31.
[36] Hayes, 'Order Out of Chaos', 91.
[37] J.B. Gewald, 'Near Death in the Streets of Karibib: Famine, Migrant Labour and the Coming of Ovambo to Central Namibia', *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 239.
[38] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 206.
[39] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 205-6.
[40] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 14; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 205, 218.
[41] Dale, 'The Armed Forces', 62; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 18-9.

'progressive'.[42] As in other contexts such as South Africa, chiefs and headmen had historically played a central part in the recruitment of migrant labourers and soldiers.[43] However, under South African rule, traditional leaders in Namibia became more closely involved in the exploitative migrant labour system and its enforcement as they had an active interest in its profitable functioning. In Ovamboland, for example, colonial authorities began in the 1920s to use taxes raised on migrant labourers to pay traditional leaders, and therefore encourage their continued cooperation with the South African state.[44] The position of chiefs and headmen had begun to fundamentally change: they were no longer independent actors making military alliances to pursue and protect their own interests but salaried employees of the South African colonial state. As Wallace writes,

> the unpopularity of this new generation of [traditional leaders] and their cooperation with the administration would lead to a crisis of legitimacy for traditional authority, as their subjects turned instead to the churches and to the new nationalist movements.[45]

During the Second World War, South Africa's forced military recruitment was extended to Namibia, where between 5,000-7,000 African soldiers were enlisted, and again heavily relied on cooperative traditional authorities acting as recruiting agents.[46] Chiefs and headmen were not only encouraged to visit so-

[42] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 233.
[43] See, for example, P. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); A. Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987). See also A. Lissoni, 'Chieftaincy and Resistance Politics in Lehurutshe During the Apartheid Era', *New Contree*, 67 (2013), 63.
[44] A.D. Cooper, 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 1 (1999), 121-38. See also T. Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, *1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein, 1999), 203-10.
[45] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 233.
[46] R.J. Gordon, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (1993), 147-65; D. Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010), 74-5. For South Africa, see L. Grundlingh, 'The

called 'holding camps' of recruits but were automatically given non-commissioned officer status when they enlisted.[47] Some traditional leaders had more complex motives and incentives, beyond personal economic gain, to assist in military recruitment. According to Robert Gordon, Chief Hosea Kutako, the Herero Paramount Chief, aimed to 'neutralise [younger political rivals] by having them immured in the Army'.[48] Like others, Kutako did not just passively collaborate with the colonial state but actively used his connection to it to protect his political authority.

The majority of recruits came from the traditional migrant labour reservoirs of Ovamboland, in particular the Kwanyama region, which suffered from 'severe population pressure'. Economic motivations, namely high military wages, seem to have been the most important factor for Africans to enlist.[49] However, according to Meredith McKittrick's interviewees in the region, some 'men who were not already working [as migrant labourers] were forced into service … and people went to great lengths to avoid being drafted, including fleeing to Angola'.[50] While a handful of soldiers saw active service as part of the South African Native Military Corps, most were employed in non-combatant labour roles in South Africa.[51] Following the Second World War, the rise of nationalism

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Recruitment of South African Blacks for Participation in the Second World War', in D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 185-6. For the British High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland, Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, 68-74.

[47] Gordon, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia', 154. See also Grundlingh, 'The Recruitment of South African Blacks', 186.

[48] Gordon, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia', 155.

[49] Gordon, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia', 153-156.

[50] M. McKittrick, 'Generational Struggles and Social Mobility in Western Ovambo Communities, 1915-1954', in Hayes et al. (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule*, 246, n20.

[51] Gordon, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia', 156; Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, 74-5.

complicated and challenged such 'collaboration' with the colonial state and its military.[52]

Fragmented Nationalism, 1945-74

The years following the Second World War saw the growth of organised resistance to South African rule, and the emergence of distinct and often conflicting strands of Namibian nationalism – similarly to everywhere else in Africa. [53] However, as Jeremy Silvester writes, 'the post-independence concentration on the history of [nationalist] resistance to white colonial rule has led to a neglect of [alternative political] dynamics'.[54] The post-war political context in Namibia was characterised by new and growing divisions, and competing political visions. These divisions and conflicts were the result of conflicting social and political projects that, in the words of Kelly, 'blur the boundary between consent and coercion, loyalty and betrayal'.[55]

In 1945, the South African government rejected plans by the newly-formed United Nations (UN), which had replaced the League of Nations, to hand over the responsibility for its mandate of Namibia. South Africa instead requested the incorporation of Namibia as a fifth province, which the UN refused in December 1946. In 1948, the National Party won the elections, and, in defiance of the UN, began the implementation of the apartheid system, and the *de facto*

[52] Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', 170; Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 6.
[53] L. Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means* (Basel: P. Schlettwein, 1998), 27.
[54] J. Silvester, 'Forging the Fifth Province', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 3 (2015), 518.
[55] T. Kelly, 'In a Treacherous State: The Fear of Collaboration Among West Bank Palestinians', in Thiranagama and Kelly (eds.), *Traitors*, 184.

incorporation of Namibia.[56] From the 1960s, the South African government, as previously in South Africa, began to restructure the native reserves along racial and ethnic lines into nominally independent 'homelands' or Bantustans, often through forced removals.[57] Through these developments, the regime promoted the construction of sub-national homeland identities, which it 'manipulated [and] distorted … to the point where to this day "ethnic" divisions have been a source of conflict'.[58]

Opposition to these developments was initially led by the Herero Chief's Council under Chief Hosea Kutako, the chosen representative of Samuel Maharero in Namibia.[59] Kutako had been prepared to make some compromises with the South African authorities during the interwar period but he had become disillusioned with growing land expropriation and impoverishment under South African rule.[60] Through the British Anglican priest Michael Scott, Kutako brought the first petitions to the UN, which, given Namibia's history as a League of Nations mandate, remained a central focus of the nationalist struggle until independence in 1990.[61] Kutako and other nationalist traditional leaders, as Lauren Dobell writes, also 'served as a symbolic link between early traditions of resistance and the birth of new forms of political activity'.[62]

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[56] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 244-5.
[57] A. du Pisani, 'State and Society under South African Rule', in C. Keulder (ed.), *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2000), 64-8.
[58] S.P. Lekgoathi, 'Chiefs, Migrants and North Ndebele Ethnicity in the Context of Surrounding Homeland Politics, 1965-1978', *African Studies*, 62, 1 (2003), 71; P.S. Jones, '"To Come Together for Progress": Modernization and Nation-Building in South Africa's Bantustan Periphery – The Case of Bophuthatswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 4 (1999), 583.
[59] R. Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013), 39; J.B. Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3 (2004), 561.
[60] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, 27; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 244.
[61] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 245-7.
[62] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 27.

By early 1960, two major nationalist organisations, both of which had different ethnic and social bases, had been formed: the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), and the South West African National Union (SWANU). Like most early nationalist parties in southern Africa, SWAPO had transnational origins, namely in a group of Namibian migrant workers based in Cape Town, who had formed the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) in 1958. The following year, the OPC became the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) under the leadership of Sam Nujoma before eventually being reconstituted as SWAPO in June 1960 after a failed merger with SWANU.[63] SWAPO and its predecessors comprised predominantly migrant labourers from Ovamboland, and, like the Herero Chief's Council and SWANU, sent representatives, notably Mburumba Kerina, to campaign for national independence at the United Nations from 1957.[64] Unlike SWANU, however, SWAPO soon actively sought to include people from other ethnic and social groups beyond its traditional stronghold in rural Ovamboland.[65]

With the backing of the Herero Chief's Council, SWANU was established by the South West Africa Progressive Association (SWAPA) and other smaller political groups in August 1959. It comprised a largely Herero membership of students, schoolteachers and other members of the growing black intelligentsia.[66] In the beginning, OPO was also represented in SWANU with Nujoma as an executive member.[67] Due to various internal conflicts, SWANU's attempt to form an umbrella nationalist movement, including OPO, was short-lived. Whereas the

[63] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance* 41, 44.
[64] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 27; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 247.
[65] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 50.
[66] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 249; Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 27.
[67] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 43.

Herero Chief's Council intended to build a mass movement based on its own system of authority, SWAPA aimed to create a new movement transcending 'traditional' loyalties, especially to traditional authorities.[68] In addition, SWANU leaders under president Jariretundu Kozunguizi sought to distance themselves from the Herero Chief's Council's 'tribal politics' and to challenge its authority when they opposed the nomination of Clemens Kapuuo as Kutako's deputy and assumed successor. In April 1960, the Herero Chief's Council withdrew its support from SWANU, and subsequently strengthened its cooperation with SWAPO (then still OPO).[69]

In the early and mid-1960s, the nationalist political scene in Namibia was characterised by increasing fragmentation and conflict, on the one hand, and the growing importance of inter- and transnational processes of recognition, on the other.[70] A number of new nationalist organisations were formed with, for example, the Herero Chief's Council establishing its own party, the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), in December 1964. Its leaders were Kutako, Kapuuo, and Kerina, who had left SWAPO two years earlier. Peter Katjavivi argues that NUDO 'was probably formed as an attempt by the Council to give itself a new, overtly political image to enable it to compete with SWANU and SWAPO'.[71] At the same time, the rivalry between SWANU and SWAPO intensified

[68] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 42; Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 40.
[69] In 1959, the Herero Chief's Council had sent Jariretundu Kzonguizi to petition the UN: Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 43-4; Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 39-40; R.F. Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa: Regional Dynamics of Decolonization, 1945-1990* (London: Kegan Paul, 1994), 34.
[70] A. du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1986), 150.
[71] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 52.

as a result of their leaders' conflicting ambitions, and SWAPO's growing strength and membership, both nationally and transnationally.[72]

Most significantly, by mid-1965, SWAPO had secured sole recognition by the newly formed Organisation of African Unity (OAU) after the organisation had initially recognised both SWAPO and SWANU, as it did in the case of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of South Africa.[73] There were a number of reasons for this development but the most important one was that the OAU's material and financial assistance was made contingent on the creation of a military force and engagement in armed struggle. While SWANU refused and subsequently declined into international irrelevance, SWAPO readily agreed and launched its transnational, armed struggle in August 1966.[74] The OAU's recognition legitimised SWAPO's violence, and allowed the organisation to present its armed struggle as part of its nation-building efforts, and its opponents as 'collaborators' and 'traitors' to 'the nation'.[75]

In 1972, NUDO, SWANU, SWAPO's internal wing, and a number of smaller groups launched another attempt at coordinated political action within Namibia through the so-called National Convention. Under the leadership of Kapuuo, who had become Herero Paramount Chief after Kutako's death in 1970, the National Convention sought the UN's recognition as the representative organisation of the Namibian liberation struggle. The National Convention thus came into conflict with SWAPO's external leadership, who had successfully managed to lobby for considerable international support. The conflict worsened when, in 1973, the UN

[72] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 28; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 52.
[73] C. Saunders, 'SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee', *South African Historical Journal,* 70, 1 (2018), 152-67.
[74] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 53; Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 41.
[75] See also Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 7.

General Assembly recognised SWAPO, rather than the National Convention, as the 'authentic representative of the Namibian people'.[76] As a result, the National Convention began to break up, and SWAPO eventually withdrew its support in late 1974.[77] 'The split between SWAPO and the Herero leadership', Wallace writes, 'proved of long duration'.[78]

In September 1975, Kapuuo participated in the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference initiated by the South African regime in response to increasing internal unrest and international pressure.[79] The Turnhalle Conference became central to South African politics of 'controlled change' during the transitional process of Namibia's decolonisation.[80] While the conference was intended as a moderate and legitimate alternative to SWAPO, it essentially constituted 'a reinvention of the Bantustan policy' as participants were appointed by South Africa on a racial, ethnic, and 'tribal' basis.[81] The process also laid the basis for the formation of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a coalition of multiple political parties united in opposition to SWAPO, in 1977. Resistance to the Turnhalle Conference was led by Namibian churches and SWAPO, which was joined by a growing number of other organisations.[82]

Kapuuo explained that he participated in the Turnhalle Conference for two reasons: first, to consolidate the Herero position, and then, to bargain for the safeguarding and reallocation of economic resources, notably land, in Herero

[76] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 278.
[77] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 92-3; Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, 254, 260.
[78] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 278.
[79] K.W. Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 250; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 95, 99; Wallace, 278, 286. For an analysis of Kapuuo's decision to participate, see Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 563-5.
[80] Du Pisani, 'State and Society under South African Rule', 69-71.
[81] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 287-8.
[82] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 288.

possession.[83] Like other Namibian leaders before him, Kapuuo seems to have opted for 'compromise settlements for fear of losing everything through armed resistance'.[84] In other words, the nationalist ideology of Kapuuo and his Council remained closely tied to the loss of land during the German colonial period. According to Kapuuo, SWAPO, as a predominantly Ovambo organisation, did not share this deeply traumatic experience.[85]

Given Kapuuo's political standing, his participation in the Turnhalle Conference was a major coup for the South African regime.[86] In the eyes of his opponents, including SWAPO, it exposed him as a 'collaborator' of apartheid rule. In late 1976, the existing split between Kapuuo and SWAPO was further deepened when the UN Generally Assembly, sceptical of the Turnhalle Conference, recognised SWAPO as the 'sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people'.[87] The decision cemented SWAPO's seemingly unquestionable dominance, both in Namibia and abroad. 'Loyalty to Namibia', Henning Melber writes, '[became] equated with loyalty to SWAPO', as captured in the organisation's slogan of 'SWAPO is the nation and the nation is SWAPO'.[88] Thus, the decision alienated a significant minority of Namibians, particularly the supporters of the DTA and Kapuuo.[89] This minority also included groups with other political agendas that, as Metsola points out, attempted 'to find an alternative political space between colonial power and potential SWAPO rule'.[90]

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[83] Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 565; Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, 286.
[84] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 147.
[85] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 278. See also Kapuuo's response to SWAPO's withdrawal in January 1975 quoted in Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 92-3.
[86] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 99.
[87] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 100.
[88] Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 42, 87.
[89] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 289.
[90] Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 134-5.

At the end of February 1978, a series of violent clashes, which appeared to follow ethnic divisions, broke out in Katutura, Windhoek. The newspapers at the time described the violence as being between the DTA and SWAPO, with the parties as respective stand-ins for 'Herero' and 'Ovambo'.[91] On 27 March 1978, Kapuuo was gunned down and killed under dubious circumstances in the back of his shop in Katutura.[92] Almost immediately, clashes broke out between SWAPO militants and 'gangs' of Herero, who were allegedly armed by South African security forces.[93] Following the assassination of Kapuuo, Gewald argues, 'the war in Namibia became highly ethnicised' as many Herero believed that Kapuuo 'had been killed by SWAPO (and thus Ovambo) guerrillas', and turned their backs on SWAPO to join the DTA.[94] Kapuuo's successor, Kuaima Riruako, became even more closely identified with the South African regime and the DTA.[95]

South Africa blamed Kapuuo's assassination on SWAPO, and used it to justify both its crackdown on the organisation within Namibia, and its increased military presence in northern Namibia and southern Angola.[96] In this context of an escalating transnational war against SWAPO, South Africa began to 'Namibianise' its security forces, that is, to recruit an increasing number of black Namibian troops. The strategy sought to exploit divisions, particularly along ethnic and regional lines, and to reduce the risk of ethnic groups coordinating

[91] Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 567.
[92] One of Kapuuo's bodyguards had been killed three weeks earlier after he had opened fire on a crowd of SWAPO supporters: Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 567; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 102.
[93] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 102; Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 568.
[94] Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 569.
[95] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 102.
[96] Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 570-1.

against the apartheid state under a nationalist mantle.[97] Before I turn to discussing the Namibianisation of South Africa's security forces from the mid-1970s, it is necessary to briefly backtrack and discuss the transnational developments of SWAPO's armed struggle from 1966 until 1974.

SWAPO's Armed Struggle, 1966-74

The first battle between SWAPO guerrillas and South African security forces took place at Ongulumbashe on 26 August 1966, and marked the beginning of an increasingly transnational war fought across boundaries of geography, institutions, and military units. Two months later, the UN General Assembly formally declared the South African occupation of Namibia illegal, and assumed responsibility for the territory, which provided SWAPO with important international legitimation for its armed struggle.[98] Until the early 1970s, few further battles took place, and the South African Police (SAP) was in direct control of the counterinsurgency effort.[99] During this period, the SAP first began with the local recruitment of a handful of armed black policemen.[100] In late 1971 and early 1972, this situation of low-level conflict began to radically change.

In June 1971, the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion found the continued presence of South Africa in Namibia to be illegal, which helped trigger

[97] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 455; Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 134; L.J. Fosse, 'Negotiating the Nation: Ethnicity, Nationalism and Nation-Building in Independent Namibia', *Nations and Nationalism*, 3, 3 (2007), 440.
[98] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 58; Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 35-6; Southall, *South African Historical Journal*, 41-2.
[99] Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report – Volume 2* (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), 63.
[100] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 253.

a massive contract workers' strike as well as a rural revolt in northern Namibia in early 1972.[101] The South African regime responded by, for the first time, deploying the SADF, which was assisted by Portuguese troops that had crossed into Namibia. In February 1972, the government declared a state of emergency in Ovamboland through proclamations, which imposed a virtual state of martial law by, among other measures, banning public meetings and allowing indefinite detention without trial.[102] In addition, the SAP expanded its units in the territory and developed its paramilitary and counterinsurgency training.[103] By early 1974, however, it had become clear that these measures had not only failed to stem the rising tide of resistance but proved insufficient to counter SWAPO's growing military capacity.[104]

At the same time, regional, transnational, and international connections and conflicts increasingly shaped Namibia's war for independence. In April 1974, news of a military coup in Portugal, a longstanding apartheid ally, shook the South African government. The new military regime in Portugal immediately decided to withdraw from its colonies in Mozambique and Angola (as well as Guinea-Bissau), which had constituted essential parts in South Africa's buffer zone.[105] In Mozambique, power was directly handed over to the dominant

[101] TRC, *Volume 2*, 63; S. Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means: SWAPO's Liberation War', in C. Leys and J.S. Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), 22; Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 41; T. Weaver, 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Claremont: David Philip, 1989), 92.
[102] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 69; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 276.
[103] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 249. On the historic paramilitary character of the SAP, see, for example, E. van der Spuy, 'Literature on the Police in South Africa: An Historical Perspective', *Acta Juridica*, 262 (1989), 285-9; J.D. Brewer, A. Guelke, I. Hume, E. Moxon-Browne, and R. Wilford, *The Police, Public Order and the State: Policing in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, the USA, Israel, South Africa and China*, 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 177-8.
[104] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 248-9.
[105] J. Miller, 'Things Fall Apart: South Africa and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire, 1973-74', *Cold War History*, 12, 2 (2012), 183-4.

liberation movement, Frelimo.[106] In Angola, rapid decolonisation led to a civil war, waged both from exile and within the country, between three nationalist movements: the FNLA, the MPLA, and UNITA.[107]

From May 1974, the three movements engaged in a fierce battle for control over Angola's territory before Portugal's departure and independence on 11 November 1975. The conflict was further exacerbated by the involvement of regional and international powers in the context of the Cold War.[108] Together with the USA and Zaire, South Africa provided military support to UNITA and the FNLA until its collapse in early 1976. The MPLA in turn received military assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. From Angola and Mozambique, as Jamie Miller writes, 'chaos … quickly spread to Rhodesia and [Namibia] as liberation movements regrouped and re-energised, inspired by each other's successes and aided in their insurgencies by increasingly porous borders'.[109]

For SWAPO, the impact of Portugal's hasty withdrawal from Angola was two-fold.[110] First, its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), now had a direct infiltration route into northern Namibia after Portuguese and South African security forces had previously forced it to launch attacks from

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[106] Frelimo is the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*.

[107] The FNLA is *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*, and was based in the Bakongo north and operated across the Congolese border in northern Angola. The MPLA is the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, which was based in Luanda and operated from western Zambia and neighbouring eastern Angola. UNITA is the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, which was based in the Central Highlands and operated largely within Angola: J.P. Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army, 1961-1974: Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique', *Portuguese Studies Review*, 10, 1 (2002), 129-30; J. Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975-2002* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 25-6; L.M. Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola, 1840s to the Present* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 129; Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 82.

[108] J. Pearce, 'Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 1 (2015), 107.

[109] Miller, 'Things Fall Apart', 184. See also G. Baines, 'Introduction: Challenging the Boundaries, Breaking the Silence' in G. Baines and P. Vale (eds.), *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War Conflicts* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2008), 3.

[110] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 87.

bases in Zambia.[111] With direct access from southern Angola, PLAN guerrillas were able to establish a semi-permanent presence in SWAPO's strongholds in the rural areas in Ovamboland and western Kavango.[112] The necessity of operating in close and friendly territory, however, limited the large-scale participation of ethnic groups from other parts of Namibia.[113] Second, the opening of the border to Angola led to an exodus of young Namibians, particularly from Ovamboland, who crossed the border to join SWAPO and PLAN.[114] Between 1974 and 1976, the number of trained PLAN guerrillas increased from about 400 to about 2,000, according to South African intelligence estimates.[115]

In October 1975, South Africa responded to the developments in Angola by launching a direct invasion of the country, codenamed 'Operation Savannah'. The invasion aimed to prevent Angola from coming under the control of a hostile regime, namely the MPLA, which would provide sanctuary to PLAN as well as the armed wings of other liberation movements such as ZIPRA and MK – as later happened when the MPLA seized power.[116] In the course of Operation Savannah, the SADF formed two ad hoc units, Alpha Group/31 Battalion and Bravo Group/32 Battalion, which consisted predominantly of black soldiers recruited in Angola (see Chapter 4). These transnational troops were thus among the very first black recruits in the SADF. As Annette Seegers argues, subsequent attacks

[111] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 21.
[112] Weaver, 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', 92.
[113] T.H. Henriksen, 'Namibia: A Comparison with Anti-Portuguese Insurgency', *The Round Table*, 70, 278 (1980), 186.
[114] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 47.
[115] H.R. Heitman, *South African Armed Forces* (Cape Town: Buffalo, 1990), 146; A. Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 223
[116] ZIPRA is the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). MK is uMkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the South African ANC. A. Esterhuyse and E. Jordaan, 'The South African Defence Force and Counter-insurgency, 1966-1990', in D.P. Baker and E. Jordaan (eds.), *South Africa and Contemporary Counter-Insurgency: Roots, Practices and Prospects* (Claremont: University of Cape Town Press, 2010), 115.

against SWAPO in Angola, in which 32 Battalion often played a central role, 'indicated the terms on which South Africa would accept Namibian independence: … a weakened, if not destroyed, SWAPO'.[117]

The Beginning Namibianisation of the War, 1974-79

Within Namibia, the South African government's approach following Operation Savannah was to 'Namibianise' its security forces through the local recruitment of black soldiers.[118] The SADF had taken the first steps toward Namibianisation in 1974, after assuming responsibility for border patrol and counterinsurgency operations from the police.[119] Initial recruitment took place in areas where SWAPO had concentrated its efforts of political mobilisation and armed struggle, namely in the Caprivi, Ovamboland, and western Kavango. In 1974, the SADF first recruited a group of San in the Caprivi, who would later be integrated into Alpha Group/31 Battalion, and formed the 1 Ovambo Battalion, before establishing the Kavango Battalion in 1975.[120] This process in northern Namibia was paralleled by the first recruitment of black soldiers into newly established Bantustan military units, such as 21 Battalion, in South Africa.[121] In Namibia, the first few dozen black recruits initially served as trackers and interpreters in the

[117] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 223-4. See also W. Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1994), 128.
[118] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 220.
[119] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 249; Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 28.
[120] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics* 253-7; G. Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1986), 199.
[121] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 197-248; Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 27-92.

auxiliary service attached to regular SADF units, but wore standard SADF uniforms and operated under the command of white SADF officers.[122]

The South African government and its military had three major reasons, similar to those of other colonial and settler regimes, for the local recruitment of soldiers.[123] First, the SADF's creation of separate 'homeland armies' mirrored South Africa's wider political strategy to maintain control over Namibia's independence process through policies of ethnic fragmentation and spatial segregation.[124] As part of the strategy, the SADF began to organise annual commemorative marches to the graves of Herero chiefs in Okahandja. According to Gewald, 'the commemorations of Herero chiefs, and through them the Herero dead of the genocide, became a demonstration of South African-sponsored opposition to SWAPO'.[125] Second, black soldiers, unlike their white superiors, knew the language, customs, and environment of the areas in which both they and the enemy operated.[126] Third, South Africa's involvement in an increasingly conventional war from the mid-1970s exposed the SADF's greatest vulnerability: white military casualties.[127] Not only were there 'never enough white soldiers to cover all fronts', as William Minter writes, but 'South African society was very sensitive to white casualties'.[128] As a result, South Africa came to increasingly

[122] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 252-8; Heitman, 'Modern African Wars', 18.
[123] For the reasons for 'Africanisation' of Portugal's colonial military, see, for example, Wheeler, 'African Elements in Portugal's Armies in Africa', 239-40, and J.P. Cann, *Counterinsurgency in Africa: The Portuguese Way of War, 1961-1974* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 87-110. For Rhodesia, see, for example, McLaughlin, 'Victims as Defenders'.
[124] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 255; Du Pisani, 'State and Society under South African Rule', 69.
[125] J.B. Gewald, 'Herero Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Politics and Memory', in J. Abbink, M. de Bruijn, and K. van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 296.
[126] Esterhuyse and Jordaan, 'The South African Defence Force and Counter-Insurgency', 119.
[127] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 239.
[128] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 123.

rely on local as well as transnational allies and proxies on all fronts, including Namibia.

From 1977, the South African government began with the creation of a national Namibian defence force. In August 1977, General Jannie Geldenhuys was appointed 'to build and develop an independent and complete defence force for South West Africa' that would involve 'all elements of the SWA population' – what would become SWATF.[129] As the military counterpart to the Turnhalle Conference, this defence force was meant to demonstrate, both to Namibians and the international community, that the South African military was no longer a foreign occupying force.[130] General Charles Lloyd, SWATF's first Commander (1980-83), declared that SWATF was 'part of the SWA independence process' and would 'form the basis of the defence of the new [Namibian] state' after independence.[131] Until independence, however, SWATF remained under firm control of the SADF at the senior officer level.[132]

The creation of SWATF marked a crucial shift in the military identity of black soldiers: they were officially no longer fighting on behalf of their homeland or a foreign army but served in Namibia's future national military to protect the country and its people – a narrative that many black troops would adopt and repeat (see also Figure 1). As Gwinyayi Dzinesa and Martin Rupiya write, the new SWATF was central to South Africa's strategy aimed 'to create an alternative

[129] Quoted in Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 262.
[130] Esterhuyse and Jordaan, 'The South African Defence Force and Counter-Insurgency', 119.
[131] Quoted in Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 201.
[132] TRC, *Volume 2*, 64.

political and military capacity that would displace the dominance of SWAPO and PLAN after independence'.[133]

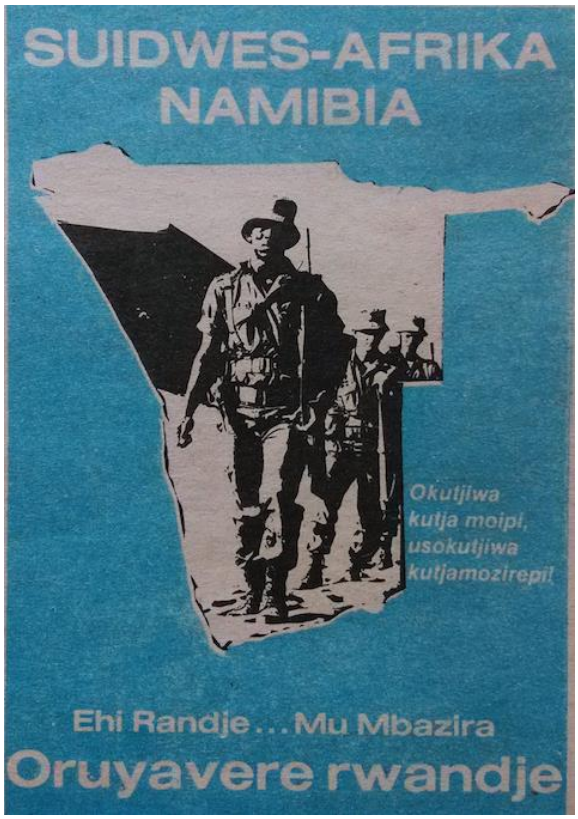


Figure 1: Propaganda picture in the SWATF newspaper, *Pergamus*, reading: 'South West Africa – Namibia – To know where you are going, you must know where you came from! – My Country … My Roots – My Future'. Photographed by the author in September 2014.

As part of this attempted nation-state-building process, the battalions' homeland references were dropped: the Kavango Battalion was renamed 34 Battalion, and 1 Ovambo Battalion became 35 Battalion. From 1977-79, the SADF also established four additional full-time battalions: 33 Battalion in the Eastern

[133] G.A. Dzinesa, and M. Rupiya, 'Promoting National Reconciliation and Regional Integration: The Namibian Defence Force from 1990-2005', in Rupiya (ed.), *Evolutions and Revolutions*, 204. See also A. du Pisani, *Beyond the Barracks: Reflections of the Role of the SADF in the Region* (Johannesburg: South African Insitute of International Affairs, 1988), 8.

Caprivi, 36 Battalion in Bushmanland, 37 Battalion in Kaokoland, and 41 Battalion, a 'multi-ethnic' unit drawing recruits from southern and central Namibia.[134] On 1 August 1980, all battalions were officially integrated into the new SWATF.[135] In early 1981, the South West African Police (SWAPOL) was created in a similar manner.[136]

The Namibian troops serving in SWATF did not only present a military threat to SWAPO but, as Anderson and Branch note, 'posed a profound challenge to the certainties of nationalist ideas of nation and citizenship'.[137] For SWAPO and its allies, they could not be genuine members of the Namibian nation but were traitors 'because they fought against national liberation'.[138] In a letter to *The Namibian*, one reader wrote: 'I would like to appeal … to those doing "national service" already: come home in loyalty to the true independence struggle'.[139]

South Africa's critics and adversaries argued that SWATF was not a national military but remained a 'foreign (colonial) army', created by an illegitimate regime.[140] To them, the SADF's Namibianisation efforts were, as Sipho Maseko puts it, 'part of a political strategy of "internalizing" the conflict in Namibia, to pit Namibians against Namibians'.[141] According to Susan Brown, the efforts were aimed at avoiding 'a war of white occupiers against black guerillas', and at

[134] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 259-63.
[135] A. du Pisani, 'Beyond the Transgariep: South Africa in Namibia 1915-1989', *Politikon*, 16, 1 (1989), 35. As part of the integration into SWATF, all battalions except for 32 Battalion were yet again renamed: 31 to 201, 33 to 701, 34 to 202, 35 to 101, 36 to 203, 37 to 102, and 41 to 911 Battalion, respectively.
[136] TRC, *Volume 2*, 64; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 183.
[137] Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 8.
[138] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 604.
[139] A.R. Kotjipati, 'SWATF "Rights"?', *The Namibian*, 22 August 1986.
[140] See, for example, R. Munamava, 'Swapo leaders at Nanso Meeting in Arandis', *The Namibian*, 22 November 1985; M. Muhuka, 'No Civil War', *The Namibian*, 31 January 1986; and V. Ndinomwa, 'Efforts to Divide Namibians', The Namibian, 9 May 1986.
[141] S. Maseko, 'The Namibian Student Movement: Its Role and Effects', in Leys and Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 123.

Namibians beginning to 'fight their own battles'.[142] Similarly, SWAPO accused South Africa of establishing SWATF in order to prevent, or at least delay, Namibia's independence, and of 'the practical establishment of civil war'.[143] According to Ben Uulenga of the SWAPO Youth League,

> South Africa is aware that Namibian independence is inevitable, she wants to prepare the grounds for a civil war so that when its army withdraws, we remain with elements of its oppressive army in Namibia.[144]

The conflict's resemblance to a civil war intensified throughout the 1980s as PLAN increasingly fought against black Namibians serving in SWATF and a newly formed paramilitary unit of the police, Koevoet.

The Growth of SWATF and the Formation of Koevoet, 1979-89

From the late 1970s, as a result of the security forces' Namibianisation process, political loyalties became increasingly equated with ethnic and racial identities, which in turn determined whether soldiers would be conscripted or 'voluntarily' recruited. In late 1979, General Geldenhuys had announced that, over the following two years, local black and white soldiers would replace as much as 50 per cent of South African troops in Namibia. Instead of reducing the number of South African troops, the ranks of SWATF were increased, partly through the

[142] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 28.
[143] Quoted in Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 204. See also R. Munamava, 'Price of Occupation Increases', *The Namibian*, 20 June 1986; and references in footnotes 128.
[144] Quoted in R. Munamava, 'Swapo Youth League on "Occupation Army"', *The Namibian*, 15 August 1986.

introduction of military conscription for all Namibian males aged between 16 and 25 from January 1981.[145]

The DTA had made demands for compulsory military service, and the Namibian Administrator-General declared that the process would 'give expression to the feeling that … the entire population of South West is handling its own interests, [it is not] as some hostile elements put it, … the Boers who are defending SWA'.[146] For SWATF, political objections were not considered valid grounds for exemption from military conscription, as one spokesperson explained:

> They [political objections] are not taken into account. Everyone has a responsibility to defend his country. … National servicemen reporting for call-up, sympathetic to Swapo, … receive exactly the same treatment and training as everyone else. Experience has shown they change their attitude completely during training as soon as they realise what Swapo's aims and methods are.[147]

Opposition to conscription was fierce, particularly in regions in northern Namibia where local support for SWAPO was strong. As a result, conscription was only ever fully enforced in the regions south of the so-called 'operational zone'. In Ovamboland and Kavango, the most populous regions, residents were excluded from the conscription process throughout the war.[148] According to Grundy, the SADF feared that forced conscription in those regions would lead to increased domestic resistance and push young Namibians to join SWAPO and PLAN in exile – strongly contradicting the SADF spokesperson's statement above.[149] At the same time, in southern and central Namibia, SWAPO was not

[145] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 266; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 202; Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 221.
[146] Quoted in Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 202.
[147] Quoted in 'The SWATF Reacts', *The Namibian*, 10 January 1986.
[148] Weaver, 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', 96.
[149] Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 266-7.

nearly as dominant, politically and militarily, as in the north.[150] As a result, selective conscription tended to further reinforce ethnic and regional divisions.[151] The divide between 'northern volunteers' and 'southern conscripts' also had a lasting effect on the political engagement of former soldiers in post-independence Namibia.[152] In other words, SWATF failed to build a 'national' army but the military identities attached to it have remained salient.

By the mid-1980s, SWATF had grown to about 11,000 soldiers. According to Gavin Cawthra, black troops of South Africa's security forces by then constituted the majority of South African casualties due to their disproportionately high deployment in front-line roles.[153] By 1989, SWATF and SWAPOL comprised over 30,000 members, of which about 70 per cent were black or coloured.[154] These numbers exceed PLAN's strength estimated between 9,000 and 20,000 guerrillas.[155] Together, SWATF and SWAPOL constituted about two-thirds of South Africa's total military force in northern Namibia, including on operations into Angola (the other third being SADF troops).[156]

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[150] Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 134.
[151] P.L. Moorcraft, *African Nemesis: War and Revolution in Southern Africa (1945-2010)* (London: Brassey's, 1990), 230; Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 604.
[152] Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers'.
[153] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 179.
[154] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Mean', 31; R. Dale, 'A Comparative Reconsideration of the Namibian Bush War, 1966-89', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 18, 2 (2007), 202. According to General Geldenhuys, non-white soldiers constituted over 90 per cent of the SWATF's total troops: J. Geldenhuys, *At the Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border War* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2009), 105.
These numbers also indicate how relatively widespread the recruitment of black Namibian soldiers was. In 1989, about 25,000 out of 1,4 million Namibians – 1.8 per cent of the total population – were then serving in the security forces. For comparison, the percentage of African troops in colonial and settler forces relative to the total population was 0.4 per cent (27,800 of 7,5 million) in Angola, 0.3 per cent (27,500 of 10 million) in Mozambique, and 0.1 per cent (37,000 of 37 million) South Africa. These percentages were calculated based on numbers found in Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 136; Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 64; L. Mashike, 'Age of Despair: The Unintegrated Forces of South Africa', *African Affairs*, 107, 428 (2008), 441-3.
[155] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 36; Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 455.
[156] Dzinesa and Rupiya, 'Promoting National Reconciliation and Regional Integration', 204.

In addition to SWATF, the South African regime came to rely on Koevoet, a special counterinsurgency police unit that became notorious for its human rights abuses.[157] After the SADF had experienced difficulties in containing SWAPO in northern Namibia following Operation Savannah, the SAP's counterinsurgency units returned to the operational zone in 1976.[158] Koevoet – later officially named the SWAPOL Counter-Insurgency (SWAPOLCOIN) – was formed in early 1979. Many of the unit's founding members and first commanders were white South African policemen who had previously served alongside the Rhodesian Special Forces during Zimbabwe's liberation war (1964-79).[159] The vast majority of its members, however, were black recruits from the areas in which Koevoet operated, that is, Kaokoland, Ovamboland, and Kavango. Koevoet played a central role in South Africa's war against SWAPO within Namibia until its disbandment in late 1989 in preparation for Namibian independence.

Transition to Independence, 1988-90

Namibia's transition to independence began with the signing of the New York Accords in July 1988 and the Geneva Protocol in August 1988. The agreement between Cuba and South Africa to withdraw from Angola and that between SWAPO and South Africa to enter a ceasefire paved the way for the implementation of UN Resolution 435 (1978), and the establishment of the UN

[157] TRC, *Volume 2*, 64.
[158] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 220, 239.
[159] S. Gear, *Now That the War Is Over – Ex-Combatants Transition and the Question of Violence: A Literature Review* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2005).

Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG).[160] UNTAG's main tasks included: the disarmament and repatriation of PLAN forces; the staged withdrawal of the SADF from Angola and Namibia; the disarmament and disbandment of SWATF and Koevoet; the monitoring of the South West African Police Force (SWAPOL); and the holding of democratic elections.[161]

The 'Nine Day War' in April 1989

The implementation of Resolution 435 and formal ceasefire between South Africa and SWAPO were agreed to begin on 1 April 1989. Early that day, however, hundreds of armed PLAN fighters crossed into northern Namibia, where they clashed with Koevoet units that had not yet been disbanded but had been transferred to SWAPOL and continued to patrol the region.[162] While SWAPO sent reinforcements from southern Angola, South Africa received controversial and reluctant authorisation from the UN Secretary General to remobilise SADF and SWATF units that had been confined to bases, in particular units from 101 Battalion. During the nine days of fighting, also referred to as the Nine Day War, more than 300 combatants were killed, the vast majority of them

[160] Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 51-2.
[161] N.J. Colletta, M. Kostner, and I. Wiederhofer, *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition: The Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Ethiopia, Namibia, and Uganda* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1996), 131; L.M. Howard, 'UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes of Success', *International Peacekeeping*, 9, 1 (2002), 115, 121; McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 82
[162] Between 1,600 and 2,000 former Koevoet members had been transferred to SWAPOL and continued to serve in the police until September 1989 when the UN Security Council demanded their disbandment under UNTAG supervision: Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 456; Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 121; J. McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State: Assessing Ex-Combatant Reintegration in Namibia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2006), 102.

PLAN fighters – the bloodiest fighting on Namibian soil since the beginning of the armed struggle. Accounts and explanations for the incursion, including those given by SWAPO's leadership and PLAN fighters, differ widely.[163]

The South African regime had been aware of SWAPO's incursion plans, and claimed – with backing by the UN, Angola, and Cube – that the movement had deliberately violated the ceasefire and contravened the provisions of the Geneva Protocol, which stipulated that PLAN forces would remain confined to bases north of the 16th parallel, approximately 150 km north of the Namibian border. SWAPO, which been excluded from the Geneva Protocol negotiations, denied the allegations, and claimed that PLAN fighters had crossed into Namibia in order to seek out UNTAG forces and voluntarily hand over their weapons.[164] In striking contrast to Nujoma who has blamed the tragic events entirely on the 'West' and South Africa, Charles Namoloh, then PLAN's Chief of Staff, in our interview referred to the incursion as 'one of our errors, one of our blunders'.[165]

Several scholars, such as Jaremey McMullin, have argued that SWAPO's leadership, including Nujoma and Namoloh, may have ordered the incursion 'to establish a military presence in the north of the country, something that SWAPO always maintained it had during the war (but in reality did not have)'.[166] Such a military presence would have constituted of powerful symbol of PLAN's military

[163] C. Lionel, R. Bush, J. Lindsay, and B. Mokopakgosi, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 84-91; Moorcraft, *African Nemesis*, 246-7; Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa.* 188-90; McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 83. See also H. Weiland and M. Braham (eds.), *The Namibia Peace Process: Implications and Lessons for the Future* (Freiburg: Arnold Bergsträsser Institut, 1994).
[164] Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, 189-90; L. Cliffe, R. Bush, J. Lindsay, and B. Mokopakgosi, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 89; Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, 75; McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 83.
[165] S. Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: Panaf, 2001), 286, 395-8; interview with Charles Namoloh, Windhoek, 7 November 2016
[166] McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-conflict State*, 83. See also Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, 190; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 88-9.

strength, bolstering SWAPO's longstanding rhetoric of bringing about independence through the barrel of the gun.[167] Chris Saunders suggests that the Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, likely advised Nujoma to insist that PLAN forces be confined to bases inside Namibia during the transition process, as Zimbabwean liberation armies were in 1979 after they had established a significant presence in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.[168] As Cliffe et al. point out, SWAPO's 'ill-advised' incursion raised questions about leadership's strongly hierarchical and authoritarian character that 'were to resurface time and again during the [election] campaign and after, especially in relation to the detainees issue'.[169]

The events of early April 1989 have also figured prominently in the narratives of former SWATF and Koevoet members (see Chapter 6).[170] They argue that SWAPO's leadership, in line with its armed struggle rhetoric, launched a direct military attack in an attempt to take power by force, which was only prevented by SWATF and Koevoet. To them, PLAN's incursion was emblematic of the organisation's aggression against Namibians throughout the war.[171]

By November 1989, all SADF forces had returned to South Africa, and all SWATF units of 22,000 soldiers plus 1,600 of 3,000 Koevoet members had been demobilised, with the remaining being gradually phased out of SWAPOL.[172]

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[167] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 86, 88-9.
[168] C. Saunders, 'Liberation and Democracy: A Critical Reading of Sam Nujoma's "Autobiography"', in H. Melber (ed.), *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2003), 93. See also Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, 191-2, and Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 88.
[169] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 91; Saunders, 'Liberation and Democracy', 94.
[170] See also Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers, 208-9.
[171] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 July 2014; interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014. See also 'Ex-SWATF and Koevoet members demand veteran status', *Namibian Sun*, 13 April 2014.
[172] McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 84.

SWAPO's main rival in the independence elections, the DTA, actively recruited demobilised SWATF and Koevoet members who aimed to prevent a SWAPO victory through the use of intimidation and violence.[173] According to Cliffe et al., the DTA justified the recruitment of former soldiers by comparing it to ex-PLAN fighters working for SWAPO.[174] Both before and after the elections, the former soldiers continued to disrupt SWAPO rallies and public displays of support for SWAPO, particularly in the party's strongholds in Ovamboland and Kavango.[175]

The Independence Elections of 1989

Under UNTAG's supervision, Namibia's first democratic elections took place from 7 until 11 November 1989. SWAPO won 41 out of 72 seats in the Constituent Assembly, the predecessor of the post-independence National Assembly. With heavy backing from South Africa, the DTA became the major opposition party with 21 seats, actually beating SWAPO in many regions of the country, while the United Democratic Front, an alliance of small opposition parties, became the third largest party with four seats.[176]

SWAPO thus missed its goal of obtaining a two-thirds majority that many had predicted and that would have allowed it to unilaterally write the Namibian

[173] For a discussion of similar tactics used by Rhodesian security forces in the Zimbabwean elections in 1980, see, for example, Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, 49-51.
[174] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 166.
[175] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 100, 165-6; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016. For a survey of violence and intimidation before and after the elections, see Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 94-107, 218-20.
[176] Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, 192-3; Fosse, 'Negotiating the Nation', 429. The three largest parties received the following percentages of the national vote: SWAPO (56.9 per cent), DTA (28.3 per cent), and UDF (5.6 per cent): H. Melber, 'Limits to Liberation: An Introduction to Namibia's Postcolonial Political Culture', in Melber (ed.), *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia*, 17.

constitution and implement its policies in the National Assembly.[177] Instead, SWAPO wrote the new democratic constitution together with the opposition through a series of 'inter-party "pacts"'.[178] As Dobell notes, 'the election results were not ideal from any one party's perspective, but were perhaps the best possible outcome in terms of Namibia's prospects for democracy'.[179]

SWAPO's victory, as Leif Fosse argues, was limited by 'persisting ethnic identifications, existing DTA footholds through patronage and other means, as well as South African and DTA intimidation of the electoral process'.[180] However, the image and election performance of SWAPO seems to have been most seriously affected by the campaign of so-called 'ex-detainees', former SWAPO exiles who been detained by the party after being accused of acting as South African spies, i.e. being collaborators.[181] Whereas SWAPO representatives associated 'their stories [of torture and betrayal] with South African propaganda' and argued that 'the histories of these and other human rights violations … were a threat to the new nation', the reactions of many Namibians were sympathetic.[182]

The DTA exploited these reactions to portray SWAPO as a party with no respect for human rights for which it received covert funding from the South

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[177] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 99; C.A. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 174.
[178] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 99. See also J.B. Forrest, *Namibia's Post-Apartheid Regional Institutions: The Founding Year* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 42; G. Bauer, *Labor and Democracy in Namibia*, *1971-1996* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998), 101-2.
[179] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 99. See also Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence', 36.
[180] Fosse, 'Negotiating the Nation', 441.
[181] Williams, *National Liberation*, 174; L. Dobell, 'Silence in Context: Truth and/or Reconciliation in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 2 (1997), 373; J. Hunter, 'Dealing with the Past in Namibia: Getting the Balance Right between Justice and Sustainable Peace?', in A. du Pisani, R. Kössler and W.A. Lindeke (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Arnold Bergsträsser Institut, 2010), 403-4, 411-2.
[182] C.A. Williams, *Exile History: An Ethnography of the Swapo Camps and the Namibian Nation* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2009), 159.

African regime together with six smaller political parties opposed to SWAPO.[183] A group of ex-detainees also formed a political party, the Patriotic Unity Movement, and linked up with the United Democratic Front in order to contest SWAPO's claim to popular legitimacy.[184] In his autobiography, *Where Others Wavered*, Nujoma writes that '[t]he "detainee" issue was the main weapon used against SWAPO in the Independence election in 1989'.[185]

According to Cliffe et al., SWAPO's campaign and its emphasis on 'forgive and forget' had limited success in countering the ex-detainee issue, partly because it 'became a vehicle for the articulation of ethnic politics'.[186] Its impact on the election results was strongest in southern Namibia, where the majority of ex-detainees were originally from, and where concerns about SWAPO's repressive tendencies and an Ovambo-dominated one-party state were most widespread.[187]

SWAPO's leadership has since perceived the ex-detainee issue as a continuing threat to the party's legitimacy and has remained determined to keep its history forgotten out of fear of the further political damage it may cause. In the critical words of Hage Geingob, 'this issue of detainees comes up like clockwork at election time, and some of the [opposition] parties have no hesitation in using it

[183] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 162; Hunter, 'Dealing with the Past in Namibia', 410. In 1991, the revelation and the DTA's subsequent admission that it had received such funding severely damaged the party's reputation: I. Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*: *A Comparative Study of Electoral Politics in Post-Colonial Namibia* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), 87.
[184] Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, 91; Hunter, 'Dealing with the Past in Namibia', 421.
[185] Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 356.
[186] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 162, 167.
[187] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 167, 235; Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia,* 91; Hunter, 'Dealing with the Past in Namibia', 412. On debates about the extent to which ethnic affiliations dictated voting patterns at the regional level, see Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 88; P.J.J.S. Potgieter, 'The Resolution 435 Election in Namibia', *Politikon*, 18, 2 (1991), 39; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 256-257; W.A. Lindeke, W. Wanzala and V.L. Tonchi, 'Namibia's Election Revisited', *Politikon*, 19, 2 (1992), 129-38.

as an electioneering ploy'.[188] At the same time, as Timothy Dauth writes, the ruling party has 'pursued something of a quiet and unofficial process of rehabilitation and reconciliation, offering many ex-detainees a return to the Swapo fold and employment in the bureaucracy'.[189] I have elaborated on the ex-detainee issue in some detail because, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, associations of former SWATF and Koevoet members have found common ground with organisations of ex-detainees in their political mobilisation for government benefits – a unique relationship in southern Africa.

Following the elections, SWAPO – similarly to Zimbabwe's new ruling party, ZANU(PF), in 1980 – began to assure former members of South Africa's security forces and its political opponents that, in the spirit of national reconciliation, 'they did not have to fear for their future under a new SWAPO-led government'.[190] In Ovamboland, the party set up a so-called 'Crisis Committee' in order to end continuing hostilities between former members of PLAN and South Africa's security forces, hundreds of whom had started to leave Namibia to South Africa (see Chapter 7).[191] In addition to officials from UNTAG and SWAPOL, the Crisis Committee comprised representatives from PLAN, Koevoet, and SWATF's 101 Battalion, who met once a month to discuss problems and then reported back to their former colleagues.

[188] H.G. Geingob, *State Formation in Namibia: Promoting Democracy and Good Governance* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2004), 204.
[189] Quoted in Geingob, *State Formation in Namibia*, 204. The Zimbabwean liberation movement Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) became ZANU(PF), with the PF referring to Patriotic Front, after independence in 1980. ZANU's armed wing was the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA).
[190] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 221.
[191] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 220.

After some initial difficulties, the work of this initiative appears to have begun to show some success.[192] In February 1990, *The Namibian* reported on a meeting of around 200 former members of Koevoet and SWATF's 101 Battalion who were addressed by Jonas Kamhulu, a former Koevoet member and now representative in the Crisis Committee. On behalf of the committee, Kamhulu echoed SWAPO's rhetoric of national reconciliation, telling his former colleagues:

> People must reconcile with one another and forget what happened in the past. … We can only develop our country if we stand together. … Every citizen will be respected and treated equally by the new government.

According to *The Namibian* report, Kamhulu's 'speech was greeted with enthusiastic applause', and 'people said without exception that they were happy peace was dawning in their country'.[193] By the time the first efforts at ex-combatant reintegration began, overt violence between ex-PLAN fighters and former SWATF and Koevoet members had largely ceased.

After 23 years of war, Namibia finally celebrated its official independence on 21 March 1990. However, as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, Namibia's transition to independence and majority rule did not mean that wartime loyalties and identities could be discarded. The latter, as Jocelyn Alexander argues in the case of Zimbabwe, 'disrupted the present again and again [partly] because as political regimes were removed and remade, the slate was not wiped clean – past loyalties remained potent even when they had been rejected, or

[192] 'Koevoet Wrecks Talks', *The Namibian*, 31 January 1990; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 220.
[193] T. Namutewa, '"Forget the past" says Koevoet man', *The Namibian*, 12 February 1990.

pertained to defunct political orders'.[194] Since 1990, the fear of traitors, spies, and collaborators has continued to haunt Namibia.[195]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to bring out three aspects that are central to the history discussed in the following chapters. First, African traditional leaders and African troops 'collaborated' with both the German and South African colonial forces for diverse reasons and with different objectives – similarly to black Namibian and Angolan soldiers who later joined South Africa's security forces (see Chapters 3 and 4). Second, Namibia's war of independence was deeply shaped by various transnational dynamics ranging from the SADF's cross-border military recruitment to the OAU's privileging of armed liberation struggle waged from exile. Third, both German and South African colonial rule created new divisions and identities, which were inherited by post-colonial Namibia and have come to play a crucial role in the post-war debates over citizenship, belonging, and their benefits (see Chapters 6 and 7).[196]

[194] Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', 181.
[195] Compare to Kelly, 'In a Treacherous State', 186.
[196] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 74.

Chapter 3 – The Complex Motivations for Joining and Remaining in SWATF and Koevoet

Why did black Namibians join South Africa's security forces?[1] Or more specifically, as Julia Hornberger asks with regard to black policemen during apartheid South Africa, 'why would black people voluntarily submit to a system that systematically discriminated against them and which, in addition, made them complicit in the oppression of other black people?'[2] In trying to answer these questions, I shift the focus of analysis beyond commonly-cited economic reasons, such as poverty and unemployment, and instead explore the complex motivations given by my interviewees. I argue that the examination of these motivations, largely neglected in previous research, is essential for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of military 'collaboration' during the Namibian war for independence. My interviewees' accounts directly challenge their popular portrayal as self-interested traitors and collaborators, and the idea that they fought 'for the racist state and for white supremacy'.[3] They show that their 'voluntary' decision to fight on the side of South Africa must be understood within the context of violence and terror that pervaded Namibia at the time.

As we have seen, from 1966 until 1989, the civilian population in northern Namibia found itself in the torturous and debilitating position of being caught up

[1] A version of this chapter was previously published as L. Bolliger, 'Chiefs, Terror, and Propaganda: The Motivations of Namibian Loyalists to Fight in South Africa's Security Forces, 1975-1989', *South African Historical Journal*, 70, 1 (2018), 124-51.
[2] J. Hornberger, *Policing and Human Rights: The Meaning of Violence and Justice in the Everyday Policing of Johannesburg* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 33.
[3] T. Barnes, 'Book Review: *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-80*', *African Affairs*, 113, 450 (2014), 142.

in an extended guerrilla war between SWAPO and South Africa's security forces. As one Namibian explained to Siegfried Groth in 1985:

> We live between two fires. Either you side with the South Africans or with SWAPO. If SWAPO men come at night, asking for help, and you don't help them, then that means you're on the South African side, and you may have to pay with your life.[4]

Whether one went into exile or remained in the country, taking sides became an existential decision, and the ambiguous term 'volunteer' – like the term 'collaborator' – must therefore be subjected to detailed analysis.

Ideological convictions as the basis for joining the security forces were largely absent in my interviewees' accounts. Instead, they emphasised three non-economic factors, which I will focus on here: the role of traditional authorities in military recruitment; the alienation by and search for protection against the violence of PLAN guerrillas; and the impact of South African propaganda. In addition, I emphasise the fact that, as black soldiers became trapped in their alliance with South Africa, the reasons for remaining were not the same as for having joined.[5]

To be clear, my interviewees' accounts on why they joined the security forces – both in this chapter and the next one – should not be taken as a direct reflection of their motivations to enlist during the war. Their post-war experiences have influenced their accounts as much as the experiences of the war between 1975 and 1989. In Namibia, I conducted interviews in the context of heated debates about the Namibian Veterans Act of 2008, which defined a

[4] Quoted in S. Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995), 28.
[5] These reasons, I should note, stand in contrast to Metsola's finding that black former SWATF and Koevoet members 'tended to explain military service as something forced on them, either directly by being drafted or out of economic necessity': Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 226.

veteran as someone who had participated in the liberation struggle, and thus excluded former SWATF and Koevoet members from government benefits (see Chapter 6). Since 2008, different groups of former SWATF and Koevoet members have unsuccessfully rallied to be recognised and compensated as veterans by the SWAPO-led government. In order to make their claims, they have sought to challenge SWAPO's dominant nationalist narrative, which lies at the heart of the Veterans Act's formulation, and has stigmatised them as 'traitors', 'killers', and 'mercenaries'.[6] Put differently, they have had to explain how and why they found themselves on the 'wrong' side of history, according to Namibia's ruling party, SWAPO.

In the interviews, many former soldiers invoked factors such as poverty and unemployment or the role of local leaders in order to explain their decision to join the security forces. Their stories about the violence by PLAN guerrillas often seemed to be intended to transfer responsibility for the war's violence and terror to SWAPO, and to challenge the latter's historical narrative of a glorious struggle past.[7] However, this does not mean that their stories and experiences should be discounted. They are, in the words of Laetitia Bucaille, a 'commentary on the conflict, marked by death, loss, [and] commitment'.[8] Their recollections provide new and often intimate insight into the dynamics of the war, which opened up multiple divisions along regional, rural-urban, generational, educational, and ethnic lines.[9] They are stories of injustice, incomprehension, and justification that make clear that not all Namibians understood the war as a national

[6] For a more extensive discussion of their claims and arguments, see Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers'.
[7] Compare to M. Evans, 'Reprisal Violence and the Harkis in French Algeria, 1962', *The International History Review*, 39, 1 (2017), 94.
[8] L. Bucaille, 'Introduction', *International Social Science Journal*, 58, 189 (2006), 425.
[9] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 604.

liberation struggle, and that former security force members speak with different identities: as perpetrators, witnesses, and survivors of violence.[10]

Beyond Economic Motivations

In the rare cases where research on military collaboration in southern Africa has looked at the motivations for joining the security forces, it has primarily, if not exclusively, focused on economic reasons that influenced recruitment.[11] In 1981, Kenneth Grundy argued that many black troops in South Africa and Namibia saw enlistment in South Africa's armed forces as nothing more than an economic opportunity where few others existed.[12] According to Denis Herbstein and John Evenson, poverty and unemployment were 'powerful recruiting sergeants' due to the war-torn economy in Namibia, where it was 'the poor, the hungry and the ill-prepared' who sought employment in the security forces.[13] Cawthra, in turn, writes that in 1986, when nearly a third of the labour force in northern Namibia was unemployed, the lack of jobs in the war zones and the relatively high salaries offered by the security forces facilitated recruitment.[14] Elsewhere, I have also argued that in a context of extremely harsh socio-economic conditions, which were further exacerbated by the war and forced resettlements by the military,

[10] See also H. Becker, 'Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990–2010', *Africa*, 81, 4 (2011), 523.
[11] Wheeler, 'African Elements in Portugal's Armies in Africa', 241; McLaughlin, 'Victims as Defenders', 270; Cann, *Counterinsurgency in Africa*, 103. See also Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau,* 208-9.
[12] K.W. Grundy, 'The Use of Blacks in the South African Armed Forces', *Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, Collected Seminar Papers*, 2, 27 (1981), 146.
[13] D. Herbstein and J. Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (London: Zed Books, 1989), 71-2.
[14] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 199, 209.

joining the security forces was primarily a question of material improvement and a desire for a better life.[15]

While poverty and unemployment were significant motivations, a narrow focus on economic reasons alone neglects the variety of other important motivations for why black Namibians enlisted in the security forces. Branch goes as far as to criticise the focus on personal economic gain in previous studies of military collaboration as 'ahistorical, acultural, and unquantifiable'.[16] It assumes that these soldiers were motivated primarily, if not only, by some sort of material gain, and thus plays into the popular portrayal of these soldiers as purely self-interested sell-outs and mercenaries.[17]

In this regard, the debate on military collaboration in southern Africa would benefit from comparative analysis with two sets of literatures that have both stressed the plurality and complexity of motivations: one on colonial troops outside of southern Africa, particularly Kenya and Algeria; and another extensive one on individuals' reasons for taking a particular side during (civil) wars. Branch argues that Kikuyu loyalists in Kenya were motivated by many reasons, including 'experience of insurgent violence, the desire for revenge, past connections to the colonial regime, family or clan ties, notions of power and authority, and … a desire to survive'.[18] Drawing primarily on the cases of Kenya and Algeria, Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless similarly argue that colonial militias were mainly motivated by 'local factors', which included 'the opportunity for social and economic advancement, political opposition to the insurgent

[15] Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers', 200.
[16] Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 208.
[17] See also M. Moyd, '"All People were Barbarians to the *Askari*…": *Askari* Identity and Honor in the Maji Maji War, 1905-1907', in J. Giblin and J. Monson (eds.), *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 153.
[18] Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 208-9.

movement or the prevailing insecurity of their home district'.[19] With regard to the extensive literature on civil wars, Stathis Kalyvas concludes that the decision to join a particular side results 'from variable and complex sets of heterogeneous and interacting motivations', which can include economic factors as well as coercion, fear, and revenge.[20]

When my interviewees said they joined the security forces primarily to earn a living, they always referred to broader socio-economic circumstances that influenced their decision, often in an effort to justify it. For example, one man explained that he enlisted in Koevoet when he was still a teenager because nobody in his family worked. He said that, in a context of extreme poverty and in order to support his family, he actually had 'no choice' but to join Koevoet:

> no one in my family worked so I decided to be the breadwinner. There was no one to take the children to school. My parents were old at the time. … I only joined Koevoet for money … I had no choice. I decided to join because my family was living in poverty and there was no one who was going to help us.[21]

Another man recounted that, because of his lack of education, the only paid job he could obtain was as a soldier:

> that time there was the government of South Africa and ... there were no jobs. The only jobs were to be a doctor or a teacher or a soldier. … Now I was not educated enough to be a teacher or to be a nurse. I was not educated enough! I got only standard five and then my only option was to be a soldier so that I can get money. Because if you were a soldier, you got a salary per month [of] R500. In that time of that government, R500 was a lot because you can get shoes, you can get a trouser, you can get a shirt, you can get food.[22]

Similarly, another interviewee claimed that he had no choice but to join Koevoet in 1983. He had previously worked at the government garage in northeastern

[19] Thomas and Curless, 'Introduction', 8.
[20] S.N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95-9.
[21] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.
[22] Interview with former soldier, Oshakati, 4 August 2014.

Namibia and had been trained as a mechanic in South Africa. As part of his work, he attended a course to become a government licenced truck driver. According to him, on the day he completed the course, he was taken to a Koevoet base near his hometown where he was told he had to serve as a driver for six months. He asserted that he only accepted because 'if one refused, one would be blacklisted from all government jobs'.[23]

For most of my interviewees, however, poverty and unemployment were not their only motivation. These factors often combined with other reasons in the decision to enlist in South Africa's security forces. One former soldier, for example, referred to reasons going back to his childhood, namely escaping familial abuse and experiencing PLAN guerrillas' violence:

> so the reason I joined, first of all, is that when I grew up, I was abused as a child by the wife of my father. Secondly, I had seen the abuse of civilians by PLAN fighters. In the village I grew up in, people were accusing [others] of being witches, spiritual witches [to] the PLAN fighters. When they cut their throat, they told the community that nobody must bury that person, he must just rot on the ground. And if you buried that person, they would come after you. As a young boy, I was very sad to see this kind of thing happening. … You know it sometimes starts young when you see someone being mistreated by someone, you get that revenge where you [think], 'if I was grown up and big, I would also join these people [SWATF] to go after them'. ... In my house where I grew up ... the wife of my father was not good to me because I was not her son, only the son of my father. And she threatened also not to pay my school fees. ... Those who were in the force that time were living a good life. They did not need money; they were well paid.[24]

While each experience was unique in some respects, a number of factors recurred in my interviewees' accounts. In the following sections, I will discuss the role of traditional authorities, experiences with SWAPO, and South African propaganda – three factors that were closely interrelated. Before I explore these factors, I briefly discuss two important contextual factors that shaped my

[23] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[24] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014.

interviewees' motivations: the nature and reach of the apartheid state, and SWAPO's levels of support and guerrilla tactics.

Between the Apartheid State and SWAPO's Liberation Struggle

As discussed in Chapter 2, the former northern Namibian territories of Kaokoland, Ovamboland, Kavango, and Caprivi were governed through a system of indirect rule since the introduction of the policy of 'native reserves' under German colonial rule.[25] This system was premised on the supposedly distinct and cohesive nature of various African 'ethnic' or 'tribal' groups, and traditional leaders exercised authority over designated areas where they enjoyed extensive civil and criminal jurisdiction.[26] As Wallace stresses, this system led 'to both the increased fixing of ethnic categories and to greater conflict between different groups'.[27]

Despite resistance among certain chiefs and headmen of all ethnic groups, traditional authorities became increasingly integrated into the administrative structures of the apartheid state.[28] As a result, many traditional leaders found themselves in a difficult and ambiguous position. On the one hand, they were recruited by the South African regime to serve in the homeland administrations and, as salaried officials of the state, were expected to control and dissipate any

[25] In the 'Police Zone' of central and southern Namibia, South Africa employed policies of direct control: H. Becker, '"New Things after Independence": Gender and Traditional Authorities in Postcolonial Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1 (2006), 33.
[26] Du Pisani, 'State and Society under South African Rule', 55.
[27] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 238.
[28] C. Tapscott, 'War, Peace and Social Classes', in Leys and Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 154; M. Bollig, 'Chieftaincies and Chiefs in Northern Namibia: Intermediaries of Power between Traditionalism, Modernization, and Democratization', in J. Dülffer and M. Frey (eds.), *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 167.

resistance against it. On the other hand, they tried to be responsive to people's complaints about socio-economic grievances, state repression, and abuses by the security forces.[29] In practice, the relationship between the state and traditional authorities, and their legitimacy among the local population varied within and across ethnic groups as well as over time and space.[30]

The reach of the apartheid state and the legitimacy of traditional leaders also influenced SWAPO's levels of presence, mobilisation, and support. In western Kavango, the uKwangali traditional authorities under Chief Daniel Sitentu Mpasi enjoyed popular legitimacy both before and after 1982-83 when Mpasi began to encourage the local population to support SWAPO. In response, South Africa's security forces drastically increased their presence in the area and Koevoet established its first local teams in 1982.[31]

In comparison, the local political structures in Ovamboland, SWAPO's stronghold, had lost much of their legitimacy by the mid-1970s.[32] With the assistance of 'tribal' police, traditional leaders meted out harsh corporal punishment, including public floggings, against alleged SWAPO supporters. The brutal repression not only made them deeply unpopular with the local population and the target of PLAN guerrillas, but pushed people to go into exile and join SWAPO.[33] Among these exiles were many public servants, such as clerks,

[29] J. Silvester, 'Introduction: Re-Viewing Resistance, Liberating History', in J. Silvester (ed.), *Re-Viewing Resistance in Namibian History* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2015), 14.
[30] Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, 285.
[31] H.K. Karapo, 'The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989: A Regional Perspective from the Kavango Regions', in Silvester (ed.), *Re-Viewing Resistance in Namibian History*, 233; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 259; P. Stiff, *The Covert War: Koevoet Operations in Namibia, 1979-1989* (Alberton: Galago, 2004), 147-8.
[32] G. Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New: Traditional and Modern Leaders in Ovamboland* (London: Hurst & Co., 1978), 218; Becker, '"New Things after Independence"', 34; N. Shiweda, *Omhedi: Displacement and Legitimacy in Oukwanyama Politics, Namibia, 1915-2010* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2011).
[33] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 77-8; Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, 232-3; Metsola,

teachers, and nurses, whose positions were later filled by military personnel as part of the colonial state's militarisation.[34]

Throughout the war from 1966 until 1989, SWAPO was never able to establish permanent military bases in Namibia. From 1975, it operated from bases close to the border in southern Angola, and within Namibia the war was mostly confined to the more densely populated northern regions of Ovamboland and western Kavango.[35] Ovamboland in particular was SWAPO's main support base and, although the organisation sought to secure multi-ethnic support, it drew most of its supporters from this region and the Oshiwambo-speaking people, who constitute almost half of Namibia's population.[36] In this region, local homesteads provided PLAN guerrillas with food, shelter, and information, and guerrillas were able to undertake political education among the civilian population.[37]

In the rural areas and among the uneducated beyond Ovamboland, SWAPO was not nearly as politically dominant, and its military activity remained severely restricted throughout the war. As Lise Howard writes, despite SWAPO's avowed anti-ethnic and nationalist character, 'alienation from what [was] perceived as Ovambo nationalism in SWAPO helped to convince leaders of several other ethnic groups' to side with the South African regime.[38] As we have seen, the UN General Assembly's decision in 1973 to recognise SWAPO as the 'authentic representative of the Namibian people' ignored the political

Reintegration as Recognition, 155.
[34] See, for example, Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 208-9, 236-9.
[35] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 128; Karapo, 'The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989', 223-4; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 259.
[36] Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, 146-50; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 23; Lindeke et al., 'Namibia's Election Revisited', *Politikon*, 19, 2 (1992), 126; Fosse, 'Negotiating the Nation', 440.
[37] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 27-9.
[38] Howard, 'UN Peace Implementation in Namibia', 101.

representation of a significant minority of Namibians, and contributed to the further fragmentation and polarisation of Namibian politics.[39] Guerrilla penetration of eastern Kavango and Caprivi was made difficult, among other factors, by South African-backed UNITA's control over southeast Angola, whereas in Kaokoland, the region's remoteness, sparse population, and arid climate posed serious difficulties for PLAN.[40]

Until the shift toward more conventional warfare in the mid-1980s, PLAN's main tactics included the abduction and assassination of pro-South African traditional leaders, members of the security forces, and other 'collaborators', as well as the planting of land mines targeting the security forces, and sabotage of economic targets, such as tarred roads and water towers.[41] The use of random or indiscriminate violence against civilians was never part of SWAPO's military policy. However, as the war began to escalate in the mid-1970s, civilians were increasingly caught in the crossfire between the security forces and the guerrillas. In response to the considerable growth of PLAN activity in the late 1970s, as discussed in Chapter 2, South Africa intensified its counter-insurgency activity in northern Namibia, and increasingly relied on SWATF and Koevoet.[42] As Brown writes, police and military action against actual or suspected PLAN supporters was 'deliberately ruthless' so as to erode SWAPO's support among

[39] In late 1976, the UN declared SWAPO the 'sole and authentic representative' of the Namibian people: Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 289.
[40] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 25-9; Karapo, 'The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989', 235; Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 27.
[41] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 25-9; Henriksen, 'Namibia', 188; Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 44.
[42] TRC, *Volume 2*, 64.

the civilian population. As a result, the politicising role of guerrillas increasingly gave way to military action.[43]

In this context of military escalation, similar to Angola and Zimbabwe, civilians used members of both sides for their own purposes and accused personal rivals of treason and collaboration.[44] Guerrillas also attempted to settle rivalries by means of rumours and false accusations, and their leadership was aware of the fact that such accusations were often made out of spite or revenge.[45] According to Niilo Taapopi, a former high-ranking member of PLAN, the 'local population used SWAPO to solve their petty problems'. He explained that people would 'get rid' of an unpopular headman or a neighbour they were jealous of by reporting them to PLAN insurgents as a 'traitor' or 'witch'.[46] Taapopi acknowledged that there were 'undisciplined soldiers of PLAN who didn't follow orders' and, although SWAPO categorically denied such accounts at the time, that 'innocent people were roughed-up and killed'.[47]

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, such incidents seem to have begun to jeopardise SWAPO's popular support, including in Ovamboland. The commander of PLAN's Northern Front bordering Ovamboland, for instance, allegedly

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[43] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 32-4.
[44] Regarding civilians as actors or subjects of violence, see, for example, S.N. Kalyvas, 'The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars', *Perspectives on Politics*, 1, 3 (2003), 482; H. Becker, 'Against Trauma: Silence, Victimhood, and (Photo-)Voice in northern Namibia', *Acta Academica*, 47, 1 (2015), 116-35.
[45] Compare to I. Brinkman, 'War, Witches and Traitors: Cases from the MPLA's Eastern Front in Angola (1966-1975), *Journal of African History*, 44, 2 (2003), 322; M. Akawa, *Our Memories of the Liberation War: How Civilians in Post War Northern Namibia Remember the War* (unpublished MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2003), 61-4, 67-8. See also Groth, *Namibia,* 28; M. Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014), 43-4; Becker, 'Against Trauma', 130. For Zimbabwe, see, for example, N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. McGregor, 'Containing Violence: Poisoning and Guerrilla/Civilian Relations in Memories of Zimbabwe's Liberation War', in K.L. Rogers, S. Leydesdorff and G. Dawson (eds.), *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (London: Routlegde, 1999), 131-59.
[46] Interview with former soldier, Epalela, 9 August 2014.
[47] Interview with Niilo Taapopi, Windhoek, 6 November 2016.

complained that guerrillas from other fronts were crossing into his section without permission and killing innocent people who were accused of being traitors.[48] At the same time, Koevoet aimed to discredit SWAPO through so-called 'pseudo operations' in which members of the unit disguised as PLAN guerrillas attacked and killed civilians.[49] In response, PLAN's leadership issued a so-called 'Twelve Point Programme', also referred to as 'Twelve Point Order Circular', in 1981. The programme, authored by PLAN's Chief of Staff, Charles Namoloh, listed twelve offences as potentially punishable by death.[50] According to Namoloh, the programme was aimed at re-establishing 'control over guerrillas roaming in Namibia [and] killing "traitors" without reporting back' to their commanders.[51]

In the regions where SWAPO struggled to gain a foothold, PLAN's tactics of assassination and abduction, particularly of non-combatants, alienated many local traditional leaders and significant parts of the civilian population who perceived the guerrillas' violence as foreign, indiscriminate, and unjust. This perception was also reflected in my interviewees' language. They spoke of

[48] Interview with Charles Namoloh, Windhoek, 7 November 2016.
[49] O. Namakalu, *Armed Liberation Struggle: Some Accounts of PLAN's Combat Operations* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2005), 47, 108, 158; Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle,* 97; Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare', 1353; K.A. O'Brien, *The South African Intelligence Services: From Apartheid to Democracy, 1948-2005* (London: Routledge, 2011), 104. See also L.E. Cline, *Pseudo Operations and Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Other Countries* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005).
[50] These offences were: (1) failure to report to one's senior commander about the enemy activities in the area of one's operation so that prompt action could be taken; (2) endangerment of the security of one's unit by one's actions; (3) failure to execute one's assigned mission; (4) throwing away or losing one's combat outfit in one way or the other without relevant reasons; (5) failure to report back at the assembly point after combat; (6) instigating others not to execute orders given to them by their senior commanders; (7) refusal to execute orders from one's direct commander; (8) failure to receive and accommodate people in such a way that these people's security was endangered; (9) destruction or incapacitation of PLAN properties; (10) desertion; (11) being captured alive and revealing information; and (12) misinforming one's senior commanders: P. ya Nangoloh, *An Exposé About Nujoma's CIA Connections: Part 10* (Windhoek: National Society for Human Rights, May 2007).
[51] Interview with Charles Namoloh, Windhoek, 7 November 2016.

SWAPO as coming from 'the bush', 'outside', and 'the north', and following 'bush laws'.[52] In contrast, they often described their own role as 'protecting the border' and 'protecting the land'.[53]

In order to further fragment and weaken SWAPO's support base, South African propaganda portrayed the war as a conflict of Ovamboland against southern and central Namibia, and between SWAPO (and thus 'Ovambo' and 'invading') guerrillas and other Namibians.[54] In the case of northern Kaokoland, John Friedman argues that PLAN's violence, along with a vigorous South African propaganda campaign, 'destroyed what had hitherto been a significant level of regional support' for SWAPO.[55] Across northern Namibia, many traditional authorities in particular feared PLAN reprisal attacks because of their long-standing association with the colonial state, and looked toward the security forces for protection.

The Role of Traditional Authorities in Military Recruitment

Many of my interviewees emphasised the important role that traditional authorities played in their recruitment into South Africa's security forces. As we saw in Chapter 2, traditional authorities historically played a central role in the

[52] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 29 September 2014; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 23 August 2016.
[53] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 23 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2015; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 30 August 2016.
[54] Gewald, 'Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?', 568, 575; Karapo, 'The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989', 223.
[55] J.T. Friedman, 'Making Politics, Making History: Chiefship and the Post-Apartheid State in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 1 (2005), 33.

recruitment of both migrant labourers and soldiers. Given their collaboration with the colonial state and the divided nature of nationalism, SWAPO viewed traditional authorities as 'collaborators' and 'puppets of the whites'. From the mid-1970s, SWAPO began to target especially those openly aligned with the South African administration for abduction and assassination. In response, the security forces' initial efforts concentrated on the protection and armament of South African-backed chiefs and headmen.[56]

An intelligence report by the security forces on central Ovamboland in August 1978, for instance, states that 'over the past two months there has been a much higher intensity of murders than in previous months. Persons who have been murdered were mostly chiefs, sub chiefs or DTA organizors [*sic*]'. It goes on to say that 'murders can be expected to escalate as [groups] of [terrorists] infiltrate in civilian clothes and move amongst the [local population] identifying anti-SWAPO elements'.[57]

Some traditional leaders took a strong anti-SWAPO line, referring to the organisation as 'terrorists' and accusing the organisation of wanting 'to disturb law and order and kill the traditional leaders so that they themselves could rule'.[58] At the request of these leaders, South Africa created and trained paramilitary and police militias that were tasked with the protection of traditional authorities and politicians against SWAPO.[59] They were loosely

[56] J.T. Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State: An Ethnographic Account of Namibia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 65; Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old And New*, 70; Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, 220.
[57] SANDF Archives, Pretoria, 32 Bn, Box 12, INSAM-INTSUM, 205/L, ISUM 4/78, August 1978, '309/1/A', 6-7.
[58] Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old And New*, 70.
[59] In Mozambique, the Portuguese colonial security forces gave weapons to trusted village headmen because many of them had been murdered by insurgents: Cann, *Counterinsurgency in Africa*, 161; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 98.

referred to as 'Special Police' or 'home guards' (*tuiswag* in Afrikaans), elements of which were later organised into the 'homeland battalions' and Koevoet.[60]

Prior to becoming a headman himself in 1960, one of my interviewees worked as a secretary of one the Councils of Headmen in Ovamboland where he liaised between the traditional leadership and the South African security forces. He has remained the headman of his village since independence, and, like other traditional leaders, seems to have retained significant influence on people's political loyalties.[61] In 1974, he was among the first black Namibians to enlist in the SADF. He recounted how 'many of our youth were unemployed and they would take any opportunity they get. Sometimes we were sent by our leaders to get people to be recruited so we gathered a few of them and brought them in'. He further explained why traditional leaders worked with the security forces:

> SWAPO was killing local civilians and burning their houses so some chiefs felt they needed to be protected against SWAPO. For that reason, most of the chiefs in that area were being guarded by officers of the South African Police. In some cases, the South African regime had to come guard the chiefs' houses because they were scared of being killed. … I had to join the South African army to represent [our] tribe. When anything happened in the community, they [local population] reported to me and I communicated with the South African army to come protect the community.[62]

Referring to the intensification of the war, one of my interviewees remembered how by 1977 the political situation in Namibia had become 'very tense'. According to him, 'it was in that year that the traditional leaders came together and decided to send five people from their districts to guard the chief', that is, the

[60] Grundy, 'The Use of Blacks in the South African Armed Forces', 143; Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New*, 71; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 132; H.R. Heitman, 'Modern African Wars: 3 South West Africa', in M. Windrow (ed.), *Men-At-Arms Series*, 242 (1991), 22; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 50.
[61] Regarding traditional leaders in post-independence Namibia, see, for example, J.B. Forrest, 'Ethnic-State Political Relations in Post-Apartheid Namibia', *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics,* 32, 3 (1994), 303-4; Bollig, 'Chieftaincies and Chiefs in Northern Namibia', 168-72; Friedman, 'Making Politics, Making History'.
[62] Interview with former soldier, near Oshikango, 1 October 2016.

Chief of the Ovaherero, Clemens Kapuuo. The headmen 'decided who had to go' and the guards 'were on rotation' such that 'at the end of every month they would send another five and the ones who were guarding would go back'.[63]

Some of my interviewees who were selected by their traditional leaders to join the security forces said they were not forced to join but volunteered their service. One man, who served in Koevoet in Kaokoland, described the selection process:

> that time when the people were being killed, that's when the traditional leaders and the army leaders came together, and they said, 'look at how our people are dying. We will give you our children to go with you and protect the land'.
> *How was it decided who would join the home guard and who would join Koevoet?*
> Firstly, they were trained and then they were selected and were asked as to who would like to be on which side. Because some were asked to protect the leaders, some were sent to protect the land. Thus, some went to protect the traditional leaders, the headmen, at their villages, and we were sent to protect the land by going around to different places. … Each person decided for himself whether to go to the headmen or to fight. And I decided myself to go to Koevoet.

He emphasised that, for him, 'it was not about the money. I felt pity for the innocent people being killed. I went for them so that I can protect them because God gave us people to protect, money was not a priority'.[64] Another man remembered he was 'determined' to fight because 'there were many [people] dying so we couldn't refuse to join'.[65] The chief of former Koevoet member took him and other recruits to the police station at Otjinyotjongava in northern Kaokoland, where they were told they were going to join Koevoet in order to 'patrol at the border so that the enemies cannot cross and come here'. He recounted:

[63] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 23 August 2016.
[64] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 30 August 2016.
[65] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.

> I was happy to go and protect the people because they [PLAN] were killing the local people. People were abducted, and the people that were killed were our people. They were saying they are attacking the whites but they were killing our people. When they went out of the country they said they were going for the sake of the civilians, yet these were the very people they were killing.
> *Did the chief say you had to go, or did he ask for people who wanted to go?*
> They didn't force us, they just asked for those who wanted to go. It was the young men who were found at home and then abducted by SWAPO. In a way, we were afraid to stay at home because if SWAPO would find us, they would have taken us. That is what moved us to join [the security forces].[66]

What emerges from these accounts is not only the significant role that local leaders played in military recruitment but also the weaknesses of SWAPO as a political organisation. In addition, these accounts highlight fear and revenge as powerful motivations to join the security forces.[67] As I will discuss in the next section, many of my interviewees felt alienated by the violence of PLAN combatants, and strategically sought protection in a context of violence and terror.

Before I discuss my interviewees' personal experiences with PLAN that impelled them to enlist in the security forces, I want to draw attention to the fact that many of my interviewees, at some point or another, considered going into exile to join SWAPO because they agreed with the organisation's struggle for national independence. Their accounts further blur the resistance-collaboration binary by illustrating how the war forced them to behave in ways that were inconsistent with their personal beliefs.[68]

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[66] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 24 September 2016.
[67] Compare to Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 99; D.M. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 73; D. Branch, 'The Enemy Within: Loyalists and The War Against Mau Mau in Kenya', *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007), 293; E.M. Orwin, 'Squad Leaders Today, Village Leaders Tomorrow: Muslim Auxiliaries and Tactical Politics in Algeria, 1956-1962', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23, 2 (2012), 334.
[68] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 94. See also White and Larmer, 'Introduction', 1274.

Joining SWAPO in exile was neither easy nor straightforward. Some people were 'caught half way' by the security forces while others never left because they feared being arrested or killed by the security forces.[69] One man, for example, explained how in 1977 he thought 'I want to go to SWAPO in Angola but I can't because it is dangerous there'.[70] Others started their journey ill-prepared and had to turn around, like one of my interviewees who had heard about people joining SWAPO in exile in Zambia and decided to leave in 1976: 'I and a friend of mine, we went to Ohangwena to join but on our way we got very thirsty and so my friend could not make it; he died, and I came back home'. Four years later in 1980, he joined SWATF's 101 Battalion because being a soldier was 'the only job available'.[71]

Yet others decided to return home after the group they were travelling with turned against them because they spoke a different language or came from another village.[72] One interviewee's father, for instance, had helped two people go into exile in Zambia through eastern Angola and the Caprivi in 1965. In 1978, he travelled from Rundu in eastern Kavango to Ondangwa in Ovamboland from where he and a friend of his attempted to join SWAPO in Angola. On their way, they met with a group of Ndonga-speaking SWAPO supporters who 'discriminated against them' and 'were sitting and eating separately'. They decided to return home because they were 'afraid of being accused of being "puppets" and being killed when getting to Angola' where 'nobody would have

[69] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016.
[70] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 5 October 2016.
[71] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 8 October 2016.
[72] See also B. Becker, *Speaking Out: Namibians Share Their Perspectives on Independence* (Windhoek: Out of Africa, 1999), 110-1.

found [their] bodies'.[73] Their decision was likely informed by rumours coming from Zambia about internal unrest and inter-ethnic rivalries within SWAPO, such as the 'Shipanga Crisis'.[74]

Experiences with the Violence by PLAN Guerrillas

According to many of my interviewees, the fear of PLAN guerrillas and their violence was an important factor that drove them into the security forces. In a sense, many of my interviewees were forced, or certainly felt they were forced, to take a side.[75] In the face of the guerrillas' violence, and in the wider context of war between SWAPO and the apartheid state, my interviewees explained that they joined South Africa's security forces for protection. One former soldier, for example, asserted: 'I was just protecting myself as a way to preserve my life because SWAPO was coming to our homes and killing our fathers and mothers'.[76] Another man stated that he originally 'had no intention to join the army but the situation forced us to join SWATF'.[77] In areas where the security forces not only had the upper hand but also provided infrastructure, services, employment, and financial support, taking the South African side seemed like the safer choice in terms of protection and self-preservation.

[73] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[74] See, for example, Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 105-8; Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*, 94-122.
[75] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 18 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016.
[76] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.
[77] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 23 August 2016.

My interviewees' traumatic experiences with SWAPO's violence, which they often described as incomprehensible and illegitimate, ranged from being beaten by a SWAPO member to guerrillas killing a family member.[78] For more than a decade, one former soldier, for instance, worked as a migrant labourer on different mines in South Africa and in the fisheries in Cape Town and Walvis Bay, where he attended some SWAPO meetings. By the early 1950s, he had saved up enough money and started his own business by opening a number of small shops in northern Namibia. After the beginning of the war in 1966, he became an interpreter for his uncle, a local headman. Both he and his uncle soon became the target of PLAN because, in his words, they were 'working with white people'. One day, he recounted,

> they [PLAN guerrillas] stole things in my shop and they burned my whole property, and everything that was left. After that they killed the headman of the village at that time. … I joined the South African army because we had been attacked and … they attacked my two drivers; they killed them and burned the car. … [Later] they once came to my house looking for me. Unfortunately, they went into another room, which was not my room, and they killed my driver thinking it was me. So you can see that I could be dead by this time.[79]

Similarly, another man became the target of PLAN insurgents who, as he claimed, considered him a 'puppet of the white government' because he worked for the Veterinary Department in northern Kaokoland. He related how he only narrowly escaped being either abducted or killed by guerrillas coming from the bush in the north:

> one morning, I was riding on horseback on my way to work ... After I left home, those people who were walking around in the bush [i.e. PLAN guerrillas], they came to my house. When I came back, I found out that those people had killed my two goats. … By that time they had heard already that I worked for the veterinary department, and [said]: 'we are those people

[78] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 4 October 2016.
[79] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 4 October 2016.

> coming from the north, and we will kill every person who works for the white government'. So that day I moved out of that place. I left early in the morning, because I was afraid I would be killed. That same week, I heard that they [the PLAN guerrillas] went to another place where they abducted three of our young men, and killed two of them in the bush. Unfortunately, I don't have their names now. So I was afraid that I would also be killed like … those two young men. That's why I ran and joined Koevoet, so that we can meet them there in the war and not die here with the children.[80]

Another man from Ovamboland decided to join SWATF for two reasons. First, he came under suspicion from his neighbours of being a spy. At the time, he lived in a village close to Ondangwa where SWATF's 101 Battalion had its major military base, which, by default, made him suspect. In 1977, he went to visit an uncle of his in a village where SWAPO enjoyed popular support. According to him, people in the village knew he came from Ondangwa and suspected him of being a potential South African spy. When he returned home a month later, he said that some of his neighbours claimed he had been to Angola and possibly worked as a double agent. As he recounted, he no longer knew where to turn:

> one day I went to visit my uncle near Eroro. There were a lot of SWAPO soldiers there who didn't want to see me. When you said you were from Ondangwa, they didn't want you there; maybe because [they thought] I would report them to the Boer. Then I came back here [to Ondangwa] one day but there was no place for me to stay because some people said I had been in Angola, and some people said I was with the Boer. Those who were on SWAPO's side didn't like me, and those who were with South Africa didn't want me because they said that maybe I work on both sides. ... Then I decided that I couldn't stay like this. I didn't have a place to go.

His experience of being caught in the middle was not uncommon. When a person left the village, their entire family or village would often be held accountable for their absence both by PLAN combatants and the security forces.[81] His second reason for joining SWATF was to seek revenge for his sister's murder:

[80] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016.
[81] Karapo, 'The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989', 227.

> one day – I can't remember the day or month – I heard that my sister had died near Okankolo; [she was] killed by SWAPO combatants. She was not buried; they just left her and told the population that nobody could bury her because she's a puppet. I felt pain because my sister was not what they said. Then I said, 'I also go to South Africa because those people are killers for nothing'. ... My sister had three children who were abroad on SWAPO's side. ... Now I felt, 'why did they kill my sister?' … It was very painful. Then I joined South Africa.[82]

He further explained that his sister was executed because of rumours that she had reported PLAN guerrillas to the security forces:

> there was a battle at her house in the morning. I don't know how many SWAPO soldiers were killed there. When the battle was finished ... they [PLAN guerrillas] came to her house and asked my sister, 'you were at Okatope [where there was a military base nearby]?' 'Why are you asking me?' 'No, we are just asking because some people are saying you went to Okatope to report us. That's why the Boer came to kill our people here.' … During the night, they came back and two people [Johannes' sister and another person] died that time.[83]

The murder of his sister by PLAN combatants was not an isolated incident. A former Koevoet member had a similar experience. He first explained that he joined Koevoet for economic reasons:

> You just went to Ondangwa where you would be trained and become a soldier. You would be given a gun, money, everything. That is why many people were not fighting for freedom, they were just doing it for money.

While economic reasons certainly played an important role, his decision to enlist was more complicated than that. While he was still in high school, he considered crossing the border to join SWAPO but became dissuaded when in 1977, within the span of three days, the majority of his classmates stopped showing up to school. Their teachers informed them that they had left Namibia, possibly after having been abducted by PLAN. A year later, guerrillas killed his sister because of

[82] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 5 October 2016. Other interviewees also recounted that guerrillas refused to allow the dead to be buried: interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014.
[83] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 5 October 2016.

rumours that she had joined the DTA. He felt 'very angry' because he realised that 'SWAPO kills innocent people'. Once he turned 18, he enlisted in Koevoet.[84]

Many of my interviewees expressed incomprehension at the violence of PLAN guerrillas against black civilians. They did not understand why guerrillas killed and abducted, in their eyes, innocent black people if SWAPO truly aimed to liberate Namibia from white oppression as it claimed to do. One of my interviewees asked,

> when those people [PLAN guerrillas] were fighting, why didn't they attack the whites? Why did they attack and kill fellow black citizens? Those people who entered through Botswana, they came to my house in my absence and my wife was there. They came there, and planted landmines behind the house. Fortunately, and I say fortunately, no one stepped on them. After that they went up to Omitara [a place between Gobabis and Windhoek] where they were arrested. Why did they not shoot at the whites that were in Gobabis? There were so many whites there! Even when you ask around you will never hear that a white person was killed by SWAPO soldiers.[85]

My interviewee's last claim that no white person was ever killed by guerrillas is not true. However, his statement is a powerful expression of bitter resentment at the PLAN guerrillas' killing of black civilians, which he perceived not only as indiscriminate but also hypocritical given SWAPO's claim of fighting to liberate black people. Similarly, another man expressed a sense of betrayal by SWAPO, and pointed out the paradoxical situation of seeking protection from the alleged 'oppressor' against the supposed 'liberator':

> when I first heard about those people [SWAPO], I heard that they went with the aim of bringing independence for this country, but then they returned with guns and so we started to protect ourselves. Because at first, we knew that these were our people and we would slaughter our animals for them. After all the favours we did for them, they would come and kill us. Perhaps they were afraid we would report them to Koevoet. The people who were not needed in the country, whom they wanted to chase out of the country, they became our mothers because they were the ones protecting us. If they did not

[84] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 and 22 April 2016.
[85] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August 2016.

> protect us, by now we would have been already dead. And SWAPO could have abducted our people and we would have not known where they are today. Our parents were found at home and killed. One wonders why a person would kill people like that; and you wonder what they have done to deserve death.[86]

For many of my interviewees, the fear of PLAN insurgents and their violence, which they perceived as unjust and unaccountable, were a powerful motive that impelled them to join SWATF and Koevoet. The security forces' propaganda aimed to further play on this fear in an effort to both discredit SWAPO and, in the tried-and-tested method of divide and rule, to portray the conflict as an un-national, inter-ethnic war.[87]

The Influence of South African Propaganda

In the regions beyond SWAPO's stronghold of Ovamboland, especially in the more rural areas of Kaokoland and Kavango, South African propaganda and its portrayal of SWAPO were important factors in my interviewees' decision to join the security forces. In northern Kaokoland, for example, South Africa's propaganda methods 'helped generate a heightened sense of fear by depicting SWAPO … as Ovambos who were out to take control of the country so as to oppress and kill the Hereros'.[88]

These propaganda methods were effective due to two main reasons. First, SWAPO's political and military activity in those areas remained more restricted, and, at least until the late 1970s, large parts of the local population were

[86] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016.
[87] See also Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 65. Compare also to Portugal's similar propaganda in its colonies: Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 127, 131.
[88] Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 65.

unfamiliar with the organisation's history and programme.[89] Second, local traditional authorities and the security forces – the agents of propaganda – enjoyed considerable legitimacy, rendering South Africa's representation of SWAPO credible. Chief Kapuuo, for example, argued in January 1975 that:

> SWAPO is … an Ovambo political organisation because about 99 per cent of its members are Ovambos [and] the tribes of central and southern parts of South West Africa … cannot and will never allow their lands and their future to be decided by a political organisation of just one tribe which was not elected by them.[90]

The regime's two-fold propaganda strategy aimed to terrorise and frighten people on the one hand, and to win their 'hearts and minds' on the other.[91] Starting from the early 1970s, the SADF began to engage in a campaign of 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) aimed at fostering positive relations with the local population while discrediting SWAPO and its insurgents.[92] The strategy of WHAM, also referred to as contra-mobilisation, had its origins in the British counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya from 1948-60, and was further developed by U.S. political strategists and military analysts in the 1960s during the Vietnam War (1955-75). WHAM stipulates that, in revolutionary warfare, the most significant battle is for the hearts and minds of the civilian population, and that security strategies should therefore be 80 per cent political and only 20 per cent military.[93] In the Namibian context, the concept of WHAM included a host of programmes known by various names, such as Civic Action (*burgersake* in

[89] See also H.K. Karapo, *Living Memory in a Forgotten War Zone: The Ukwangali District of Kavango and the Namibian Liberation Struggle, 1966-1989* (unpublished MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2008), 60, 121, 134.
[90] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 93.
[91] G. Miescher, L. Rizzo and J. Silvester, 'Introduction', in G. Miescher, L. Rizzo and J. Silvester (eds.), *Posters in Action: Visuality in the Making of an African Nation*, (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009), 13.
[92] F.J. Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië: Die Rol van die Polisie* (unpublished MA thesis, University of South Africa, 1992), 243.
[93] TRC, *Volume 2*, 298.

Afrikaans), Psychological Operations (Psy-Ops) and Communication Operations (ComOps).[94]

In their Civic Action programmes, the SADF and SWATF initiated agricultural and irrigation projects and provided medical and educational services to the local population.[95] As part of the programmes, the South African regime argued that while SWAPO only brought violence and uncertainty, the security forces not only offered protection, but also employment and various services, resources, and opportunities for the local population.[96] Similar to their Rhodesian counterpart, the South African security forces used various propaganda methods, including local radio services, broadcasts from aircrafts and helicopters (so-called 'sky shouts'), and the distribution of pamphlets.[97]

Such propaganda pamphlets contained messages and often extremely graphic photos, which were meant to portray the security forces in a positive light, discredit SWAPO, and discourage prospective recruits from joining the organisation.[98] One pamphlet distributed in 1983, for example, depicted the faces of dead PLAN guerrillas killed in action, and read:

> Who are the winners? Do you belong to SWAPO's 'special unit' who is now desperately attempting to drive us out of [South West Africa]? ... These are just 25 of the nearly 200 'special unit' terrorists who died since 15 Feb 83 [my translation from Afrikaans].[99]

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[94] L.E. de Visser, 'Winning the Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War', *Scientia Militaria,* 39, 1 (2011), 96, n3.
[95] Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 244.
[96] Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 65.
[97] I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Rhodesian Army: Counter-Insurgency, 1972-1979', in I.F.W. Beckett and J. Pimlott (eds.), *Counter-Insurgency: Lessons from History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011), 182.
[98] Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 248; see also J. Silvester, '"The Struggle is Futile" – A Short Overview of Anti-SWAPO Visual Propaganda' in Miescher et al. (eds.), *Posters in Action*, 187-201; Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle,* 45.
[99] National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, AACRLS 214, 'War of Propaganda during the Liberation Struggle by Sebulon Ekandjo', undated.

As part of ComOps, the military appointed troops as so-called communicators who visited communities and held meetings where they discussed political issues. The father of one former soldier took him to several of these meetings arranged by local councillors and chiefs where he first learnt about the supposed communist threat posed by SWAPO. He explained he joined SWATF's 102 Battalion in 1985,

> because of … what I learnt and listened to at the meetings I attended – what the communist rule did to people in different countries, and what it was going to do to the people of this country – is what moved me to protect this country and its people and to develop it. … At the political meetings, we were taught about the way communist governments ruled around the world. At these meetings, we were taught about security in the country and how the country should be maintained when it becomes independent. The second meetings were community meetings where people were taught how to live together in unity and how to treat each other with equality, and to preserve their culture so that they do not lose their cultural identity.[100]

Another man, who joined SWATF's 202 Battalion in Rundu in eastern Kavango in 1979, described what he heard at such meetings:

> that time, we were young, 16-17 years old, and we were not fully educated, we didn't know what was going on in the world [and] the Boer came with propaganda. They told us, 'when SWAPO comes, if we let him to come into this country, if you have three kids, he will take one. If you have a lot of cattle, he will take some for him and leave one for you. If you have a car, that car doesn't belong to anyone; anyone can come and drive that car. ... If you have a beautiful woman, he will take that woman'. ... Now the people said, 'no, we don't want that law. If we don't want such a law in this country, we have to stop those people [SWAPO] from coming here'; because we knew nothing.

Until the late 1970s, the majority of rural population beyond Ovamboland had limited knowledge about SWAPO, which often struggled to gain its trust and support. In those areas, the security forces' military and propaganda efforts were relatively more successful than in Ovamboland where the SADF's ComOps were

[100] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 24 September 2016.

an 'almost total failure', according to one observer.[101] In his study of the western Kavango regions during the war, Herbert Karapo describes how civilians feared PLAN combatants and 'some deserted their homesteads claiming that the unidentified soldiers had come with the intention to kill civilians, civil servants and to confiscate their goods'.[102]

One of my interviewees, who was born in Ovinjange in northeastern Kaokoland, recounted that he did not know what SWAPO was fighting for and learned about the organisation from the security forces:

> when the South African soldiers were patrolling, that's when they used to tell us that 'if you see people who look this way, you must watch out. They are dangerous people'. Because at first, we used to feed these SWAPO soldiers [and] treat them well. But then after they left and SWATF chased after them, then they would come back and accuse us of having reported them to SWATF. … SWATF showed us pictures of guns that if we see people with guns that look like the ones they showed then they are SWAPO, and if you see someone with these clothes they are SWAPO.

He said he 'was well informed as to how to identify the [SWAPO] soldiers', who had different clothes, shoes, water bottles, and guns than the South African soldiers. The information he had received from the local security forces affected his first encounter with PLAN guerrillas, whom he identified by the guns they were carrying:

> they came and found me at the borehole while I was giving water to the cattle and I saw them with my own eyes. They started interrogating me, asking me about the headmen. And I answered them that I didn't know about the headmen. … Then I realised that that headmen would probably be killed, because we heard their main target were the headmen ... I ran to [the local headman] and … I informed him that, 'there are people who are not from our soldiers but from another country [referring to Angola] and with different kinds of guns and they are asking about you'. He was advanced in age and he decided to leave from there and go to a village called Ovinjange that was near Opuwo. I escorted him. … Later they [PLAN guerrillas] started looking for me

[101] Quoted in W. Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989* (Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1989), 97. See also L.E. de Visser, 'Winning Hearts and Minds: Legitimacy in the Namibian War for Independence', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24, 4 (2013), 715; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 208.
[102] Karapo, *Living Memory in a Forgotten War Zone*, 135.

> ... Then I realised they wanted to kill me. … Later I ran away to Opuwo where in 1980 I joined Koevoet.[103]

South African propaganda readily exploited such encounters with PLAN guerrillas and their violence in its portrayal of SWAPO as a foreign force and the war as an un-national, inter-ethnic conflict. The accounts of some of my interviewees echoed this depiction. One man asserted that 'SWAPO was fighting against apartheid' but in addition 'they wanted to remove the Boers, and also to remove us [Hereros]'.[104] Another one, who joined a home guard unit in Opuwo in northwestern Kaokoland in 1979, explained:

> most terrorists were Ovambos. When he [a PLAN guerrilla] tried to hurt a person, without realising, the person he was trying to hurt might be his own mother. The way they killed the Himbas was not the same as the way they killed the Ovambos because their families were not in Kaokoland but in Ovamboland.[105]

Similarly to the Rhodesian security forces during the Zimbabwean war of independence, South African propaganda also concentrated on dehumanising PLAN guerrillas, for example, by depicting them as hyenas or demonic creatures with a tail.[106] One former soldier vividly described the impact such depictions had on him and other people in his community:

> the army was going from school to school, they held meetings in the villages. They said, 'SWAPO is coming. If you allow him to come, he will come and kill you. Don't allow SWAPO to come! Those guys who are in school and those people who are sitting at home must go and join the army so that we can fight SWAPO and not allow him to come'. ... But that time I had never seen SWAPO. They made a drawing of what SWAPO looks like; it looked like a baboon with a tail and glasses. So we said, 'oh, that's what SWAPO looks like!?' ... We

[103] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 29 August 2016.
[104] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.
[105] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016.
[106] Akawa, *Our Memories of the Liberation War*, 76; M. Evans, 'The Wretched of the Empire: Politics, Ideology and Counterinsurgency in Rhodesia, 1965-80', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 18, 2 (2007), 186; Silvester, '"The Struggle is Futile"', 194, 201.

> couldn't believe it was a person. We didn't know. We thought SWAPO was an animal.[107]

At least in the late 1970s and early 1980s, these depictions seemed to have shaped civilians' view of SWAPO. Karapo confirms the influence of South African propaganda and cites a civilian's first encounter with SWAPO in February 1978, when a group of guerrillas came to his homestead: 'when I arrived … I was welcome [*sic*] with a question where they asked me whether I know them, and I told them that I think they were SWAPO. Among them one asked me that people referred to us as having tails, and asked "can you see it?" Out of fear I did not respond to the question'.[108]

The security forces further employed captured PLAN combatants, referred to as 'ex terr' or 'ET' (short for ex-terrorist), as part of ComOps. According to Colonel H.C. Nel, captured PLAN guerrillas 'were brainwashed, conditioned [and] put through an extensive programme to clean their minds of all communist influences' before being recruited.[109] Most captured guerrillas were 'turned' through physical and psychological torture, including the use of solitary confinement.[110] At meetings with local civilians, they would recount their experiences of life with SWAPO in exile, such as attacks by the security forces on SWAPO bases, as a scare tactic against prospective guerrillas. One SWATF

[107] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 17 October 2016.
[108] Karapo, *Living Memory in a Forgotten War Zone*, 60.
[109] Quoted in TRC, *Volume 2*, 300.
[110] Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 70; K.A. O'Brien, 'Counter-Intelligence for Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: The South African Police Security Branch 1979-1990', *Intelligence and National Security*, 16, 3 (2001), 44. See also Dlamini, *Askari*; and Cline, *Pseudo Operations and Counterinsurgency*.

Situation Report on ComOps in Kaokoland claimed that 'ex terr had big impact on [local population] especially the fact that he had been abducted originally'.[111]

Tuneya remembered how Koevoet brought a captured PLAN insurgent to his village:

> the first man who came from SWAPO and who I saw myself he was an Ovambo. The Koevoets caught him at the border and then they brought him. ... Then he was shown to the people from house to house. 'This is SWAPO. You hear? This is SWAPO.' Then that man talked to the people. He said, 'yes, I was caught by the Boer, I was at SWAPO [but] now I'm not going back to SWAPO. I am now here with you to fight SWAPO'.

Tuneya claimed he only learnt that 'SWAPO didn't come to kill our people' after the end of the war in late 1989. He said he never considered resigning from SWATF, unlike some of his colleagues who were 'only there for work' and actually had 'SWAPO in mind', that is, they secretly supported SWAPO.[112] This not only again complicates the idea of 'collaboration' but also raises the question: once one had joined, what were the motivations for remaining in the security forces?

The Motivations for Staying in the Security Forces

The reasons for joining South Africa's security forces were not always the same as the reasons for remaining in them.[113] Experiences of violence and the desire

[111] SANDF Archives, Pretoria, KO Bn, Box 100, B-SAKE, 328-3-3-1-4-4, 102 BN, 'P 010810B, From 102BN HQ To C Army 2 (GS2 COM OPS) SWATF, Info Sektor 10, BT, SECRET COM OPS/008/Nov 83'.

[112] Interview Michael Haingura Tuneya, Rundu, 17 October 2016.

[113] John Lynn distinguishes between initial motivations (why individuals join an army), sustaining motivations (why they stay in the military), and combat motivations (why they fight

for protection, however, were again central to my interviewees' accounts about why they stayed in the security forces. Through violence, their alliance with South Africa's security forces became entrenched, and many of my interviewees felt that they could not have left even if they had wanted to. In other words, once they had joined, black troops became trapped in their alliance with South Africa. Once they had joined, 'there was no turning back', as one man put it.[114]

Particularly in Ovamboland, a major reason for remaining was that black members of South Africa's security forces often became socially isolated from their home communities and the civilian population. One interviewee explained that he rarely visited his home village because his service in SWATF not only endangered his own life but that of his parents:

> it was very difficult for me to go there because of SWAPO. … There were times I went there but I never slept there. It was really difficult for us to go there unless you asked people and they say it's really fine then maybe you could go. The main reason why we never went is not that we were afraid of anything. The problem here was because if you go there the next thing you will hear is that your parents have been killed once they [SWAPO] found out.[115]

Such security concerns of black troops for their families were not unique to Namibia. During the Zimbabwean war of independence, the relatives of black civil servants and servicemen of the Rhodesian security forces who lived in remote rural areas also became targets for retaliation against 'sell-outs' aimed at undermining all connections to the settler colonial state.[116]

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on the battlefield): J. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 22, 35-6. See also Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 100-1; Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 124; Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 16; J.M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12-3.

[114] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.

[115] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 9 October 2016.

[116] McLaughlin, 'Victims as Defenders', 269.

In some cases in Ovamboland, black troops became alienated from the local civilian population because of the ways in which their unit worked. For example, one man fought in the reconnaissance wing of 101 Battalion based in Ovamboland, which often operated wearing different uniforms and clothing. In order to avoid detection by SWAPO's local networks of informers in Ovamboland and thus compromising his unit's covert operations, he kept a low profile during leave from the military. He avoided being seen together with members of both SWATF and Koevoet, and was careful about going out drinking or attending football games where SWAPO members were known to gather.[117] He said he also felt scared of going to church because of 'gossip' among people who knew him, and because many churches were 'like brother and sister' with SWAPO.[118]

Many black troops remained in the security forces for self-protection as they were one of the main targets by PLAN. For instance, between 1978 and 1989, a total of 198 black policemen, many of them Koevoet members, were killed by PLAN.[119] One interviewee, who was among the first black Namibians to be recruited into the security forces in early 1975, spoke of the need for protection against PLAN:

> in 1975, we were sent for training in Ondangwa where we were trained on how to use .303 rifles so that we can protect the chiefs. While in training, twelve police officers … were attacked by SWAPO; eleven police officers were killed and only one survived. Then from there we realised that these .303 rifles that we were given were not enough to fight SWAPO. So we decided that we needed better or special rifles, that we cannot continue and we gave back the rifles. … [Later] we received new rifles: the R1, the special rifle that was used in the South African regime.[120]

[117] See also M. Fumanti, 'Burying E.S.: Educated Elites, Subjectivity and Distinction in Rundu, Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 475-7.
[118] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 4 November 2016. On the relationship between Namibian churches and SWAPO, see, for example, P. Steenkamp, 'The Churches', in Leys and Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 94-114.
[119] Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 79. Compare to Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 208-10.
[120] Interview with former soldier, near Oshikuku, 1 October 2016.

One man, who served in SWATF's 101 Battalion in Ondangwa, explained that it was dangerous for black members of the security forces to visit their families in the rural areas of Ovamboland:

> I couldn't take a taxi for more than 5km from [Ondangwa] to go to the village. … [People] like me [who were] staying near the airport [at Ondangwa] and had family 10km from here in the village could not go there. They [SWAPO] would have killed us. A lot of our people were killed just like that.[121]

Even if they had wanted to leave, black troops feared serious repercussions both from their own units and from SWAPO as they were no longer able to leave behind their loyalty to the security forces.[122] As Dlamini writes with regard to the *askaris* in South Africa, it was fear that 'kept [them] in place'.[123] In an interview with *The Namibian* in October 1988, Mweulyata Jonas Kemanya, who had left Koevoet earlier that month, said that 'some of my colleagues repeatedly warned me that if one resigns, then you are in trouble, be it from Koevoet or from civilians'.[124] One former Koevoet member claimed that 'even if … you left Koevoet, then they [SWAPO] would find [and] kill you'.[125] Speaking of PLAN combatants who had been captured and 'turned', one interviewee, who served in both SWATF and Koevoet, stated that they 'were not allowed to be civilians' nor to leave their unit 'because of their training and knowledge'.[126] A former Koevoet member, who joined the unit in Rundu in 1983, contemplated leaving the unit and throughout the war kept up a correspondence with a friend of his from

[121] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016. See also L.H. Nampala, 'Okongo: Case Study of the Impact of the Liberation Struggle in the Ohangwena Region', in Silvester (ed.), *Re-Viewing Resistance*, 208; Becker, *Speaking Out*, 126.
[122] For a discussion of similar dynamics in the case of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, see Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation'.
[123] Dlamini, *Askari*, 194-5.
[124] C. Shipanga, 'Koevoet is an SA Instrument', *The Namibian*, 7 October 1988.
[125] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[126] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016.

school who had gone into exile and joined SWAPO. He asserted that if his colleagues had found out, he would have been killed.[127]

A few of my interviewees considered defecting to SWAPO. However, they all feared that, given their military identity, they would be suspected of being South African spies, arrested and killed if they tried to join SWAPO. Such fears were not unfounded.[128] One man referred to SWAPO's treatment of captives and a story of how a colleague of his in Koevoet, who was allegedly captured by SWAPO and later escaped, told him that captives were executed by firing squad.[129] Another interviewee claimed that 'turned' SWAPO members who decided to return to the liberation movement in exile were killed as suspected spies.[130] Other interviewees had heard accounts of Namibians being imprisoned by SWAPO in Angola.

From the 1980s onward, an estimated 1,000-2,000 SWAPO members were detained in camps in southern Angola, such as the headquarters in Lubango, where an unknown number of them were abused, tortured, and executed as suspected South African spies.[131] Several hundred 'disappeared' while in the hands of SWAPO, and never returned from exile.[132] From 1986, the Parents'

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[127] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[128] In my interviewees with former members of both the security forces and of PLAN I was told of only one case where a member of the security forces, a black Koevoet member together with his family, 'successfully' defected during the war. Compare also to Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation'.
[129] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 3 October 2016.
[130] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016.
[131] C. Leys, and J.S. Saul, 'Liberation Without Democracy? The Swapo Crisis of 1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 1 (1994), 138; K.P. Nathanael, *A Journey to Exile: The Story of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (Aberystwyth: Sosiumi Press, 2002), 142; H. Melber, '"Namibia, Land of the Brave": Selective Memories on War and Violence within Nation Building', in Abbink et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance*, 323; J. Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia: Umgang mit schweren Menschenrechtsverletzungen der Ära des bewaffneten Befreiungskampfes 1966 bis 1989* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 85; Williams, *National Liberation*, 118.
[132] Becker, 'Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana', 523; Williams, *National Liberation*; Dobell, 'Silence in Context', 371-82; Hunter, 'Dealing with the Past in Namibia', 403-

Committee, formed by the families of SWAPO members detained at Lubango, struggled to raise public awareness of SWAPO's abuses in exile.[133] Since then, the treatment of 'ex-detainees' has repeatedly been the focus of heated debate and controversy (see Chapter 6).[134]

One man, who joined SWATF in Katima Mulilo in eastern Caprivi in 1985, had thought about going into exile because he 'knew the people who are liberating the country from apartheid'. He said he also knew that SWATF 'was fighting the people who are liberating this country' but questioned the legitimacy of SWAPO's authority by referring to its 'bush laws':

> there was nothing I could do because as I saw that there was some other factors, which made me not join the struggle. They had the bush laws; the bush laws of arresting somebody without proper investigations. … Like the Lubango dungeons, we heard about it. Lots of people are still missing. Even now.
> *So you already knew about Lubango before independence?*
> Yes, because normally in the SADF they would brief you about what's happening in exile. … So and so person had been arrested, this one is missing. … We knew what was happening even if we were not there. … They were telling us it [the situation in exile] is not good. They were discouraging us to join the struggle.[135]

Over time, military collaboration was entrenched through violence but remained contingent and temporary.[136] At the height of the seven-month long Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in November 1987, for instance, it was reported that several hundred members of SWATF's 101, 202, and 701 Battalions refused orders after

43. See also P. Trewhela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009).
[133] J.S. Saul and C. Leys. 'Lubango and After: "Forgotten History" as Politics in Contemporary Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 2 (2003), 338.
[134] Williams, *Exile History*, 159. In September 2017, a commission of inquiry comprising the Committee of Parents and the Truth and Justice Committee began with a formal investigation of the ex-detainee issue: C. Sasman, 'Dungeon Inquiry to Start Soon', *Namibian Sun*, 9 August 2017.
[135] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 29 September 2014.
[136] Thomas and Curless, 'Introduction', 8.

being deployed to fight in support of UNITA against Angolan and Cuban forces.[137] A source for *The Namibian* newspaper, who claimed to have recently resigned from 101 Battalion, accused the SADF of using SWATF members as '[UNITA] mercenaries against our will' and contrary to their 'aim and principle of defending the Namibian border'.[138] SADF officials acknowledged that several troops had been discharged but denied that there had been a mutiny.[139] Less than one and a half years after the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, in March 1989, the SADF began to withdraw from Angola and Namibia to South Africa, leaving behind the black Namibian members of SWATF and Koevoet.

Conclusion

To argue that the decision of black Namibians to voluntarily join South Africa's security forces – to 'collaborate' in the eyes of SWAPO – was not simply driven by personal economic gain but shaped by reasons that were more complex and ambiguous may seem like a platitude.[140] People's actions and decisions in wartime are of course complicated and layered. Nonetheless, the argument here is a corrective to the popular depiction of former SWATF and Koevoet members, particularly in Namibia, as traitors and collaborators, and to the focus of

[137] 'Dissent in Battalion 101 Over Fighting in Angola for UNITA', *The Namibian*, 20 November 1987; R. Munamava, 'Mass Resignations in 202 Battalion', *The Namibian*, 20 November 1987; M. Verbaan, 'Troops Charged for Refusing to Obey', *Weekly Mail*, 27 November 1987.
[138] 'Dissent in Battalion 101 over Fighting in Angola for UNITA', *The Namibian*, 20 November 1987.
[139] J.D. Battersby, 'Pretoria Ousts 47 Black Troops', *The New York Times*, 23 November 1987.
[140] See also K. Healy, 'Fuck Nuance', *Sociological Theory*, 35, 2 (2017), 118-27.

scholarly explanations for military collaboration on individuals' greed.[141] While economic factors were an important motivation, my interviewees instead emphasised the role of chiefs and headmen in military recruitment, experiences with PLAN guerrillas' violence, and propaganda by South Africa's security forces.

I argue that in order to more fully grasp the motivations of local allies of settler and colonial security forces, it is essential to examine how they made sense of the conflict and its underlying reasons, wherever possible, through oral sources.[142] Outside of SWAPO's strongholds in Ovamboland and western Kavango, few people, at least initially, understood the war as a national liberation struggle spearheaded by SWAPO. In those areas, SWAPO's political and military activities were severely restricted at least until the late 1970s, and South Africa's propaganda efforts were thus able to exploit people's negative perceptions and limited knowledge of the organisation.

In Kaokoland, Otjiherero-speaking people feared SWAPO as an invading force of Ovambos coming from 'outside' and 'the north' intent on removing them from their land. Black Namibians from that region often made a strategic decision to join the security forces in order to seek protection and security against the violence by PLAN guerrillas, which they regarded as foreign and illegitimate. In their eyes, the conflict resembled more an un-national, inter-ethnic war, as South African propaganda sought to portray it, rather than an armed struggle for national liberation. They did not 'collaborate with the enemy' because PLAN was the enemy. In sum, my interviewees' accounts not only blur but upset the boundaries between resistance and collaboration, consent and coercion, and

[141] See also Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 208-9.
[142] For a similar argument, see Larmer, 'Of Local Identities and Transnational Conflict', 175.

victim and perpetrator. The same holds true for the accounts by former soldiers about the transnational origins and formation of 32 Battalion, which I will turn to now.

Chapter 4 – The Transnational Origins and Formation of 32 Battalion, 1975-76

Opponents and enemies of apartheid South Africa have also commonly depicted the Angolan members of 32 Battalion as 'mercenaries', that is, as 'guns for hire'.[1] This label has since stuck with the unit's former soldiers, and has been retrospectively reinforced by the fact that, after the unit's disbandment in 1993, many of them were hired as mercenaries by private military companies across the globe (see Chapter 7). I argue that the popular depiction of these soldiers as mercenaries or collaborators is not only inaccurate and misleading but fails to capture the complex trans- and un-national trajectories of how they came to fight on the side of South Africa.

The vast majority of 32 Battalion's first generation of black recruits – Angolan ex-FNLA troops commonly called *Sete-Seis* ('Seven-Six' in reference to the unit's official formation in 1976) – resembled refugees rather than guerrillas and, at least initially, earned no money at all. By and large, their decision to fight alongside the SADF was an existential one shaped by, in the words of White and Larmer, 'motivations and mobilisations, overlapping and shifting in response to circumstance'.[2] According to my interviewees, these motivations ranged from sheer survival to pragmatism. The circumstances of these soldiers' recruitment, then, are also essential to understanding how 32 Battalion's particular military identity and culture subsequently developed (see Chapter 5).

[1] See, for example, National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, TLE 0834, Covert Action Publications, 'South Africa's Black Mercenaries', *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, No. 13 (July-August 1981), 16-7; Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 28.
[2] White and Larmer, 'Introduction', 1274.

The transfer of allegiance of ex-FNLA guerrillas to the SADF must be understood in light of the fractures and factions of Angolan nationalism that marked the country's chaotic decolonisation process. As Justin Pearce writes, 'the emergence of separate strands of nationalism … hindered the possibility of a common vision of nationhood'.[3] In fact, Angola's transition to independence thus stands out as a peculiar case: more so than in other similar contexts in southern Africa, various different groups shifted alliances, often repeatedly and based on considerations of pragmatism and opportunism rather than higher ideals and long-term political allegiances. For example, in 1965, a high-ranking FNLA cadre, Alexandre Taty, attempted a coup against the movement's leader, Holden Roberto. After briefly seeking an affiliation with the MPLA, Taty defected to the Portuguese regime in the northern enclave of Cabinda, along with 1,200 troops. About half of them came to form the core of the *Tropas Especiais* ('Special Troops'), the first unit in the Portuguese colonial army that consisted entirely of African soldiers.[4]

The defection of Taty and his troops pointed to deep-rooted problems of political and military leadership within the FNLA, which were also reflected in my interviewees' accounts. As I will discuss below, my interviewees had little to say about political or military training during their time in the FNLA. Instead, they focused on the military training they received in the SADF (see Chapter 5). Their accounts thus support assessments of the FNLA as an organisation

[3] On the fractured character of Angolan nationalism, see, for example, Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict*, 24-31; and R. Soares de Oliveira, 'The Struggle for the State and the Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Angola, 1975-2015', *Social Dynamics*, 42, 1 (2016), 69-73.
[4] W. Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 73; Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 140; F.R. de Meneses and R. McNamara, 'Parallel Diplomacy, Parallel War: The PIDE/DGS's Dealings with Rhodesia and South Africa, 1961-74', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 2 (2014), 376.

characterised by 'its inability to create a[n] … integrated political community', in the words of John Marcum.[5] According to different observers, the movement's organisational incapacity was connected to the movement's long-standing weaknesses of political and military leadership, particularly by Roberto, and led to widespread indiscipline among FNLA troops.[6] As one U.S. intelligence analyst notes, the FNLA's 'leadership, discipline, maintenance, command, control and communications were all lacking'.[7]

Another central aspect of my interviewees' accounts was that many of them found it difficult to remember and recount their experiences of why exactly they did what and how precisely they ended up where. In response to my questions, they would explain that, at the time, they did not think or feel anything or that they just followed orders. More than 40 years later, such difficulties and explanations are of course unsurprising. However, I suggest that they are not just the result of troubles of recall. My interviewees' accounts convey a deep sense of fatalism, of having been swept up by larger forces beyond their control. The former soldiers' accounts also reflect the chaos and confusion of this war, which often seem to escape comprehension, let alone articulation. Such was the case with one interviewee, who recounted the situation in 1975:

> I was [in the FNLA] for no longer than a year until … the war came. The war was very complicated: the FNLA against UNITA; UNITA against the FNLA; …

[5] J. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Volume II (1962-1976)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 276. See also F.A. Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), 77; S.F. Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy: The Case of Angola and Mozambique', *The China Quarterly*, 142 (1995), 392.
[6] See, for example, W. Steenkamp, *Borderstrike!: South Africa in Angola* (Durban: Butterworths, 1983), 48; W.S. Van der Waals, *Portugal's War in Angola, 1961-1974* (Rivonia: Ashanti, 1993), 165; P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 238, 281; J. Miller, 'Yes, Minister: Reassessing South Africa's Intervention in the Angolan Civil War, 1975-1976', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15, 3 (2013), 14.
[7] W. Thom, 'Angola's 1975-76 Civil War', *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement*, 7 (1998), 12.

> the FNLA against the MPLA; the MPLA against FNLA. Everyone was there, there was no way out. … Then the Cubans came, and we were pushed out into the bush. … Us staying here [in South Africa] is due to the lack of comprehension. The politicians and leaders had no comprehension or understanding … It was a very dangerous situation. All three movements came [into Angola] and wanted to be president at once. … [This] is what caused us all to run away and come here. … God was with us; luck was with us.[8]

At the same time, my interviewees' accounts also told stories in which they often had little to no agency, and abdicated most responsibility for their actions. One man, for instance, explained:

> In the war there is no family. If you don't kill, you get killed. We couldn't do anything. We just had to do it. … The laws [i.e. military commands] were coming from the general in South Africa. In Angola, [it was] the same, the orders came from the general. … The law is determined by the general … who says, 'You are going to do this', and you do.[9]

The former soldiers' agency during the war is perhaps best understood as 'tactical agency'. As Alcinda Honwana writes, tactical agency is exercised out of a position of limited power, and aims 'to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions … created by [a] violent military environment'.[10]

To some extent, my interviewees' stories have also been shaped by the widespread negative perception of 32 Battalion, particularly among many black South Africans. During the war in Angola, 32 Battalion was seen as one of the SADF's most infamous units, and was also known as *Os Terríveis* ('The Terrible Ones'). The battalion's later deployment to South African townships in the early 1990s was highly controversial, and further cemented its reputation as a unit of apartheid 'mercenaries' and 'killers' (see Chapter 7).

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[8] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[9] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[10] A.M. Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 71, 73-4.

Reasons for Joining the FNLA, 'the Most Famous Party'

Throughout the war, the FNLA (previously *União das Populações de Angola* [UPA]) was heavily dependent on financial and military support by Zaire where half a million Angolan Bakongo, the organisations' main support base, had settled following anti-colonial uprisings in 1961.[11] Since 1962, the FNLA had its main military training camp at Kinkuzu, about 150km north of the border with Angola.[12] In early 1972, after FNLA soldiers challenged Holden Roberto's erratic leadership, the Zairian army intervened to violently suppress the mutiny, and began to take an active role in reorganising, retraining, and equipping FNLA forces.[13] The Zairian regime under President Mobutu further authorised large-scale recruitment of new soldiers from among the Angolan exile population in Zaire.[14] According to Marcum, the FNLA leadership's 'reliance on that base [Kinkuzu], its dependency on exile-émigré manpower, and its immersion in the Zairian political system … conditioned its failure to develop a program of political education and mobilization within Angola'.[15]

Among the FNLA's new recruits in Zaire was a man, whose family had moved from northern Angola to Zaire's capital, Léopoldville (today's Kinshasa), in the early 1960s. Like other interviewees, he lived in Kinshasa until he was forcibly

[11] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 238; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 116.
[12] Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 64.
[13] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 220; Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 86.
[14] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 220; Van der Waals, *Portugal's War in Angola*, 165.
[15] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 183.

conscripted into the FNLA in 1973.[16] Another interviewee recounted how, in 1974, he was forcibly recruited in his hometown in northern Katanga:

> In order to enter Angola and achieve independence, the leader [of the FNLA], Roberto, requested soldiers from Mobutu [who] replied: 'I don't have any soldiers but I'm going to issue an order to get children older than 15 years old to go to the front'. … I joined FNLA when I was 15 years old. … They caught us. They forced us to go into Angola. It was forced recruitment. I didn't have family in Angola, all of them were in Zaire.[17]

In August and September 1974, the FNLA, supported by 1,200-1,300 Zairian troops, began to move its forces from Zaire into Angola. Using funds provided by the CIA, Roberto had also recruited several hundred former Portuguese officers and mercenaries, some of whom were hired to train new FNLA units, and would later become commanders in 32 Battalion.[18] The FNLA was soon able to establish a considerable military presence in northwestern Angola, particularly in the rural Bakongo north.[19] There, FNLA representatives went from village to village to recruit men for military training in Zaire.[20] According to one of my interviewees, he was forcibly recruited in his hometown in the province in Kwanza Norte in northern Angola. He was 21 years old when FNLA troops came to his village and rounded up all the local young men. Out of his three brothers, the local FNLA commander chose him, apparently because he was the youngest and physically fittest. That was the last time he saw his family.[21]

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[16] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 30 May 2016.
[17] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[18] R. Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola, 1975-76', *African Affairs*, 77, 308 (1978), 359; G. Hughes, 'Soldiers of Misfortune: The Angolan Civil War, the British Mercenary Intervention, and UK Policy towards Southern Africa', *The International History Review*, 36, 3 (2014), 496; P. Nortje, *The Terrible Ones: A Complete History of 32 Battalion* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2012), 59.
[19] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 246, 269; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 241; Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 102.
[20] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 246.
[21] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 4 June 2016.

When Roberto launched a military offensive against the MPLA in Luanda in March 1975, the FNLA – backed by Zaire, the USA, and China – possessed the strongest military forces out of the three nationalist movements. According to some of my interviewees, the FNLA's military superiority prompted them to enlist in the organisation. One man, for instance, explained that the joined the FNLA because he 'wanted to be a soldier [and] liked the FNLA [because it] was very famous'.[22] Another interviewee who had considered enlisting in UNITA decided to join the FNLA because it was 'the most famous party at the time'.[23]

Other interviewees joined the FNLA because of 'promises of a better life' or to seek revenge for relatives who had been killed by the Portuguese colonial military.[24] Some enlisted out of clearer ideological convictions, as one interviewee explained:

> I joined [the FNLA] because it was the only party working with the Americans and the Chinese. The MPLA was part of the Soviets and Cubans. And I decided to go to the FNLA [because] I did not agree with the Soviets.[25]

When I asked if he had considered UNITA, he said no, and, referring to the organisation's previous 'non-hostility' pact with the Portuguese, explained: 'UNITA had no direction. [First,] they were helped by the Portuguese, then they turned against the Portuguese'.[26]

Others recounted more ambiguous memories about joining the FNLA. One interviewee had voluntarily enlisted in his hometown of Cateco, Malanje

[22] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.
[23] Following the FNLA's disintegration in early 1976, he left the party to join 'the movement of the South', UNITA. After less than a year, he deserted UNITA and fled to Rundu, northern Namibia, where he enlisted in 32 Battalion in November 1976: interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.
[24] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016.
[25] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[26] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016. See also Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 239-41; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 82; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 144.

province, in December 1974, and explained his decision as one of a young man influenced by propaganda:

> We were young then, 17 or 18. So they [the FNLA] started to bring propaganda with them. We were innocent then and didn't know the history behind [the propaganda] very well. … I decided to join because the politics that were going on. We didn't know what was the truth and what was a lie. They controlled us by talking about freedom so we followed. [27]

He went on to undergo seven months of military training at the Kinkuzu base where FNLA troops were trained by Zairian and Chinese military instructors.[28] In early and mid-1974, China, in competition with Soviet support for the MPLA, had sent about 120 military advisers along with 450 tons of military equipment to Kinkuzu.[29] Less than a year later, however, China had reportedly become disaffected with the FNLA.[30] Steven Jackson argues that 'Roberto was counting on a military victory by sheer force of numbers [and paid] little attention to what made the Chinese [military] an effective force: high morale, strict discipline and constant training and political indoctrination'.[31] China eventually withdrew its backing in late October 1975, almost immediately after South Africa's military invasion of Angola in support of the FNLA and UNITA, discussed below.

My interviewees had very little to say about their military training in the FNLA. One recounted that 'the training was [in] the experience of war', meaning they learnt 'how to use firearms and set ambushes'.[32] Another one explained that life at Kinkuzu was 'normal': 'We trained until we could fight for Angola'. When I

[27] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.
[28] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.
[29] See, for example, J. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: Norton, 1978), 67; Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy', 402.
[30] Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy', 408; G. Bender, 'Kissinger in Angola: Anatomy of Failure', in R. Lemarchand (ed.), *American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978), 107.
[31] Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy', 408.
[32] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

asked about the relationship with his Chinese instructors, he called them 'traitors' for having withdrawn their support for the FNLA.[33] In a similar vein, another man said that China 'only gave us instructors [and] after they gave us instructions, they disappeared'. However, he did not remember life at Kinkuzu as 'normal' but as a time of extreme deprivation and harsh weather conditions:

> When it rains, it rains. And when you need to eat, you only eat once a day. … The situation was bad. ... When you go to the hospital and see the sick people, you just want to run away because they are sicker than you, just covered in a cloth, already dead or dying. … If you left there alive, [you knew] God looked after you well.[34]

His account of Kinkuzu echoes similarly negative accounts by members of the PAC sent there for military training in the early and mid-1960s, which again point to long-standing structural problems of leadership and logistics within the FNLA.[35] According to one former PAC member, Gasson Ndlovu:

> This Roberto man [i.e. Holden Roberto] had a few little boys. You can't call them soldiers because those were small boys: 14-15 years old. Little things that he might have collected from the streets … They were dying literally, when we came there. This malaria was killing them. But even worse than malaria, they were dying from hunger. … Now, I think we were just two weeks there, trying to find what to do there in Roberto Holden's [*sic*] camp. We were in a camp where there are no guns to use for training.[36]

When I asked one former soldier if he ever considered running away, he said 'never' and explained that, both at Kinkuzu and later back in Angola, he and his colleagues found themselves in places 'where you don't belong and where you don't have any family'. In addition, he had become dependent on the FNLA for

[33] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016.
[34] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.
[35] See also Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 118.
[36] Quoted in G.F. Houston, *Military Bases and Camps of the Liberation Movements*, 1961-1990 (Amathole District Municipality, 2013), 37-8. See also G.F. Houston, T. Ka Plaatjie and T. April, 'Military Training and Camps of the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa, 1961-1981', *Historia,* 60, 2 (2015), 37-8; L. Passemiers, 'The Pan Africanist Congress and the Congo Alliance', *South African Historical Journal*, 70, 1 (2018), 82-107.

food and shelter: 'They controlled us with food. After you left your family and your house, you just had to follow. … You don't know that place [so] where you would go and to whom?'[37]

In February 1975, the FNLA's numerical military strength was further increased when Daniel Chipenda, the MPLA's former commander of the eastern front, and the majority of his 2,000-3,000 troops joined the organisation.[38] The so-called *Revolta do Leste* ('Eastern Revolt') was the result of an internal power struggle between Chipenda and the MPLA's leader, Agostinho Neto, as well as widespread discontent among the eastern rank-and-file of the movement.[39] Chipenda's troops resented the predominantly Mbundu and *mestiço* origin of the MPLA's leadership, the leadership's privileges and abuse of power, and their luxurious living conditions in exile, while those fighting in the bush in Angola were suffering from hunger and Portuguese military attacks.[40] 'For many guerrillas', Inge Brinkman writes, 'Daniel Chipenda had all the way been a more important leader than Agostinho Neto'. While the latter rarely visited East Angola, Chipenda was the most prominent of the local military leaders.[41]

As part of their alliance, the FNLA gained an important military presence in the southeast of Angola, and Chipenda became assistant Secretary General of the

[37] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.
[38] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 251; Brinkman, 'War, Witches and Traitors', 303-25; I. Brinkman, *A War for People: Civilians, Mobility, and Legitimacy in South-East Angola during MPLA's War for Independence* (Köln: Köppe, 2005), 184-5; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 99-101, 167; Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 103-4.
[39] At the same time, Neto's leadership was challenged by another faction, *Revolta Activa* (Active Revolt): Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 98-9. According to Kennes and Larmer, 'Zairian president Mobutu encouraged this split and facilitated the integration of Chipenda's forces with those of the FNLA': Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 104.
[40] See, for example, Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II*, 200-4, 248-51, 268; J.M. Mabeko-Tali, '"Tribalisme", "régionalisme", et lute de libération nationale: la question "tribale" et "ethnico-régionale" dans la dissidence au sein du MPLA dans l'Est angolais en 1969-1974', *Année Africaine (1992-3)*, 463-86; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 98-9; and Brinkman, *A War for People*, 184-5.
[41] Brinkman, *A War for People*, 185.

FNLA. However, the adhesion of Chipenda's faction to the FNLA, as Marcum argues, 'never became more than a loose expediency'. Instead, 'it was an alliance that enabled Chipenda to freewheel with South Africans … in what was really a fourth, south-eastern-based movement' – the *Facção Chipenda* ('Chipenda Faction'), as some of my interviewees called it.[42]

One of my interviewees was among the troops loyal to Chipenda. He had joined the MPLA in 1965 'because of lies', meaning he had been made false promises of being sent abroad to study. He recounted that he had initially hoped to be able to study medicine or law but instead 'was given a military uniform', and sent to military training courses in Moscow for a total of two years (1965-66 and 1969-70).[43] In 1975, He followed Chipenda, and changed affiliation from the MPLA to the FNLA. When I asked him how he felt about the change, he, again with a sense of fatalism, simply said that 'I felt nothing – I was still young and happy to be fighting as soldier'.[44] To many troops of the Eastern Front such as him, the transfer to the FNLA, as Inge Brinkman points out, 'did not mean grant [*sic*] ideological, class, ethnic or other changes'.[45]

Similarly, another man was also a member of the Eastern Revolt. He first said that he had originally joined the MPLA in 1965 at the age of 15 because, 'I was only a child, I didn't know anything'. However, as he later explained, his backstory was much more horrific:

> The Portuguese killed my whole family. My great-grandparents, my grandparents, they were all killed by the Portuguese. … They were just killed because they were black. I was angry. … That is why I took a gun and started fighting against the Portuguese.

[42] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II*, 276.
[43] On the Soviet Union's assistance to the MPLA in the 1960s, see V. Shubin, 'Unsung Heroes: The Soviet Military and the Liberation of Southern Africa', *Cold War History*, 7, 2 (2007), 256-7.
[44] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 24 May 2016.
[45] See also Brinkman, *A War for People*, 185.

After almost ten years in the MPLA's Eastern Front, he followed Chipenda to the FNLA:

> Chipenda was a Secretary General who took all the weapons to Angola so that we can fight. … When [the MPLA] realised that Angola was going to be taken over by black people, they wanted to kill Chipenda. … That is when Chipenda changed to the FNLA. … The ones from the north they never liked us. … That is why he was nearly killed. … When we separated, we from the south joined FNLA and those in the north joined MPLA.[46]

His statement that 'the ones from the north never liked us' likely referred to the split between 'northerner' and 'southerner' (sulano) identities in Angola. While sulano also refers to the general south of the country, it is often shorthand for the Ovimbundu ethnic group. In the eyes of many 'northerners', the Ovimbundu historically stood for suspect political loyalties, and became especially associated with UNITA.[47] During the 1961 anti-colonial uprisings in northern Angola, many Ovimbundu migrant labourers from the south had not joined the revolt while others had been forcibly recruited into the Portuguese colonial army, 'thereby causing some scepticism about their commitment to independence'.[48]

Similarly to the above men, another interviewee also indirectly ended up in the FNLA. In January 1975, he joined the Chipenda Faction, and less than two months later became a member of the FNLA. he explained that considerations about language and ideology influenced his original decision to join the Chipenda Faction:

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[46] After serving in 32 Battalion until 1988, he resigned and joined Koevoet: interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[47] I thank John Spall for this point. See V. Martins, 'Ovimbundu Identity Attributions in Post-War Angola', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4 (2015), 853-67.
[48] L.M. Heywood, 'Unita and Ethnic Nationalism in Angola', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 1 (1989), 52-3; I. Brinkman, 'War and Identity in Angola: Two Case-Studies', *Lusotopie*, 10 (2003), 205-6. See also Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola*, 163; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 21, 77; J. Pearce, *Control, Ideology and Identity in Civil War: The Angolan Central Highlands 1965-2002* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2011), 49.

> There were four parties: MPLA, FNLA, UNITA, and the Chipenda Faction. I was with the Chipenda Faction but went to look at the FNLA. They spoke a dialect I didn't understand [likely referring to Kikongo] so that's why I didn't join them. In the MPLA, they spoke Portuguese but they were communists. … Their story was, 'Whatever is yours belongs to others too'. In UNITA, they spoke my dialect [Umbundu] but I didn't like the way they were. When I got to the Chipenda Faction, I also found people speaking dialects that I didn't understand but found others speaking Portuguese. … Then I said, 'Here is where I'm going to join'.

For him, his transfer from the Chipenda Faction to the FNLA also did not seem to involve any significant changes:

> After just about two months, … the Chipenda Faction came to an end [and] we joined the FNLA. We used the flags of the Chipenda Faction and the FNLA [until] the politicians said: 'There cannot exist two different flags in the same party'. So [we] became part of the FNLA [and] were no longer the Chipenda Faction.[49]

Alongside Chipenda's troops, yet other FNLA recruits came from various units of the Portuguese colonial military and police. During the transition to independence scheduled for November 1975, all rival nationalist organisations actively recruited former colonial troops in order to increase their military strength – a highly unusual action in comparison to similar transition processes in southern Africa.[50] In the power vacuum created by the Portuguese withdrawal, expediency and opportunism often took precedence over other considerations.[51] Both the FNLA and the MPLA, for instance, absorbed many of the 3,000 members of locally recruited *Grupos Espeçiais* ('Special Groups'), who were stationed at military bases in northern and eastern Angola.[52] These troops'

[49] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[50] Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', 359; Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 149; A. Leão and M. Rupiya, 'A Military History of the Angolan Armed Forces – As Told by Former Combatants', in Rupiya (ed.), *Evolutions and Revolutions*, 15-6; Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 8-11.
[51] Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 9.
[52] Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 10; Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 149.

integration into the different nationalist movements was possible due to the fractured character of Angolan nationalism. 'Where nationalism was … internally divided by factionalism', as Anderson and Branch write, colonial soldiers 'could remake themselves as nationalists and escape retribution [as in] Angola'.[53]

However, by far not all colonial troops 'remade' themselves as Angolan nationalists or met the same fate, as the contrasting cases of the 'Katangese Gendarmes', and the *Flechas* ('Arrows') demonstrate. The Katangese Gendarmes, who were originally a secessionist force from Zaire's Katanga region, had fought against the MPLA under Portuguese command, and were also known as the *Fiéis* ('Faithful Ones').[54] During Angola's decolonisation process, it was initially proposed that the group of about 2,400 troops be moved to South African bases in the Caprivi in northern Namibia (where both Bravo Group/32 Battalion, and groups of *Flechas* would later be settled). However, the leftist colonial governor, Admiral Rosa Coutinho, instead strongly supported their transfer to the MPLA, which had been severely weakened by the Eastern Revolt's split.[55] Ultimately, the ex-gendarmes entered into an opportunistic military alliance with the MPLA: they agreed to assist the organisation in its struggle for power in exchange for the latter's help to reach their objective of taking power in Kinshasa.[56]

The *Flechas* followed a different route. They had been an auxiliary unit established by the Portuguese intelligence service that consisted mostly of San ('Bushmen') recruits from southeastern Angola as well as 'turned' MPLA

[53] Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 8.
[54] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 249; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 103-5; Larmer, 'Local Conflicts in a Transnational War', 93.
[55] By now, the group had been renamed the *Front de libération nationale congolaise* ('Front for Congolese National Liberation', FLNC): Larmer, 'Of Local Identities and Transnational Conflict', 170; Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 109.
[56] For a detailed discussion of the accord between the MPLA and the FLNC, see Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 103-9.

guerrillas.[57] Under Portuguese command, which exploited the hostility between the San and 'Bantu' black Africans, the *Flechas* had fought primarily against the MPLA and the FNLA. In October 1974, the MPLA held a meeting with the *Flechas* but, unlike with the Katangese Gendarmes, ultimately reached no agreement. As Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer write, the ex-gendarmes – in contrast to the *Flechas* – had retained considerable 'autonomous political leadership and organization', which enabled them 'to articulate and pursue their interests and avoid … being treated as a tool of one or another of the various nationalist or regional state forces'.[58] In late 1974 and early 1974, some *Flechas* joined the FNLA and the Chipenda Faction.[59] However, the trajectory of many *Flechas* mirrored that of the FNLA troops who ended up in Bravo Group/32 Battalion: fearing for their lives, they fled to the Caprivi in northern Namibia where the SADF established a camp and formed them into an ad hoc military unit.[60]

Generally, the decision of African colonial soldiers to join a particular organisation seems to have been based on a variety of factors, such as ideological convictions, family or ethnic ties, and regional location of their original unit.[61] In the case of one man, his decision appeared to rest primarily on the last factor. In 1971, at the of age 21, he had enlisted in the Portuguese army in his hometown near Serpa Pinto (today's Menongue) for economic reasons:

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[57] Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 129-30. See also J.P. Cann, *The Flechas: Insurgent Hunting in Eastern Angola, 1965-1974* (Solihull: Helion & Co., 2013); and De Meneses and McNamara, 'Parallel Diplomacy, Parallel War'.
[58] Kennes and Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes*, 104-5.
[59] A.S. Van Wyk, 'The Militarisation of the Platfontein San (!Xun and Khwe): The Initial Years 1966-1974', *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 10, 3 (2014), 146.
[60] Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 149; Van Wyk, 'The Militarisation of the Platfontein San', 146-7. Ian Uys claims that a quarter of the *Flechas* were killed by the Angolan liberation movements: I. Uys, *Bushman Soldiers: Their Alpha and Omega* (Germiston: Fortress Publishers, 1993), 11.
[61] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 177; Leão and Rupiya, 'A Military History of the Angolan Armed Forces', 16; Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 10. It is unclear to what extent it was possible for colonial soldiers *not* to join other organisations or units.

> In those times, if you had a good body and were fit, you would serve as a soldier. You would do tests and if you passed, you got in. When you finished the training, you got your documents and then you got work.

In late 1974, he, together with the majority of his unit, joined Chipenda's MPLA faction, about two months before they shifted their affiliation to the FNLA:

> The FNLA got into Angola and [their commanders] called us because they knew we were serving as soldiers in the Portuguese military.
> *Why did you decide to join the FNLA?*
> We didn't think. We were there [with] Chipenda [and the] MPLA was far away. [62]

Within the span of less than three months, he had changed affiliation twice. By the end of 1975, he would find himself undergoing training by yet another group of actors who had become involved in Angola's civil war: white officers of the South African Defence Force.

The Formation of Bravo Group

South African military intelligence officials had been in regular contact with both UNITA and the FNLA since February 1975. Both organisations were desperate for military support and, in exchange, offered to assist South Africa's security forces to expel SWAPO from southern Angola.[63] According to Jamie Miller, the FNLA 'said it would allow the SADF to conduct "hot pursuit" operations against

[62] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016.
[63] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 13; S. du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola: Die Verhaal van Suid-Afrika se Soldate in Angola 1975-1976* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1989), 28. Despite what one might expect, the referenced literature does not mention the SADF's fight against MK in Angola nor did any of my interviewees. Also, on the shifting relationship between UNITA and SWAPO, see V.A. Shigwedha, 'The Relationship between UNITA and SWAPO: Allies and Adversaries', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 6 (2014), 1275-87.

SWAPO operatives up to 80km inside Angola'. In response, South Africa began to supply limited military and financial aid to both organisations.[64]

From late May 1975 onwards, South Africa became increasingly alarmed about the situation in Angola as the MPLA, supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, gradually gained the upper hand in Luanda, driving out the ill-disciplined FNLA troops.[65] After having effectively secured control of the capital and its surrounding areas, the MPLA then began an offensive against UNITA and the FNLA in the south towards the border with Namibia.[66] With the backing of South Africa and the USA, the FNLA and UNITA entered a fragile and short-lived alliance, united only by the common aim of expelling the MPLA from its positions in Luanda by 11 November, the scheduled date of independence.[67]

In May and July 1975, Chipenda met SADF officials in Namibia's capital, Windhoek, to further discuss South Africa's support of the FNLA.[68] In late August, the SADF began with the covert supply of weapons, ammunition, and other equipment to Chipenda's southern arm of the FNLA, adding to previous arms shipments to both the FNLA and UNITA.[69] SADF officials, however, had concerns about the proper use of the equipment and believed that additional training of FNLA and UNITA troops was required.[70] At the end of August, a group of SADF officers, headed by Colonel Jan Breytenbach, met with Chipenda at the SADF base at Rundu to develop an operational plan to help the FNLA retake southern

[64] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 13.
[65] Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', 355; Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 14.
[66] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 21; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 52.
[67] F. Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 151; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 311; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 109.
[68] Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 131-2.
[69] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 294-5; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 61.
[70] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 23; H. Hamann, *Days of the Generals: The Untold Story of South Africa's Apartheid-era Military Generals* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2001), 24; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 67.

Angola.[71] In the original operational plan, Breytenbach wrote he believed 'that the success of the operation depends on good leadership at every level, that is to say, white South African command and logistical support'.[72]

For Breytenbach, this kind of operation was not the first nor would it be the last.[73] Three years earlier, in 1972, he had briefly been tasked with the military training of a group of Zambian dissidents who 'were to be used to destabilise Zambia, thereby persuading [President Kenneth] Kaunda to end Zambian support' of the ANC, SWAPO, and nationalist organisations in Angola and Zimbabwe.[74] In late 1976, Breytenbach helped establish the Directorate of Special Tasks, an office of the SADF's Chief of Staff Intelligence. The Directorate would provide covert support, primarily in terms of equipment and training, to various military groups across southern Africa: UNITA, Renamo, Super-ZAPU, the Lesotho Liberation Army, and other groups and operations in South Africa.[75]

While the SADF set up a training camp for about 800 UNITA troops at Calombo, south of Serpa Pinto, Breytenbach was sent to begin training Chipenda's FNLA forces at Mpupa.[76] Breytenbach writes that 'the 300 FNLA troops quartered at the base … were undoubtedly the scruffiest, most underfed,

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[71] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 23. As a curious side note: Jan Breytenbach is the brother of the famous anti-apartheid writer and activist, Breyten Breytenbach.
[72] F.J. du T. Spies, *Operasie Savannah: Angola 1975–1976* (Pretoria: S. A. Weermag, 1989), translated from Afrikaans by Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 23.
[73] For a brief summary of Breytenbach's military career, see R. Reeve and S. Ellis, 'An Insider's Account of the South African Security Forces' Role in the Ivory Trade', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 13, 2 (1995), 228.
[74] M. Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 143; P. Stiff, *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations, 1969-1994* (Alberton: Galago, 1999), 39.
[75] S. Ellis, 'The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2 (1998), 278; O'Brien, *The South African Intelligence Services*, 121. See also TRC, *Volume 2*, 88-93, 321-2, 419-20, 440; and interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at Historical Papers Research Archive (HPRA), University of Witwatersrand (HPRA), A3079 'Missing Voices' Oral History Project, 2004-2012 (A3079), D.16.
[76] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 269; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 294; Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 24.

worst-armed and most unwarlike body of troops I had ever seen in my life'.[77] While the training of these troops began, more FNLA soldiers, who were fleeing from the MPLA's advance southwards, were arriving at Mpupa. For the next weeks, the SADF fed, armed, and trained the troops, and organised them into companies, platoons, and sections.[78] In October, another training base was established for FNLA units at Serpa Pinto.[79]

The commanders put in charge of the new units were white South African officers, mainly from the Reconnaissance Commandos for whom it was the first time to interact with black soldiers, as well as former members of the Portuguese security forces, who had joined either the FNLA or the SADF from various backgrounds in Angola and Mozambique.[80] Later they were joined by white mercenaries from Rhodesia, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, France, the US, and Puerto Rico.[81] Referring to the men they commanded, one SADF officer commented that he was surprised to learn that people 'were continually changing allegiances … one moment the FNLA will be friends with UNITA and the next moment they will be friends with the FNLA or the [MPLA] against UNITA … and so on and so forth'.[82] Similarly, Sisingi Kamongo observed that 'the line between all the fighting factions was very thin'.[83]

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[77] J. Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers: The Story of South Africa's 32-Battalion 1975-1993* (Alberton: Galago, 2002), 22.
[78] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 22, 26; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 295.
[79] Spies, *Operasie Savannah*, 67; Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, 28.
[80] The Portuguese commanders included former inspectors of the Portuguese intelligence service (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado/Direção General de Segurança*), a former paratrooper originally from the Cape Verde Islands, and a former commander of Portuguese irregular forces in Mozambique: J. Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword: 32 'Buffalo' Battalion – South Africa's Foreign Legion* (Alberton: Lemur, 1990), 15-16; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 59; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 295; Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', 359.
[81] Interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.16.
[82] Interview with Kevin Fitzgerald, Johannesburg, May 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.11.
[83] Kamongo and Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand*, 37.

By early October 1975, the stage had been set for direct military intervention by South Africa, which was by now providing full-scale training and logistical support for the FNLA and UNITA in the south, and supplying arms and advisers to the FNLA in the north.[84] Most of the equipment provided to FNLA troops under Breytenbach's command, however, included arms from the Second World War and was heavily out-dated.[85] On 14 October, a first South African armoured column, called 'Task Force Zulu', entered Angola from northern Namibia, marking the beginning of 'Operation Savannah'.[86] In addition to 1,500 SADF soldiers, Task Force Zulu comprised two battle groups: roughly 1,000 FNLA troops under the command of Breytenbach, and about 800 former *Flechas,* codenamed 'Bravo Group' and 'Alpha Group', respectively.[87] After having received some military training in the Caprivi, the former *Flechas* returned to Angola, now fighting alongside FNLA troops, their previous enemy.[88]

To my interviewees, the FNLA leadership's decision to join forces with the SADF was largely a *fait accompli*, a decision in which they had no say.[89] Like in the case of the Chipenda Faction's change to the FNLA, one interviewee simply said that he agreed with the decision because Chipenda was his commander, while another explained that 'I couldn't disagree [or] say yes or no – I was just following'.[90] The actual process of training and integrating the FNLA troops into

[84] Miller, 'Yes, Minister', 27.
[85] I thank Will Gordon for reminding me of this. See J. Breytenbach, *The Tempered Sword: Forged in Battle Revisited: Operation Savannah and the Birth of 32Bn* (Sandton: Bushwarrior.com, 2011), 66-8.
[86] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 298.
[87] The two groups are sometimes also referred to as 'Battle Group Alpha' and 'Battle Group Bravo': Stiff, *The Silent War*, 113; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 146.
[88] In 1976, Alpha Group would officially be renamed 31 Battalion.
[89] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 4 June 2016.
[90] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.

the SADF was far from smooth, as I will further discuss in Chapter 5. For instance, in late November 1975, a Portuguese Officer who was debriefed by the SADF reported:

> The FNLA troops generally conduct themselves well except under fire when positive leadership can stop them from fleeing. In some cases however they have to be convinced at pistol point.[91]

Similarly, a situation report on the morale of FNLA troops fighting in Task Force Zulu in December 1975 stated:

> It was reported that during [enemy] fire on 1 Dec 5 members of a [company] deserted [and] the rest of this [company] could only be stopped by force[.] Later during the same day the same [company] had task to start with an [operation but] they refused leaving the white [platoon commander] alone.[92]

These troops' reluctance, if not refusal, to fight shows that they were not (yet) motivated by a shared sense of identity or loyalty with the SADF. Instead, SADF officers enforced combat discipline often violently and at gunpoint (see in Chapter 5).

While Task Force Zulu was advancing north toward Luanda, Roberto, disregarding the counsel of South African, Portuguese, and American military advisers, launched an offensive on the capital with the aim of capturing it before 11 November.[93] The attack ended in disaster when Cuban-backed MPLA forces and the Katangese Gendarmes repelled the advance at the village of Quifangondo, just 20km north of Luanda, killing hundreds of FNLA troops.[94] As Marcum writes, 'the FNLA army, weak in discipline and without political

[91] SANDF Archives, Pretoria, HS Ops Gp 1, Box 10, HS 11 3 14 Vol 4, 'De-briefing conducted with the Portuguese Officer … Gaspar on 24 Nov 75', 1.
[92] SANDF Archives, Pretoria, HS Ops Gp 1, Box 10, HS 11 3 14 Vol 4, '030600B, From HQ 101 TF to Chief Army, Info FMA, Sitrep Savannah Period Covered 011700A to 021700A Des 75', 2.
[93] Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 110.
[94] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II*, 274; Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', 376; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 146-7; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 309-11.

indoctrination, never recovered from what became known as the Battle of Death Road'.[95] After the FNLA's defeat in the north, the MPLA forces turned south against UNITA and Chipenda's forces, whose alliance almost immediately fell apart, leading to a 'war within a war'.[96]

'Where Are We Going Now?': The Retreat and Disintegration of the FNLA

By January 1976, the FNLA had largely disintegrated. The USA and China had ceased their support, South Africa began to withdraw its forces from central Angola and to change strategy to exclusively back UNITA, and its two top leaders, Roberto and Chipenda, had left Angola. The FNLA's troops left behind were now in full retreat, fleeing from both the MPLA and UNITA, as João Mucaba recounted:

> The war was getting hard and because there was no solution, we retreated. … We didn't have another way because we had the enemy behind us and in front of us. … Our president [Holden Roberto] told us: 'We can't cope fighting against them. We have to leave Angola'. Later on, UNITA that had worked together with us started killing us. … MPLA killed many, but UNITA decimated us. UNITA killed us very badly. And we didn't have any means to solve the situation.[97]

Many FNLA units deployed south of Luanda began to flee toward the Namibian border, often under the cover of the SADF, which had begun to pull out of central Angola as Operation Savannah was coming to an end.[98] FNLA commander Pedro Gomes, better known as *Kioto*, described the retreat of his unit, which had previously fought in Task Force Zulu's Alpha Group:

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[95] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 274.
[96] Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II,* 276; Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', 376-82; Guimarães, *Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 113.
[97] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[98] Stiff, *The Silent War*, 123; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 146.

> While [the South Africans] prepared to leave, the balance was tipping in UNITA's favour. UNITA was defeating the FNLA by then. I personally did not want any more civil war, seeing UNITA was the enemy. Ahead were a thousand Cubans and Russians, and then we had UNITA. UNITA had already become the enemy. It was then that I asked South Africa to give permission for my group to go back with theirs, or otherwise I would go myself. I told them that I would rather be killed by them than left behind. I asked Commandant Myburgh [of the SADF], and within three days they allowed me to go back. Then we headed for Namibia.[99]

By the end of January 1976, all South African forces had withdrawn within approximately 30km north of the Namibian border, and Breytenbach gathered his troops of Bravo Group back at Mpupa.[100] Over the following weeks, soldiers of other FNLA units, many of them together with their families, arrived at various refugee camps in southern Angola from where, after being disarmed, they were brought to Mpupa and put under Breytenbach's command.[101] One man recounted his unit's journey to Mpupa via Chitado:

> Our journey to Namibia was a very dangerous and tough situation, with a lot of suffering involved. … When we retreated from Sá da Bandeira [today's Lubango in southwestern Angola] … on 2 January 1976, … we arrived in Chitado, which is in the province of Cunene. There the South Africans took all our equipment from us, and we stayed there all January until 20 February ... Our Colonel Breytenbach, who we used to call *Carpinteiro* ['Carpenter'], took us from Chitado and brought us to Mpupa.[102]

From February 1976, Breytenbach began selecting recruits from the arriving troops at Mpupa while sending 'the rejects' about 50km further southwest to the Calai refugee camp at the Namibian border, just north of Rundu.[103] At the same time, Breytenbach and his officers continued to bring other FNLA units that were

[99] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 152.
[100] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 65; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 143.
[101] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 130; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 40.
[102] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016. I was told that one reason why Breytenbach was called *Carpinteiro* was because he, like a carpenter, had 'built' the unit.
[103] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 130.

scattered throughout southern Angola, primarily in the Cuando Cubango province, under their command.[104]

With regard to the soldiers at Mpupa, Breytenbach writes: 'they had limited choices. The men could either become soldiers – with a future of some sort – or continue as refugees with very little to look forward to'.[105] My interviewees' accounts largely echoed Breytenbach's assessment of their situation. One former soldier remembered:

> We came to Namibia to run away from Angola because of the war there. … We didn't have food so we just had to join 32 Battalion [then still Bravo Group]. In the refugee camp we had food … but then they said that the refugee camp was going to close so we had to leave and go fight to have food and something to eat. … *Carpinteiro* recruited us to help in the war [and] to give us a little bit of training. We were happy with him [because] we had nowhere to go. If we went back, UNITA would catch us.[106]

Similarly, another man, who joined the unit at Calai in 1981, recounted:

> Some returned to Angola and made it but [others] didn't. The problem was, you know, we were kids then. When someone says to you, 'Take the gun and go', [you go]. You are afraid because when you return, you could fall into UNITA's ambush. That was the problem. … We [joined] to make the most of life. We didn't return but stayed with the South African army to see how life could go forward.[107]

While Breytenbach trained his troops at Mpupa, a number of FNLA units in the Cuando Cubango province continued to fight independently against the MPLA and UNITA.[108] Other FNLA groups deserted, such as one group at Luenge that joined incoming MPLA forces after reporting the local presence of Bravo Group to them.[109] In this chaotic context, the retreat of FNLA soldiers who ended up in

[104] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 81-2, 88.
[105] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 130-1.
[106] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[107] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.
[108] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 145, 155.
[109] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 197.

Bravo Group/32 Battalion was often far from straightforward, as the journey of one former soldier illustrates.

He had joined the FNLA in his hometown of Luso (today's Luena) in August 1973 in order to 'free Angola' before being sent to Zaire for six months of training. Following the FNLA's defeat at Luanda, he fled to Silva Porto (today's Kuito) where he was briefly imprisoned by MPLA forces in December 1975. From Silva Porto, he went on to Caiundo before arriving in Rundu in Namibia's western Caprivi in March 1976. That same month, he returned to Angola to join an FNLA unit at Savate 'for training and then went back to fight against the MPLA'. In July 1976, he again fled to northern Namibia, this time to Katima Mulilo in the Eastern Caprivi, where he lived as a refugee for six months before enlisting in 32 Battalion.[110]

By mid-March 1976, the SADF had begun to pull its forces out of Angola with the official date for complete withdrawal set for 27 March 1976. As part of the process, SADF General Constand Viljoen authorised the relocation of the trained members of Bravo Group at Mpupa and their families to the western Caprivi in Namibia where the soldiers would officially become members of the SADF.[111] One man remembered the day he and his colleagues were informed about the relocation to Namibia:

> On 15 March, the South Africans gave us the message that the President Holden Roberto no longer wished to fight. So now we didn't have a president anymore. So we asked, 'Where are we going now? Angola is occupied by the Cubans so we can't go back. We don't have a place to go because we're from a different party'. But the South Africans asked, 'Ok, who wants to go to South Africa [referring to South West Africa/Namibia]?' So we said, 'Yes'. I came from … Huambo [which] was very far away for me to go back to.[112]

[110] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[111] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 158.
[112] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

Similarly, another man recounted:

> The MPLA was attacking UNITA and UNITA was attacking us. *Carpinteiro* called us and said, … 'You all go to South Africa [referring to South West Africa/Namibia]. There's no more combat. There's no need to stay in Angola. UNITA is coming to kill people'. We saw that more [UNITA forces] were coming, and a choice was given to either join him and leave or to stay.[113]

While elements of Bravo Group continued fighting under the official banner of the FNLA, the soldiers and families at Mpupa were relocated to a new base named *Pica Pau* ('Woodpecker'; later renamed to 'Buffalo') in the western Caprivi by 27 March.[114] As Bravo Group was not yet officially part of the SADF, the move was organised with extremely limited logistical support or preparation of the new base. In addition, the unit had not been given any official instructions about its mission or utilisation.[115] Breytenbach writes,

> The general opinion throughout the army at this time was that Bravo Group's existence was of a temporary nature, that we were acting as caretakers only until the FNLA problem had been resolved. I did not agree and told everybody quite bluntly, including my black troops, that FNLA's days were over. … We had changed and were by then fighting South Africa's war, not a war of liberation to bring 'freedom' back to a Marxist dominated Angola.[116]

Breytenbach further asserts that Chipenda's last visit of the troops in January 1976 'had finally purged [the troops] of their last vestiges of loyalty to Angola's opportunistic politicians', and that after Bravo Group's relocation to Namibia 'their loyalty had … swung from Angola and Chipenda to loyalty to the Battalion'.[117] As I will further discuss in the next chapter, Breytenbach saw it as central to break any alternative loyalties that his new troops may have held in

[113] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016.
[114] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 159.
[115] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 160, 165
[116] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 74-5.
[117] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 99; interview with Jan Breytenbach and Willie Ward, Sedgefield, June 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.3.

order to form the unit into a competent fighting force, which he did with considerable success.

At least in the beginning, however, the troops' loyalties remained ambiguous. Colonel Gert Nel, who would succeed Breytenbach in becoming 32 Battalion's second Officer Commanding, recounted that the troops were initially 'fighting under our leadership and their own leadership', and that the people at *Pica Pau* 'were still very much thinking about Angola, because their dances and their songs were all about "One day we will go back to Angola, to our mother country"'.[118]

Many of my interviewees said that, at least in the beginning, they fought on the side of South Africa in the hope of returning to Angola. One interviewee, invoking biblical imagery, explained that while Namibia was 'the promised land to us', he and others still 'had thoughts [and hopes] of going back to Angola or Zaire'.[119] Another interviewee recounted:

> The South Africans came and helped us fight the enemy … We were fighting against the MPLA. Then they said, 'Let's go back to South Africa to fetch some material, reinforce, come back and take these guys out'. …
> *Do you think it was mistake to ask South Africa for support?*
> It was a mistake to join the South Africans. We were taken from our country by being told that we were just going to bring more people. We thought we were coming back.[120]

Another former soldier disagreed, asserting that 'it was a good idea to go with the South Africans – that's why we are here talking today'.[121] Another one also expressed gratitude to the SADF, and argued that the FNLA troops ended up with the South Africans after being abandoned by their former leaders:

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[118] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 152; interview with Gert Nel, Centurion, October 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.
[119] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[120] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016.
[121] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.

> The only promise was to come to Angola and to remove the communists and the communist party [the MPLA]. The promise was to train at Buffalo and then go back to Angola. And when Holden Roberto said that he was no longer involved in politics, we had nowhere to go. … We were abandoned. If it weren't for the South Africans, we would have died in the bush like animals. Of all the politicians and commanders, the only one we came [to Namibia] with us was old *Kioto*. … The rest went back to Angola, others to Kinshasa, and we stayed without the leaders. Our leaders were now the whites … and that was it.[122]

Breytenbach actively strengthened the idea that the FNLA troops had been abandoned by Roberto and Chipenda with the aim that they give up their allegiance to the FNLA and its leadership. Among other measures, Breytenbach dismissed former FNLA commanders in Bravo Group, started 'a campaign to undermine Daniel Chipenda's position, stressing his desertion to Europe', and forbid any contact between his troops and FNLA cadres in the refugee camps.[123] In addition, Breytenbach seems to have sown misinformation about the fate and whereabouts of the FNLA's leadership. One man, for instance, said he had heard that Chipenda had left Angola to play football in Europe.[124] Another interviewee recounted that 'until today I don't know if [Holden Roberto] abandoned us … No one told us what happened but we were told he had passed away'.[125]

In mid-May 1976, Breytenbach was appointed as the official commander of Bravo Group and, for the first time, given guidelines for the unit's operational task: 'The primary aim of Bravo Group is to deny SWAPO an area of 50 kilometres north of the South West African border by means of clandestine operations and to be available for any task internal in [South West Africa]'.[126] In the aftermath of Operation Savannah, the SADF deemed it unwise for its forces to

[122] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[123] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 133.
[124] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[125] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016. Roberto returned from Zaire in 1991, and lived in Luanda until his death on 2 August 2007.
[126] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 168.

openly cross into Angola to attack SWAPO, and thus recognised the strategic value of the black members of Bravo Group. As Piet Nortje, a white former officer, explains: 'The troops were black Angolans, so they could blend into the "landscape" without anyone thinking anything was amiss. If they were captured, who could say they were SADF men? Particularly if it was denied'.[127] Similarly, Breytenbach writes:

> I, and presumably others as well, adopted the cynical stance that it was politically far more expedient for a foreign black Angolan to be killed in battle defending South Africa, than it was for a white national serviceman to die.[128]

In October 1976, Bravo Group was officially renamed 32 Battalion.[129] By then, the former FNLA troops in 32 Battalion were fighting a new enemy, SWAPO, alongside their former enemy, UNITA, which had come to enjoy exclusive support from South Africa. In addition, they were joined by a growing number of UNITA defectors who enlisted in 32 Battalion. One man, who fought in UNITA from 1975 until 1980 before joining 32 Battalion, acknowledged that there was 'tension' within the unit between former FNLA and UNITA soldiers as a result of FNLA having had to retreat south because of UNITA.[130] João Mucaba recounted:

> The South Africans were supporting UNITA … but it was against our will … because UNITA was killing us. It is politics. The leaders were the ones who were doing that because in politics when you receive orders, you have to comply with them [and] their instructions. [131]

When I asked one former soldier how he felt about the alliance with UNITA, he echoed Mucaba's sentiments of having to follow the commanders' orders: 'I am a

[127] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 183-84.
[128] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 71-3.
[129] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 174.
[130] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.
[131] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.

soldier and I am not a commander. Our commanders would tell us, "Let's go!" [and] we would just go as a unit'.[132]

Refugees, Ex-Guerrillas, Migrant Labourers: 32 Battalion's Other Recruits

Throughout the war, 32 Battalion recruited new soldiers from among the Angolan refugee population in northern Namibia, particularly at the Calai refugee camp.[133] Among these recruits were not only former FNLA troops but also civilian refugees, UNITA defectors, stranded migrant labourers, and others who ended up in 32 Battalion, sometimes after quite extraordinary turns of events.

One interviewee was 12 years old when, in 1974, he fled from his hometown close to Artur de Paiva, Huíla province, together with a friend with whom he would later enlist in 32 Battalion, and with a stream of FNLA soldiers and their families. He first arrived at Mpupa and then went on to the Calai refugee camp, where he joined 32 Battalion in 1981:

> I arrived in a refugee camp [where] they gave us tents but there was no food. They asked us, 'Who wants to work? Rundu wants people to work.' … So people went to give their names. Then another group came and asked, 'Who wants to join 32 [Battalion]?' …
> *Why did you decide to join 32 Battalion?*
> It was really to have something to eat, for the body to stay well. We went to the military to eat. It wasn't good staying [in the camp] without doing anything.[134]

[132] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[133] Interview with Gert Nel, Centurion, October 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.
[134] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.

Minter also writes about how one of his interviewees, similarly to the above interviewee, was 'told by the South African officers in charge of the refugee camp that his job prospects were limited, and that he should choose to join either Unita or 32 Battalion'.[135] According to José Ricardo Belmundo, who deserted 32 Battalion in January 1980:

> South Africa recruited in the refugee camps where there were FNLA and UNITA. The South African officer Liebenberg [referring to General Andreas Liebenberg] made use of hunger in the refugee camps, while he provided favorable conditions in the military camps.[136]

Another former soldier also joined 32 Battalion as a civilian refugee. he first came to Namibia with his grandfather in 1971 and lived there for three years until his father brought him back to Angola. In 1976, he again fled to Namibia, this time via Mpupa together with his cousin who had fought in the FNLA until the two were separated in northern Namibia. While his cousin joined Bravo Group, he went on to the Calai refugee camp, where he initially made a bare living selling alcohol to locals and other refugees before moving in with his grandfather. In 1983, he decided to follow his cousin and enlist in 32 Battalion, as he explained, 'only to get a job' because he actually 'never wanted to be a soldier'.[137]

In a rather curious case of wartime contingency, another group of 76 refugees recruited into 32 Battalion originally came from São Tomé and Príncipe, the two-island country off the western coast of Central Africa that had been a Portuguese colony until 1975. The men originally belonged to a splinter group of a political

[135] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 125.
[136] Quoted in W. Minter, *Operation Timber: Pages from the Savimbi Dossier* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 107.
[137] He also claimed that in 1985-6 all 20-25 year old men at Buffalo Base had to join 32 Battalion: interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 12 July 2016.

movement (*Frente de Resistência Nacional de São Tomé e Príncipe*) of São Toméan exiles living in Kribi, Cameroon. After their failed seaborne invasion of São Tomé and Príncipe in 1988, the group found their way to Walvis Bay in Namibia, where they were detained as illegal immigrants. After a year of detention, they were incorporated into 32 Battalion for their knowledge of Portuguese after allegedly being given the choice of either staying in prison or joining the unit.[138]

Former UNITA soldiers were also among the guerrillas-turned-refugees-turned-32 Battalion soldiers. As a result of military setbacks and factional struggles in the early and mid-1980s, UNITA experienced growing numbers of desertions and defections. Cawthra writes that 'defectors from UNITA reported the hardships suffered by members and their civilian captives, tyranny and factionalism of UNITA commanders and hunger suffered by the civilians'.[139] While most guerrillas defected to the MPLA government, 32 Battalion also experienced an influx of UNITA troops. According to Johan Anderson, a South African officer in the unit:

> They [the UNITA defectors] wanted to get away … They had food but really not in big quantities and they really had a hard life … When we drove to operations, they used to walk most of the day. They were really thin but hard kids if you can call them that. It was quite an eye opener. The guys with rank in UNITA … they really felt nothing for those kids.

Anderson also observed the important role of family ties in the recruitment of new soldiers, like in the case above:

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[138] G. Seibert, *Coup d'état in São Tomé and Príncipe: Domestic Causes, the Role of Oil and Former 'Buffalo' Battalion Soldiers* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2003), 5-6; J.G. Porto, 'Coup d'état in São Tomé and Príncipe', *African Security Review* 12, 4 (2003), 34. In July 2003, a number of these soldiers participated in a coup d'état in São Tomé and Príncipe.
[139] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 157-8.

> While we were still at Mavinga … a lot of the troops saw some of their family in UNITA and we smuggled them back to Buffalo in our Buffels [a type of SADF vehicle] and gave them our camouflaged clothes and they became decent troops as well. [140]

Among my interviewees, one man joined 32 Battalion in 1984 after having fought in UNITA for almost five years. According to him, two of his older brothers left the family to join MPLA when he was only five years old while their mother 'did not know where they were'. When he was still a teenager, he decided to join UNITA 'to fight for democracy and for my own country', and quickly rose up the ranks to become a commander. Over time, however, he became increasingly disillusioned with the organisation: 'We were only fighting for the country but did not get anything'. After his first child was born in 1983, he deserted while on his way to UNITA's military headquarters at Jamba, where he had been sent by one of his commanders. He swam across the Okavango River before going to the Sayema Location in Rundu, where one of his sisters was staying. His nephew, who was a sergeant in 32 Battalion, introduced him to the unit, which he joined a few weeks later in 1984. At the time, he thought he would eventually go back to Angola after the end of the war but he never did.[141]

Another interviewee also joined 32 Battalion after having fought in UNITA for several years. he was 15 years old when UNITA soldiers abducted him from his home in Caiundo, Cuando Cubango province. As he recounted, he was forced to fight in UNITA for five years before he managed to flee to northern Namibia where some of his relatives lived. He deplored the harsh conditions and poor treatment of soldiers in UNITA: 'They only wanted you to fight. … There was no food, no uniform, no shoes'. Prior to joining 32 Battalion in 1982, he considered

[140] Interview with Johan Anderson, Cape Town, August 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.7.
[141] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.

joining the Koevoet unit at Rundu but decided against it because of language issues: he could not speak any of the Kavango languages or Afrikaans used in Koevoet but spoke Portuguese used in 32 Battalion.[142]

Another man also had been abducted by UNITA and ended up in 32 Battalion after the unit attacked his hometown of Savate. he was born in Savate, next to the Cubango River (called Okavango River in Namibia), where he joined the MPLA as a student. According to him, by early 1980, MPLA forces were occupying the small towns on the western side of the Cubango River, including Savate, while UNITA was in control of the other side.[143] In late May 1980, however, 32 Battalion attacked Savate and captured the town on behalf of UNITA. He recounted that 'Savate was being attacked, the MPLA ran away, and UNITA took advantage and took people … children, women, and elders … to the other side of the river'. Together with his brother and a friend of his, He was taken to a place called Kafuma, allegedly 'to go to school'. The three stayed there for two years until 1982 when they heard that UNITA was 'going to get more boys for military service'. According to him, 'they started selecting people for the war [and] giving us more information like "you guys are young but you can handle an AK-47"'. He and his brother decided to run away from Kafuma, and fled to a refugee camp in Namibia. Two years later, he enlisted in 32 Battalion because, as a refugee in Namibia, he explained, 'you would never leave back to your country. You could

[142] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016. According to one man, Koevoet asked for knowledge of Afrikaans and higher educational qualifications than 32 Battalion: interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 7 July 2016.
[143] See also P. Nortje, *32 Battalion: The Inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 147.

not study [as] no one had money to put you in school. To leave this situation, we had to join the army'.[144]

Another group of 32 Battalion recruits consisted of Angolan migrant labourers, in a sense, continuing the longer history of transnational migrant labourers being enlisted into the SADF, discussed in Chapter 2. Many of them had worked in the mines in South Africa prior to 1975 but became stranded in northern Namibia after they left South Africa and could not return to Angola because of the on-going civil war.[145] One man, for instance, fled from his hometown in Mavinga, Cuando Cubango province, at the age of 24, and came to the Calai refugee camp in 1972. A year later, South African mining contractors arrived in Calai and recruited him to work in the mines around Johannesburg for the next four years. In 1977, all Namibian and Angolan miners were told to return home and were flown to Namibia via Francistown, Botswana, where they had to stay for three months. He said it was only then that he first heard about the fighting between the MPLA and UNITA.[146] From Francistown, he and his colleagues were flown to Rundu, where he was told he would be sent to Angola. From Rundu, he returned to Calai where he exchanged all his earnings into Angolan kwanza before encountering former FNLA troops for the first time. His Angolan kwanza, He explained, were 'useless' in Namibia and he soon 'had no money and no food'. In order 'to make a living', he returned to Rundu where he eventually enlisted in 32 Battalion in 1981.[147]

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[144] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 7 July 2016.
[145] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.
[146] Other southern African liberation movements also recruited returning labour migrants and refugees in Francistown. See, for example, W. G. Morapedi, 'The Dilemmas of Liberation in Southern Africa: The Case of Zimbabwean Liberation Movements and Botswana, 1960-1979', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 1 (2012), 73-90.
[147] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.

Similarly, another man left his family in Chinguar, Bié province, in 1974 together with a cousin to work in the mines in South Africa. At the time, 'only *Kaputos* [Portuguese] were there [and] there was no UNITA, no FNLA'. He decided to leave to South Africa because, as he explained, 'I was a boy [and] went because someone said I could go'. After working as a miner for six years, his contract, along with those of all other Angolan miners, was suddenly terminated. He wanted to return to Angola via Namibia but as he recounted:

> The borders … were closed. I was supposed to go to Angola [but] there was no way back. We could not pass, as there was fire everywhere. The mines were closed. The paths and roads were also closed. … The South Africans closed all paths [and] so the only one was to join the South African military.[148]

Another man also enlisted in 32 Battalion after returning from working in South Africa but, unlike the above interviewees, he had previous military experience. he had been born in Cuito Cuanavale, Cuando Cubango province, where he was forcibly recruited into the *Flechas* in 1967. He explained that 'if you refused [to join], they would kill you. … It was colonialism'. As part of the *Flechas*, he initially fought in Task Force Zulu's Alpha Group until late 1974 when he left the unit and went to South Africa to work in the mines. Three years later, he returned to northern Namibia. By then, the SADF had officially integrated Alpha Group as 31 Battalion, and reassigned Angolan troops according to the military's conception of their race and ethnicity. The San members of Alpha Group were enlisted exclusively in 31 Battalion, hence often referred to as 'Bushman Battalion', whereas non-San troops from Angola were assigned to 32 Battalion.[149] Thus, he was recruited into 32 Battalion in 1978.[150]

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[148] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[149] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 12 July 2016.
[150] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June.

This last extraordinary story of one man illustrates, perhaps like none of the others, the wartime contingency and the trans- and un-national dynamics so central to the accounts in this chapter. He first joined the FNLA in his hometown in Bié province, before his unit moved southeast to Menongue (then Serpa Pinto), Cuando Cubango province. He said that he 'had a good time' in the FNLA and claimed that he 'received a salary every month', which was 'the reason why everyone wanted to join the FNLA'. In April 1975, sporadic fighting broke out between the FNLA and UNITA at Menongue. In September 1975, the MPLA forces sent word to Menongue that they were approaching the city and that 'everyone should join the MPLA'. While local UNITA troops retreated, he and other FNLA soldiers transferred their affiliation to the MPLA. At the time, he explained, he could not follow and join UNITA 'because they knew me' and 'if UNITA caught you, they killed you'.

For the next twelve months, he served in the MPLA at Menongue as the leader of a ten-men reconnaissance commando, fighting against the FNLA and UNITA. He explained that the MPLA 'treated their soldiers well', they had food, and 'no one suffered'. In October 1976, while out on patrol about 10km outside of Menongue, his group was ambushed and taken prisoner by UNITA. Together with his men, he was detained in an underground prison for nine months, and repeatedly threatened with execution before being incorporated into UNITA's forces. According to him, there was 'much suffering' in the organisation, and its members had to steal out of thirst and hunger. He eventually became a commander but deserted in 1979 after receiving a tip-off about being sent on an apparent suicide mission against the MPLA's position at Menongue. Out of fear of being caught and killed by the MPLA, he decided not return to the city but

instead fled to northern Namibia, from where he went on to South Africa to work in a mine close to Soweto, Johannesburg. However, due to his anxiety of having to work underground, he returned to Namibia in late 1980. The following year, he enlisted in 32 Battalion, now joining his former FNLA colleagues, because he 'had no other work' and the unit 'was busy looking for people'.[151]

Conclusion

The concepts of 'mercenary' or 'collaborator', as I have argued, are not only highly problematic but betray the extraordinary circumstances under which former troops of the FNLA and the Chipenda Faction ended up fighting in the SADF – often after already having crossed various other boundaries of geography and organisations. The fractured character of Angolan nationalism and the transnational dynamics of Angola's chaotic process of decolonisation are central to understanding the trajectory of these soldiers. After their organisations began to quickly disintegrate in late 1975, these troops, similarly to their counterparts in the former *Flechas*, were essentially left to their own devices before finding a degree of security and stability in the form of transnational military service for the SADF. However, this did not mean that these troops suddenly formed a cohesive unit, which swore loyalty to apartheid South Africa. In fact, their integration process into the SADF was fraught with further difficulties, suffering, and violence, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

[151] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016.

In its early days, Bravo Group/32 Battalion seemed difficult to categorise as a military unit: while it received arms and equipment from the SADF and was commanded by South African officers, it was not yet officially part of the SADF; the unit's South African officers and the former FNLA troops had vastly different understandings of their aim and mission; and the loyalties of the rank-and-file, many of whom had repeatedly shifted allegiances prior to joining the SADF, remained ambiguous.[152] Furthermore, 32 Battalion came to comprise an almost bewildering array of groups and actors from various backgrounds: SADF officers, ex-guerrillas of both the FNLA and UNITA, former soldiers of the Portuguese colonial military, and migrant labourers stranded in northern Namibia. In short, the unit was still far from unified. This disordered aspect is fundamental to understanding the subsequent development of 32 Battalion's distinct military culture, particularly the violent enforcement of discipline among black troops.

Even after these soldiers had joined Bravo Group/32 Battalion, it was often not the last time that they transferred units or crossed borders. In 1979, several 32 Battalion members were recruited into Koevoet.[153] Throughout the 1980s, more soldiers left the unit to join Koevoet, primarily as a result of 32 Battalion's unusually long and intense operations in Angola.[154] As one man explained: 'When we fought in 32 Battalion, we were working and marching for three months in the bush but in Koevoet, we went with trucks … In 32 Battalion, we just walked'.[155] These units' different ways of operating brings me to the next

[152] Compare to Larmer, 'Of Local Identities and Transnational Conflict', 175.
[153] Stiff, *The Covert War*, 67.
[154] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[155] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.

chapter on the distinct military cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF, in particular its 101 Battalion.

Chapter 5 – The Distinct Military Cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF

In academic scholarship, troops belonging to the same colonial and settler armies have often been portrayed as a seemingly static and homogenous group. As Parsons points out with regard the King's African Rifles, historians have tended to treat African troops of colonial and settler security forces as 'an undifferentiated unit of analysis' when in fact they were divided, for example, by territorial origin or military specialisation.[1] Moyd similarly argues that shorthand such as 'King's African Rifles' or 'the *Schutztruppe*' 'fails to capture the textured composition of [these] forces'.[2] In nationalist discourses, as we have seen, these troops have been lumped together as 'collaborators' and 'mercenaries'.

In this chapter, I compare the 'textured composition' of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF, particularly its 101 Battalion, through the lens of their military cultures.[3] As discussed in the introductory chapter, I understand the term as the 'source' of military identities, practices, and experiences. Here, I argue that 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF did not constitute a cohesive group – neither taken together nor individually – but were highly mixed units that developed distinct military cultures. The development of these military cultures was shaped

[1] T.H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 4.
[2] See also M. Moyd, 'Color Lines, Front Lines: The First World War from the South', *Radical History Review*, 131 (2018), 17.
[3] While Koevoet was officially part of the South African Police and later the South West African Police, it essentially operated as a military unit. Hence, I refer to the culture of Koevoet as a military culture.

by the units' particular geographical and institutional origins in the context of transnational war, and in turn influenced the ways in which the units operated.

In contrast to previous studies' top-down lens of military culture, my analysis is concerned with those aspects that my interviewees highlighted in their accounts, which I have grouped into three sections: training and discipline; relations between black and white soldiers; and ideology and mission. Broadly, I consider: how were soldiers trained, and discipline enforced among them? How was the relationship of black troops with their white officers expressed? And in what (ideological) terms did they explain the war and their unit's mission in it? A certain overlap in the answers to these questions is of course inevitable. For instance, the ways in which discipline was imposed among black soldiers also impacted their relationship with the white officers who disciplined them.

Arguments about the heterogeneity of military cultures have previously been made particularly in studies of the U.S. military. Wilson, for instance, argues that military culture is often fragmented, 'exhibiting different, possibly contradictory attitudes and behaviour within the same army'.[4] With respect to West African troops of the French colonial army, such as the *tirailleurs Sénégalais*, Gregory Mann writes that the military's 'distinct culture' evolved over time and 'was never unified or homogenous, particularly across the colonial army's racial and political divides'.[5] In this regard, South Africa's security forces were no different.

As I will discuss in Chapters 6 and 7, the units' military cultures profoundly impacted their members' post-war trajectories. The latter, in turn, shaped my interviewees' accounts of the past. This became most apparent in accounts of

[4] Wilson, 'Defining Military Culture', 18. See also Snider, 'An Uninformed Debate on Military Culture', 19.
[5] Mann, *Native Sons*, 4, 162.

relations between black and white soldiers. The accounts of most former SWATF and Koevoet members residing in Namibia were generally positive, and have been influenced by the SWAPO-led government's discrimination against them since independence. Like other interviewees, one man contrasted the 'partiality' of his former white superiors to that of the Namibian government: 'Yes, the whites were showing partiality but … you could see they are also forgiving people. But the partiality [meaning political discrimination] we see in our current government is very clear'.[6] Similarly, when I asked another interviewee about the relationship with his white officers, he said, 'that time, life was far better than today; things are very difficult today … because I was in the South African military'.[7]

While former SWATF and Koevoet members who left for South Africa at the end of the war similarly spoke of their relations with white officers in generally positive terms, they also conveyed a deep sense of abandonment and betrayal by their white former leaders since the end of the war. Former 32 Battalion soldiers in South Africa, in turn, also expressed feeling abandoned and betrayed by their former leaders but often spoke of their relations with white officers in terms of 'slavery' and 'colonialism'. In other words, my interviewees' accounts have been shaped by current political contexts but not always in consistent ways. Their accounts were not simply romanticised stories aimed at criticising the SWAPO-led government. Neither were they direct projections of a sense of abandonment and betrayal back onto the past, as the contrast between the accounts of former 32 Battalion soldiers and former SWATF and Koevoet members residing in South

[6] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016.
[7] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 9 October 2016.

Africa indicates. Thus, a careful reading of these stories can help to illuminate the contrasts in military cultures of these three units.

The Genealogy of the Three Units

In the following section, I discuss the genealogy of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF and its 101 Battalion in more detail, emphasising the impact that the units' particular formation and leadership had on their military culture. In addition, I consider the units' competition and rivalry, which shaped how their members imagined and expressed military culture. As scholars have examined in other contexts, especially in the USA, different branches of the armed forces often compete against each other for resources and influence.[8]

Both former soldiers and observers have ascribed the rivalry between Koevoet and the SADF to the different cultures or 'ways of life' of the police and military: whereas Koevoet, originally a police unit, operated with speed and autonomy, the military historically emphasised planning and hierarchy.[9] This one-dimensional distinction, however, is blurred by the fact that all three units discussed here eventually operated with significant rapidity and autonomy, if not impunity. In a context where body counts were used as a measure of success and

[8] See, for example, Wilson, 'Defining Military Culture', 28; English, *Understanding Military Culture*, 119-20; S.C. Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 26.
[9] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016; Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, 65-6; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 59.

effectiveness, units of South Africa's security forces competed not only for resources and influence but 'kills'.[10]

Both the fixation on body counts as an indicator of success and the inter-unit competition for 'kills' are of course not unique to apartheid South Africa's security forces. Perhaps most famously, the U.S. military in Vietnam 'used body counts to evaluate success at al levels'.[11] In 1962, Bernard Fall wrote that in Vietnam 'the military "kill" becomes the primary target – simply because the essential political target is too elusive for us, or worse, because we do not understand its importance'.[12] Fall might well have been writing about apartheid South Africa's military involvement in Namibia and Angola.

32 Battalion

As discussed in the previous chapter, 32 Battalion had its origins in Bravo Group, an ad hoc military unit of white SADF officers and ex-FNLA troops formed during the SADF's invasion of Angola in late 1975 – hence the unit's slogan, *Proelio Procusi* ('Forged in Battle' in Latin).[13] Under Jan Breytenbach's command from 1975-77, the unit essentially operated as a secret irregular force, 'without the brakes of army red tape' and 'deploying as guerrillas'.[14] The unit's origins and

[10] See de Visser, 'Winning the Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War', 93.
[11] S.S. Gartner and M.E. Myers, 'Body Counts and "Success" in the Vietnam and Korean Wars', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 25, 3 (1995), 380. See also C.G. Appy, *Working-Class War: Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 156.
[12] Quoted in Gartner and Myers, 'Body Counts', 379-80.
[13] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 181.
[14] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 68, 89. Breytenbach recounts a telling incident when an angry couple confronted him and his troops for resting in their garden in Angola: '[the couple] complained very strongly that we were illegally occupying the premises. They kept on referring to the law of the land which would get us for breaking and entering unlawfully. They generally

initial mode of operation deeply shaped 32 Battalion's distinct identity and unconventional military culture.[15] As one white former soldier put it,

> The most important thing about 32-Battalion was that it was made up of Angolans who [had] fought for the FNLA. ... 32-Battalion was totally different from the rest of the army. … The discipline was different, the doctrine was different and the operational circumstances were different.[16]

Due to its Angolan origins, 32 Battalion, in contrast to other 'indigenous' SADF units, was never incorporated into SWATF but remained a unit of the South African Army.[17] Most black soldiers of the unit, however, were enlisted as part of the SADF's Auxiliary Service. This meant that contrary to members of the Permanent Force, which only white soldiers could enlist in, they did not qualify for pension, housing or medical-care benefits. After the disbandment of 32 Battalion, the lack of pension payouts would become a source of deep and lasting grievances among many black troops (see Chapter 7).[18]

In contrast to the rest of the SADF, SWATF, and Koevoet, the primary language spoken in 32 Battalion was also Portuguese and not Afrikaans or English.[19] According to Tony Nienaber, a white former officer in 32 Battalion,

> Of the 30-odd men under my command only the sergeant, Flai Dala, spoke rudimentary Afrikaans. The rest spoke only Portuguese. … Communication was, of course, our biggest obstacle, but we somehow managed to create and use a hand-signal language that seemed to work for us. At night around the fire my medic would teach me basic Portuguese using pictures in his first-aid book.[20]

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carried on using this tack. … In the end I lost my patience. … "I am the law in this place now, so get out!" I said.': J. Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle* (Cape Town: Saayman & Weber, 1986), 119.

[15] For a similar case of a unit created to 'out-guerrilla the guerrillas' in the context of the Vietnam War, the so-called 'Tiger Force' of the U.S. military, see B. Greiner, *War Without Fronts: The USA in Vietnam* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 24, 166-9.

[16] J. Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration in the Post-Apartheid Era: A Case Study of 32-Battalion* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 2015), 18.

[17] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 174.

[18] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 248.

[19] Nortje, *32 Battalion*, 76. See also interview with Marius Oberholzer, Roodeport, 14 January 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.13

[20] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 178-80.

Similarly, Peter Williams recounted that 'the troops only spoke Portuguese, so you basically spoke to someone, beg, borrowed a dictionary and you started learning day by day. We learned Portuguese very quickly'.[21] The black soldiers' limited knowledge of Afrikaans and English later severely restricted their capacity to claim belonging both as soldiers and citizens in post-apartheid South Africa (see Chapter 7).

The first commanders of Bravo Group/32 Battalion strictly and often brutally enforced discipline among their Angolan troops in response to their (perceived) lack of order and obedience. According to Corporal Heinrich Rademeyer, a white former commander,

> Most of the troops that stood in front of me were older than me and had just returned from a war where some of them had been veteran terrorists fighting against the Portuguese. … It was a difficult situation to get under control. … The troops … were absolutely pathetic; there was no standard and they knew nothing, they were plain stupid and useless. They could not even shoot. It was a major challenge for everybody to get them up to scratch. Accidental discharge of weapons was the order of the day. … Later we told them that the first one that had an accidental discharge would be physically assaulted, and we did it.[22]

During his command, Breytenbach aimed to mould 32 Battalion into a unit with a distinct identity, similar to the French Foreign Legion, where 'there could only be one cause they could fight for, which was the unit'.[23] In his view, the soldiers were 32 Battalion members first and SADF members second.[24] Like white officers of other colonial and settler armies, Breytenbach saw himself as a paternal figure to his black troops, whom he described as 'orphans of war', and

[21] Interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.16. See also interview with Piet Neethling, Cape Town, August 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.8.
[22] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 158.
[23] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 72-3; Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 125.
[24] Breytenbach, *They Live by The Sword*, 73.

as their undisputed leader: 'I was the only guy who ... could handle them'.[25] Breytenbach further envisioned the unit as a new 'tribe':

> I remember saying to them, Well look, if you come here to join 32 Battalion … you don't belong to a tribe or to a political organisation, you now belong to 32 Battalion … 32 Battalion is now your tribe, and I'm the chief of that tribe … [I]t [was] useless to talk to them about loyalty to South Africa, they didn't even know what South Africa was, or the South African cause was … [I]t was loyalty to the unit that was important.[26]

Breytenbach's vision of his troops is a clear restatement of the old but persistent racist idea that Africans are by nature organised in separate 'peoples' or 'tribes'.[27] It is also similar to that of French colonial officers for whom, as Mann writes, '[t]he supposed loyalty [of their troops] was the source of much pride, and officers often saw it as evidence of the salutary effects of colonial military culture'.[28]

Under the command of Colonel Gert Nel, the unit's second Officer Commanding (1977-78), the shaping of 32 Battalion into a 'community' began to extend well beyond soldiers' military service.[29] In contrast to the members of SWATF and Koevoet who returned to their homes off base after each operation, 32 Battalion soldiers lived together with their families in a civilian section close to the military base referred to as either *Pica Pau* (Woodpecker) or '*Kimbo'* (a

[25] Breytenbach, *They Live by The Sword*, 66; interview with Jan Breytenbach and Willie Ward, Sedgefield, June 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.3. Compare to Mann, *Native Sons*, 66.
[26] Interview with Jan Breytenbach and Willie Ward, Sedgefield, June 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.3. See also Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 72.
[27] The South African apartheid government actively used the idea of the 'tribe' as the political base for its Bantustan or 'homeland' policies both in South Africa and in Namibia: L. Vail, 'Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History', in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), 2-3; C. Keulder, 'Traditional Leaders', in Keulder (ed.), *State, Society and Democracy*, 151; Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 31.
[28] Mann, *Native Sons*, 66.
[29] Interview with white former nurse in 32 Battalion in South Africa, Skype, 26 September 2016; interview with Gert Nel, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.

vernacular Angolan term for 'village').[30] The military base and the civilian section together were called 'Buffalo Base'. Unless they were on leave, 32 Battalion soldiers and their families therefore remained under almost constant supervision of the unit's military leadership.

At the base, military drill went hand in hand with the SADF's 'civilising' programmes for black soldiers and their families.[31] Robert Gordon and Stuart Sholto-Douglas cite an SADF official in *Die Volksblad* who explained that 'the Defence Force does not only make war. On the contrary, the task of civilizing … is probably greater than the military function'.[32] The extent of white officers' paternalistic control over black troops as well as their families meant that, in comparison to SWATF and Koevoet, a wider and different range of 'civilised' behaviour was supervised and 'offenses' punished. For example, as I will discuss further below, soldiers needed permission from their superiors to get married, and adultery of both troops and civilians at *Pica Pau* was not tolerated.[33]

[30] On the life at the Buffalo Base, see H.W. Gordon, *Forged in Battle? A Socio-Military History of South Africa's 32 Battalion (1975-1993)* (unpublished PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018), 143-86.

[31] Gordon and Sholto-Douglas refer to Omega Base where soldiers of Alpha Group/31 Battalion lived with their families as a 'total institution': R.J. Gordon and S. Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 186-90. See also R.B. Lee and S. Hurlich, 'From Foragers to Fighters: South Africa's Militarization of the Namibian San', in E. Leacock and R.B. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 335.

[32] Gordon and Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth*, 190.

[33] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 4 August 2016; interview with J former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.

Koevoet

Koevoet had its origins in Operation K, a covert operation between the SADF and the SAP, officially launched January 1979, as noted in Chapter 2.[34] The unit's commander throughout its existence was Colonel Johannes 'Sterk Hans' Dreyer, who had previously been with the SAP's Security Branch in the then Natal province. Like many of Koevoet's first white commanders, Dreyer had also served in Rhodesia and worked with the Selous Scouts, a counter-insurgency unit of the Rhodesian security forces.[35] Similarly to Breytenbach and 32 Battalion, Dreyer was central to shaping Koevoet's military culture and identity as a 'rogue unit' distinct from the rest of South Africa's security forces.[36] According to Johan Burger, 'the unorthodox but dynamic leadership of General Major Dreyer … resulted in a particular *esprit de corps* among the members of the unit [my translation from Afrikaans]'.[37] More specifically, Dreyer repeatedly clashed with SADF commanders in northern Namibia, as Jim Hooper writes:

> Living up to his reputation for contrariness, Dreyer began butting heads with the army over defined areas of operation. He wanted – and demanded – unlimited freedom of movement throughout the operational area. … As usual, he got his way.[38]

Koevoet was initially supposed to operate as a secret policing and intelligence-gathering unit in support of the Reconnaissance Commandos ('Recces') of the SADF's Special Forces, and to engage in so-called 'pseudo-terrorist operations'

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[34] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, 225. In 1985, the unit's official name became the 'South West African Police Counter-Insurgency' (SWAPOLCOIN).
[35] H.R. Heitman, 'Koevoet: The Thinking Crowbar', *Armed Forces* (December/January 1984), 7.
[36] G. Baines, *South Africa's 'Border War': Contested Narratives and Conflicting Memories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23.
[37] Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 306.
[38] J. Hooper, *Koevoet! Experiencing South Africa's Deadly Bush War* (Solihull: Helion & Co., 2012), 118.
See also Stiff, *The Covert War*, 92; Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 101.

similar to those of the Selous Scouts.[39] However, the unit soon acquired autonomous, combat capacities and, by 1984, consistently engaged in 'search-and-destroy missions' against SWAPO, both in Namibia and Angola.[40]

As the Report of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) summarised, Koevoet became 'a mobile [combat] unit, using especially designed Casspirs (armoured personnel carriers) to gather intelligence, track guerrillas and then kill them'.[41] The SATRC Report further noted that the unit operated 'with virtual impunity, making it extremely difficult to establish lines of command and accountability'.[42] At its disbandment in 1989, Koevoet comprised about 3,000 men – double the size of the Selous Scouts at their peak – 90 per cent of whom were locally recruited black special constables.[43] The unit also included an unknown number of 'turned' PLAN fighters as well as former FNLA and UNITA guerrillas from southern Angola.[44]

Similarly to the black troops of 32 Battalion, the majority of black Koevoet members were essentially hired as day-to-day labourers with no medical coverage while off-duty and no access to any sorts of unemployment or pension

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[39] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 225. According to Eugene de Kock, another early idea had been to create a 'local force', similar to Renamo, to fight against SWAPO in Ovamboland. The project did not take roots due to 'political reasons' in the region, namely because of overwhelming local support for SWAPO: E. de Kock, Amnesty Hearing, Pretoria, 29 September 1998, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/amntrans/pretoria/52850.htm, retrieved 28 May 2018; E. de Kock and J. Gordin, *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Saxonwold: Contra Press, 1998), 72; TRC, *Volume 2*, 74.

[40] K.A. O'Brien, 'The Use of Assassination as a Tool of State Policy South Africa's Counter Revolutionary Strategy 1979-92 (Part II)', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13, 2 (2001), 124-5; Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 225.

[41] TRC, *Volume 2*, 74. Koevoet's increase in size and operations were also due the fact that the United Nations' proposals for Namibia's demilitarisation and independence excluded police forces: Moorcraft, *African Nemesis*, 230-1.

[42] TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report – Volume 6* (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), 580.

[43] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 225; Cline, *Pseudo Operations and Counterinsurgency*, 10.

[44] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 124; Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, 225; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 67, 69-71.

fund.[45] After Koevoet's disbandment, the lack of pension payouts led to a deep sense of resentment among black former members at having been betrayed and abandoned by both the South African government and their white former leaders (see Chapter 7).

The violence of Koevoet has been extensively documented, and its extremity, in comparison to the rest of South Africa's security forces, has often been attributed to two interrelated factors.[46] First, Koevoet members received monetary rewards, called *kopgeld* ('head money' in Afrikaans), for each (alleged) SWAPO guerrilla they killed or captured.[47] As a white former Koevoet officer explained,

> For example, in the team of 40 people, I think it was R1000 for a capture and R800 for a dead SWAPO guerrilla, so it would be R800 divided by 40. So obviously the more effective we became, the more money we could make.[48]

Through these payments, special constables could earn more than double their monthly basic pay of R300-350.[49] Second, Koevoet teams competed for 'kills' or *koppe* ('heads' in Afrikaans), which were used as a measure of effectiveness.[50] According to SADF Lance Corporal Sean Callaghan, who was attached to Koevoet during his military service:

> There was a scoreboard and a map in the operations room in the Koevoet base and on the weeks that we were not in the bush, we were checking the

[45] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016.
[46] See, for example, Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 210-11; Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 61-95; and D. Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage* (London: Rex Collings, 1986).
[47] K. Gottschalk, 'The Rise and Fall of Apartheid's Death Squads, 1969-93', in B.B. Campbell and A.D. Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 242; Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 310; TRC, *Volume* 2, 75.
[48] Quoted in D. Foster, P. Haupt and M. de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (Cape Town: Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 2005), 139.
[49] Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 88; J. Balch and J.N. Scholten, 'Namibian Reconstruction and National Reconciliation: Putting the Horse Before the Cart', *Review of African Political Economy*, 17, 49 (1990), 87.
[50] See de Visser, 'Winning the Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War', 93.

> scores of the teams that were in the bush. Koevoet was much more effective than SADF units because of its bounty policy.[51]

The unit also claimed to account for 70-80 per cent of killed SWAPO guerrillas in Namibia despite constituting less than 10 per cent of all security forces.[52]

These explanations for Koevoet's particularly ruthless behaviour, while significant, are limited by the less-documented fact that other security force units, including SWATF's 101 Battalion and 32 Battalion, operated with similar incentives of *kopgeld* and 'kill rates'.[53] According to a white former officer in 32 Battalion, 'initially we just went out for kills and in those days kills was [*sic*] important because the platoons … and the companies used to compete against each other in kills'.[54] In his amnesty hearing at the SATRC, Eugene de Kock claimed that, in fact, '32 Battalion was miles ahead of us [Koevoet]' with regard to the number of killed SWAPO guerrillas.[55] These accounts raise the question of why the same incentives do not seem to have led to the same degree of violent behaviour across these units, and to what extent the units' differences are mythological attempts to create a particular reputation.

To some extent, the difference between Koevoet and the rest of the security forces might be due to an 'observational problem': in contrast to the military, Koevoet deployed primarily in northern Namibia rather than on foreign soil in

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[51] TRC, *Volume 2*, 75.
[52] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* 225; O'Brien, 'The Use of Assassination', 125. Burger puts the figure even higher at 90 per cent: Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 305. These claims are not entirely unreasonable: according to a 1978 study by the Rhodesian Directorate of Military Intelligence, close to 70 per cent of all guerrilla deaths inside Zimbabwe were attributed to the Selous Scouts: J.K. Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 132.
[53] See de Visser, 'Winning Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War', 93.
[54] Interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.16. See also Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 272.
[55] E. de Kock, Amnesty Hearing, Pretoria, 29 September 1998, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/amntrans/pretoria/52850.htm, retrieved 28 May 2018.

civil war-torn Angola, which certainly facilitated the monitoring and documentation of its operations by anti-apartheid activists, journalists, and international observers.[56] However, I argue that the difference must be understood more broadly as the result of Koevoet's distinct military culture, which, in the words of Stephen Ellis, 'was aggressive, arrogant and utterly contemptuous of the law and of civilians and even of ordinary soldiers or policemen'.[57] As I will discuss in the next section, members of the SADF and SWATF often recounted and imagined their unit's identity and military culture in explicit contrast to Koevoet.

SWATF's 101 Battalion

As discussed in Chapter 2, SWATF had its origins in Alpha Group/31 Battalion, a small ad hoc military unit of white SADF officers and San former *Flechas*-turned-refugees formed in the Western Caprivi in late 1974. The same year, the SADF began to create and train so-called 'homeland battalions' organised along 'ethnic' or 'tribal' lines, ostensibly at the request of South African-backed traditional authorities who were targeted for assassination and abduction by SWAPO guerrillas.[58]

By the late 1970s, there were six 'ethnic' and one 'multi-ethnic' battalion, which, throughout the war, were led by white officers and manned primarily by

[56] For one of the only reports on atrocities committed by 32 Battalion, see the account of Trevor Edwards, a British mercenary who defected from the unit in 1980, in N. Davies, 'British Deserter Exposes South Africa's Terror Operation in Angola', *The Guardian*, 29 January 1981.
[57] Ellis, 'The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force', 278.
[58] Grundy, 'The Use of Blacks in the South African Armed Forces', 143; Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 253-4.

non-white volunteers.[59] As the SADF began to regard and promote these battalions as the nucleus of a future Namibian national military, their homeland references were removed: 1 Ovambo Battalion, for instance, was renamed 35 Battalion in 1978, and then 101 Battalion in 1979.[60] In August 1980, all former homeland battalions were officially integrated into the newly established SWATF, which was to 'form the basis of the defence of the new [Namibian] state', according to SADF Major-General Charles Lloyd.[61]

SWATF eventually comprised a Permanent Force, which included the former homeland battalions, a Reaction Force (Citizen Force), an Area Force (Area Force Units), and a large number of other units.[62] By the late 1980s, SWATF provided more than 70 per cent of all South African forces deployed in northern Namibia.[63] At least 70 per cent of these roughly 30,000 troops were black Namibians.[64]

Despite its territorial base and nominal autonomy, SWATF remained under the authority of the SADF, and its budget was funded by South Africa.[65] As Cawthra writes,

> The large numbers of South African … military personnel 'on secondment' to the … SWATF, coupled with direct SADF control over operations, … ensured

[59] Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', 28; A.M. Gossmann, 'The South African Military and Counterinsurgency: An Overview', in Baker and Jordaan (eds.), *South Africa and Contemporary Counter-Insurgency*, 94.
[60] Heitman, 'Modern African Wars', 18; Grundy, 'The Use of Blacks in the South African Armed Forces', 144; Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 250.
[61] Quoted in Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 201.
[62] Heitman, 'Modern African Wars', 17-22; Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, 267.
[63] Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa,* 221; Burger, *Teeninsurgensie in Namibië*, 222-6.
[64] L. Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War, 1966-89* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013), 51; Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Mean', 31; Dale, 'A Comparative Reconsideration of the Namibian Bush War', 202.
[65] F. Toase, 'The South African Army: The Campaign in South West Africa/Namibia since 1966' in I.F.W. Beckett and J. Pimlott (eds.), *Armed Forces of Modern Counter-Insurgency* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985), 208-9; Baines, *South Africa's 'Border War'*, 24; J.J. Grotpeter, *Historical Dictionary of Namibia* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 492.

> that the SWATF … remained in effect [an] administrative sub-section … of the SADF.[66]

As a result, SWATF's organisation and approach to discipline and training largely modelled after those of the SADF.

In contrast to Koevoet and 32 Battalion, SWATF carried out both a military and political role. As discussed in Chapter 3, the SADF and later SWATF instituted a strategy of 'winning hearts and minds' in an effort to counter growing support for SWAPO.[67] As part of this strategy, SWATF engaged in a number of Civic Action programmes to enhance the legitimacy of the security forces and the 'homeland' power structures.[68] In the early 1980s, however, certain SWATF units, in particular 101 Battalion, began to reduce their WHAM efforts, and took on a more direct and aggressive counter-insurgency approach, similar to that of Koevoet.[69] 101 Battalion was converted from a training and support unit into a light infantry battalion, and two Reaction Force companies were formed and adopted Koevoet's organisation, vehicles, and tactics.[70] In addition, 101 Battalion also began to 'turn' captured SWAPO guerrillas. From the mid-1980s, 101 Battalion increasingly took part in external operations into Angola, and, alongside Koevoet, 'handled the bulk of mobile and reaction operations inside [Ovamboland] and cross-border pursuits'.[71]

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[66] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 201

[67] For a more extensive discussion of the WHAM strategy in Namibia, see de Visser, 'Winning Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War'; and de Visser, 'Winning Hearts and Minds: Legitimacy in the Namibian War for Independence', 712-30.

[68] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 193; Du Pisani, *Beyond the Barracks*, 9.

[69] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 194; T. Stapleton, 'Bush Tracking and Warfare in the Late Twentieth-Century East and Southern Africa', *Historia*, 2 (2014), 247.

[70] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War*, 51; Heitman, 'Modern African Wars', 18; Stapleton, 'Bush Tracking', 247. See also Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 123.

[71] Heitman, 'Modern African Wars', 18.

As a result, an intense rivalry and macabre competition about 'kill ratios' developed between and within 101 Battalion and Koevoet. Teams from both sides would tune into each other's radio frequencies for information and movement about SWAPO guerrillas in order get the 'kill' first.[72] According to a white former 101 Battalion officer, the 'fighting was an ego trip to see who could piss the furthest'.[73]

However, former 101 Battalion members explicitly contrasted themselves and their unit with Koevoet. Their accounts certainly served to distance themselves from Koevoet, which came to represent all of South Africa's security forces in the eyes of many Namibians. At the same time, their accounts show how these soldiers imagined and expressed their unit's military culture in contrast to other units. Colonel Willem Welgemoed, the Commander of 101 Battalion from 1981-88, claimed that Koevoet, after listening to their radio frequency, would rush ahead to lay an ambush for SWAPO to get the 'kill', without informing the military and thus putting at risk the following SWATF troops.[74] Two white former officers of 101 Battalion argued that Koevoet lacked discipline because the unit was a 'dumping ground of the [South African] police', and recounted an incident where a Koevoet team allegedly killed four UNITA guerrillas, supposed allies of the South African security forces, for *kopgeld*.[75]

Such accounts of Koevoet are common among former members of the SADF and SWATF, more generally. Referring to the SADF's WHAM campaign, SADF General Constand Viljoen asserted that 'I could never agree with the methods of

[72] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; T. Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa, 1952-1990* (London: Routledge, 2015), 123; Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 110.
[73] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, November 2016.
[74] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016.
[75] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, November 2016.

Koevoet. They had a cruelty about them that certainly didn't further the hearts and minds of the people'.[76] According to a SADF national serviceman,

> They [32 Battalion] were people I was scared of … but they were also … people I admired and who contributed to my own safety. We all knew that they were superb soldiers … So there was a sense of safety when [32 Battalion] were around. Koevoet were like mad pit bull terriers. They went around killing and they rejoiced in killing.[77]

In the words of another national serviceman, 'I also realised that there are different corps that do different things and ... do their own thing … Koevoet did their own thing, they had their own law, their own rules'.[78] Similarly, according to SADF General Georg Meiring, 'Koevoet was not a law unto itself. Koevoet was just unto itself'.[79]

Training and Discipline

In the accounts of former soldiers, the military cultures of Koevoet, SWATF, and 32 Battalion differed most significantly with regard to training and discipline. In comparison to SWATF and 32 Battalion, Koevoet members underwent shorter training periods, appear to have been relatively less disciplined, and were often punished by being beaten. SWATF soldiers stressed their extensive training and the enforcement of discipline through physical drill (in contrast to Koevoet). In 32 Battalion, discipline was often violently enforced, especially with the *sjambok* (a heavy leather whip), and soldiers underwent extensive, regular retraining

[76] Quoted in Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, 64.
[77] Interview with Dr. M, Johannesburg, 14 December 2007, available at HPRA, A3079, D.7.
[78] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Johannesburg, 10 September 2007, available at HPRA, A3079, D.6.
[79] Quoted in Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, 65.

back at Buffalo Base. The particularly distinct treatment of black soldiers in 32 Battalion, especially in the early days, was rooted in the unit's history of recruitment of former FNLA guerrillas, and white South African officers' attitudes towards them.

Koevoet

Among former Koevoet members, many interviewees recounted being asked questions meant to test their loyalties and allegiances prior to joining the unit. Some interviewees referred to this process as an 'oath' or 'Koevoet oath'.[80] Given the unit's counterinsurgency operations among the local population in northern Namibia, its leadership wanted to ensure that their members were fully aware that they would potentially have to arrest or even kill people they knew, including family members.[81] One man, for instance, remembered being asked 'why do you want to fight SWAPO?' because, as he explained, the leaders wanted to make sure whether recruits really wanted to fight or not.[82] Most of my interviewees recalled more disturbing questions around moral dilemmas in which they specifically had to choose between the loyalty to their families and their allegiance to the unit and its members. One interviewee explained,

> in the war, we received instructions and we were taught to know exactly what fighting war is all about. For instance, we were asked, 'what will you do if you

[80] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 29 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016. Not all of my interviewees were asked questions: interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 29 August 2016.
[81] A white former Koevoet officer called such questions 'ridiculous' because, according to him, people enlisted in Koevoet simply to get a job: interview, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016.
[82] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016.

> find your mother on the enemy side or your father is turning against you?' It's war! You have to fight them![83]

Similarly, another man remembered being asked, 'now that you are a soldier, if you find your brother who is a SWAPO, what will you do?'. He asserted that 'you said, "I will kill him" because you want money'.[84] Others took such questions more seriously and found them difficult to answer. One man was asked 'if your own mother steals something, will you be able to arrest her?', which he felt was a 'difficult question' but he had no other choice than to answer 'yes'.[85] Another interviewee, whose parents supported SWAPO, vividly remembered the questions he was asked and how he felt at the time:

> you were asked questions before you joined. We were in a group being asked questions and they [the recruitment officers] would point at you. There was one question that I was asked. … They asked me, 'if you find a SWAPO group in your house with your mother and your siblings, what will you do?' It was very difficult for me to answer that question but then I answered that I can only shoot if they start shooting first because I am also protecting my soul.[86]

His attempt to truthfully answer these questions was not a sign of naiveté. Like him, nearly all recruits had family members and friends who had joined SWAPO in exile. When they were confronted by these questions, they realised the implication of their recruitment: that it was no longer an implausible scenario that they had to fight and kill people they knew. Speaking more specifically of the oath, he recalled,

> then they would ask you, 'we have a job for you but the first thing we want to tell you [is that] you have to accept the law that we are going to tell you'. You raised your right hand and said, 'God, I want all the things that I am going to be told here and I want to fulfil them'. … There is this other question that I will never forget: 'after you finish training, you will join the war. As you know, we

[83] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 18 August 2016; see also interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.
[84] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[85] Interview former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[86] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.

> will fight against the terrorists but I want to ask you one question, 'if you guys work as a group, and then you reach your place and find SWAPO at your house, and in the house is your mother, your siblings, and then SWAPO starts shooting, what will you do?' My head was very confused. I didn't know how to answer this question. But then I thought that this is impossible. I thought that the question I was asked was impossible and it will never happen in my life. Then I just said, 'I myself will also shoot'. Then they said, 'ok, join'. It was just like that.[87]

Such 'initiation rituals' alongside other training processes, as Elisabeth Wood argues, aim at melding individual recruits into a cohesive unit in which allegiance to the group is felt to be stronger than previous loyalties, such as those to family members.[88] Thus, the 'Koevoet oath' made it abundantly clear that the new members were expected to owe their unquestioning loyalty not to their families but to the unit, even if it meant having to shoot one's own mother or father.

After recruitment, Koevoet members were trained for three to five months (in contrast to 12 months in SWATF).[89] Training consisted of basic training in weaponry, discipline, tactics, and law but the emphasis was on intensive physical drill. As Dreyer explained, 'to guarantee success they had to be fit – not only mentally, but also physically'.[90] Similarly, Colin Leys writes that 'the officer in charge of Koevoet training at Oluno testified to the O'Linn Commission on Intimidation and Election Malpractice [in 1989] that [men] were recruited on the

[87] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[88] E.J. Wood, 'The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), 546; see also R. Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: Free Press, 1985), and G. Dyer, *War: The Lethal Custom* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004).
[89] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 199; Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 71.
[90] Quoted in S. Dobson, 'Spotlight on Koevoet', *RSA Policy Review*, 2, 3 (1989), 16, available at National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, PB/3794.

basis of fitness alone'.[91] According to Eugene de Kock, the levels of training and discipline in Koevoet declined from the early 1980s when the unit rapidly expanded.[92] At the same time, experienced officers left the unit because they 'were needed in South Africa'.[93] De Kock, for instance, was withdrawn to the C1 unit (later renamed C10) of the SAP's Security Branch based at Vlakplaas, a farm outside of Pretoria, in 1983.[94] The unit, as Kevin O'Brien writes, had been established 'for the expressed purpose of "turning" ANC and PAC guerrillas … to operate against their former comrades'.[95]

The accounts of training in Koevoet indicate that the unit's 'kill rates' were not the result of any extensive military instruction and drilling of its members. When I asked about his training experience, one man simply said, 'we were told how to kill people; how to hold a gun'.[96] A Koevoet member, interviewed by David Lush in 1989, explained:

> When we joined Koevoet, they took us away for perhaps two to three months and showed us how to use the weapons and told us who we should use the weapons against. During that time we did not see anyone outside the camp where we were doing the training. They filled our heads with information about Swapo, and I tell you, when I came out of that training, if you had told me my mother was a Swapo, I would have killed her without hesitation.[97]

Another interviewee enlisted in 1986 and his training only lasted for one month before he and his fellow members were sent on their first mission. He recounted his instructors showing them a rifle and asking,

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[91] C. Leys, 'The Security Situation and the Transfer of Power in Namibia', *Review of African Political Economy*, 16 (1989), 147.
[92] Interview with Eugene de Kock, Koevoet, Pretoria, 30 July 2016.
[93] Tony Weaver, Human Rights Violation Hearing, Pollsmoor, 27 November 1996, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/hearing.php?id=55782.htm, retrieved 28 May 2018.
[94] Ellis, 'The Historical Significance', 269.
[95] O'Brien, 'The Use of Assassination', 125.
[96] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.
[97] Quoted in D. Lush, *Last Steps to Uhuru: An Eye-Witness Account of Namibia's Transition to Independence* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1993), 75.

> 'You know this?' 'Yes.' ... 'We will provide you with this weapon. Each and everyone of you will get this weapon.' 'Oh, ok.' … 'Come, we will show you how to disassemble and assemble this weapon, and how to aim it at the target. Because from now on SWAPO is your enemy! If you see the uniform of SWAPO [likely referring to the mustard-coloured uniforms worn by some SWAPO guerrillas], if you are not the first one to shoot, you will die. SWAPO will shoot you!' We didn't train hard. We were just shown how to use the weapon.[98]

According to a white Koevoet officer in 1983, 'they [black special constables] are expendable, and that is why they are trained like that. Even so, we lose very few of our own men'.[99]

Discipline in Koevoet was enforced less strictly and less frequently than in SWATF or 32 Battalion; and if so, through physical drill, such as carrying a bag of sand while running, or through beatings, which seem to have been an integral part of Koevoet's military culture.[100] Punishable offenses included absence without official leave (AWOL) and fights with other team members.[101] Alois Gende of SWATF's 201 Battalion, who liaised with the unit, asserted that beatings as a disciplinary measure were 'policy in Koevoet'.[102] One former Koevoet member felt that the assaults by certain superiors, especially being kicked, were a serious problem in the unit. He explained, 'every force has its own rules. [The beatings] were not too much. But they can kick so you know that you will feel it. That's a problem, neh!'[103]

[98] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 3 October 2016.
[99] Quoted in P. Honey, 'Death-defying Killing Machines', *Weekend Argus*, 8 October 1983.
[100] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016; interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016.
[101] Interviews with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 and 22 April 2016.
[102] Interview with Alois Gende, Rundu, 18 October 2016.
[103] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016.

Physical assaults targeted not only members of Koevoet but also suspected SWAPO insurgents, members of rival units and the civilian population.[104] As one newspaper reporter in 1983 put it: 'after-hours fights between [Koevoet members] and military or civilian personnel over a careless word are legion in the operational area'.[105] One interviewee remembered that superiors of his in 101 Battalion would regularly return from their weekend leave with black eyes and bruises from bar brawls with Koevoet members.[106] According to another interviewee, one 101 Battalion lieutenant was even killed in such a fight.[107]

Some former Koevoet members also acknowledged the brutality of the unit. One of my interviewees explained, 'when Koevoet comes to your house, you must be prepared to speak the truth. Otherwise you will be beaten'.[108] One man claimed that white members of his team had beaten civilians to death.[109] Another one, who transferred from Koevoet to 101 Battalion in 1984, asserted that 'Koevoet had no rules': '[they] beat people and killed people. … They were killers. That is why people were afraid of it'.[110]

In contrast to SWATF and 32 Battalion, Koevoet members openly celebrated the unit's reputation, for example, by sporting t-shirts with slogans such as 'If you have them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow', 'Killing is our business and business is good', and 'Happiness is 100 confirmed kills' (see Figure

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[104] R. Dicker, *Accountability in Namibia: Human Rights and Transition to Democracy* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992), 48, 65.
[105] P. Honey, 'The "Killing Machines"', *Sunday Tribune*, 9 October 1983.
[106] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 4 November 2016.
[107] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, 17 November 2016. See also Lush, *Last Steps to Uhuru*, 66; Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 110.
[108] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[109] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016.
[110] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016. One woman, whose late husband had served both in 32 Battalion and Koevoet, remembered Koevoet members coming to her house and beating her and her family, and said, 'people were very afraid of Koevoet': interview, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.

2).[111] The public displays of its 'rogue' status among the security forces also conveyed a particular conception of masculinity characterised by power, aggression, and violence. Sean Mark Callaghan, an SADF medic seconded to Koevoet, testified at the SATRC:

> Having been there for six months four of us were asked to go and join Koevoet, to be medical personnel to Koevoet. All we knew about Koevoet was they were the guys who didn't strap themselves into casspirs where the rest of us had to. They were the people who drove down the middle of the road, even if there was a landmine there, not through the middle of the trees and bushes, and they were the guys who drank beers while sitting on top of casspirs instead of drinking water while on patrol. And in a sense that was something which was quite attractive to 18 year-old boys who were living under military rules and military regime.[112]

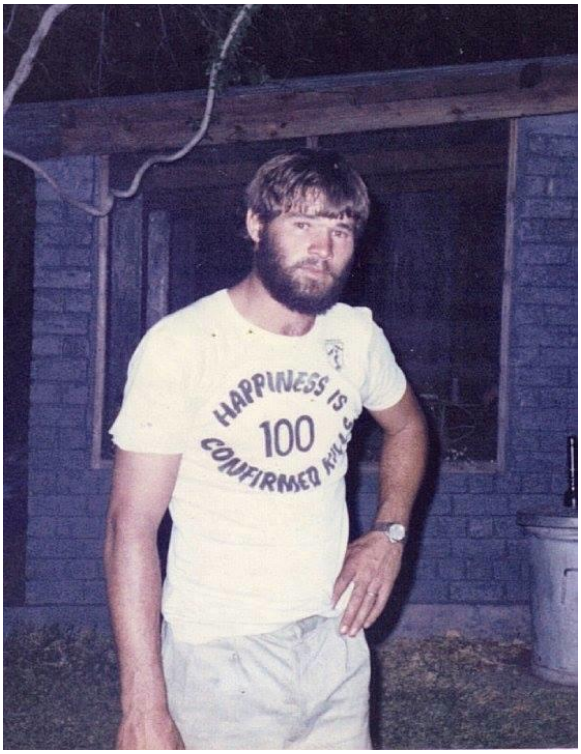


Figure 2: Photograph of an unnamed Koevoet member wearing t-shirt saying 'Happiness is 100 Confirmed Kills'. Image downloaded from https://www.facebook.com/groups/ SpecialopsK in October 2016.

[111] Similarly, the Selous Scouts had also celebrated their image of being 'secretive, violent, and a law unto themselves': L. White, 'Precarious Conditions: A Note on Counter-Insurgency in Africa After 1945', *Gender & History*, 16, 3 (2004), 611.

[112] Sean Mark Callaghan, Special Hearing, Cape Town, 17 June 1997, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/health/56318.htm, retrieved 28 May 2018.

According to a white former Koevoet officer, the power and status associated with being a Koevoet member were central to the unit's military culture: 'the main thing was just that whole *esprit de corps*, that we were an elite unit, … and that we were good at what we did. People were scared of us, they were in awe of us and we felt like we were hotshots'.[113]

SWATF

The accounts of former SWATF members stood in stark contrast to the above stories about Koevoet's brutalised military culture of beating subordinates, members of other security forces, and civilians. Without doubt, SWATF officers beat both black and white troops, but none of my interviewees recounted incidents of being beaten or lashed with the *sjambok* as in the cases of Koevoet and 32 Battalion.[114] SWATF members were commonly disciplined through physical drill, termed 'confined to barracks', such as running, pushing a tire, or dancing in one spot. Typical punishable offenses included being AWOL, arriving late for parade or lack of 'neatness'.[115] One former 101 Battalion member, for example, recounted being punished through physical drill while still wearing his suit after he returned late from weekend leave.[116] According to Colonel

[113] Quoted in Foster et al., *The Theatre of Violence*, 139.
[114] In 101 Battalion, any punishment with the *sjambok* was stopped in 1981: interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; interview with former soldier, Pretoria, 17 November 2016.
[115] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016.
[116] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016.

Welgemoed, in some cases, senior black staff members asked him to fine his troops a goat or an ox if they had 'disrespected' them.[117]

Instead of focusing on physical punishment, the former members of SWATF spoke of the importance and the professionalism of their military training. Before enlistment, recruits had to pass a series of physical fitness tests, such as push-ups, sit-ups, and a 10km forced march.[118] During a one-year probationary period, recruits underwent an intensive basic infantry training course with subjects such as counterinsurgency training.[119] Alon Peled writes that, from late 1970s onwards, the SADF became 'determined to provide its black soldiers with advanced training, not the poor training given to black police officers, many of whom had been killed in combat in previous years'.[120]

One interiewee asserted that 'South Africa gave us full training, not half training' and that the 'South African training was very tough' with the first leave only being given after 6 months.[121] Another one also emphasised that

> South Africa didn't train us for 6 months. South Africa trained us for 12 months. 12 months. 6 months was only theory and the other 6 six months were practice. The people who trained us trained us very nicely. ... They trained us for a professional war.122

One former 101 Battalion soldier, described the physical strenuousness, in this case hunger, during his training, which apparently only 100 out of 1,000 recruits passed:

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[117] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016.
[118] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 28 September and 2 October 2016; P.G. Kokalis, 'Guns of Ovamboland', *Soldier of Fortune* (February 1989), 29, available at available at National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, TLE/0612.
[119] Kokalis, 'Guns of Ovamboland', 29.
[120] Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 63.
[121] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 28 September and 2 October 2016.
[122] Interview with ' former soldier, Ondangwa, 28 September 2016. See also interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014.

> they [the instructors] can starve you while you are going through this tough training and just for your own benefit. I remember one thing: they would give us one potato to share between two men. After sharing that potato, you would be sent to go dump the leftover food in the garbage without taking anything. … During the war this training helped us a lot.[123]

A senior SWATF member recounted that the training was not only 'very tough' but 'helped you to be wise and strong, both physically and mentally, [and] you also had to learn how and when to be sympathetic with people'. He further asserted that the soldiers of SWATF 'were not trained to kill innocent people [but] to take care of and to protect people'.[124] Even former members of SWATF who had become critical of their role during the war stressed the military's relatively considerate contact with the civilian population. For instance, one former 101 Battalion soldier insisted that,

> when we fought in the war, we who were working for the white men, as people say now that we were bad people, I believe it is true that maybe we were bad. But then we had certain rules, we were trained that we were not allowed to touch the things of the inhabitants. We cannot just shoot a person who does not have a weapon or who is not a member of SWAPO.[125]

Other former SWATF soldiers, like him, frequently contrasted their training and behaviour, both implicitly and explicitly, to those of Koevoet. When I asked another interviewee, who changed from Koevoet to 101 Battalion in 1980, about the differences between the two forces, he emphasised the superior training in the military.[126] The duration (12 instead of 3-5 months) and physically more demanding type of training in SWATF deterred many Koevoet members from enlisting despite the higher salaries paid by the military.[127] One man, who transferred from Koevoet to 101 Battalion in 1984, affirmed that there were

[123] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 9 October 2016.
[124] Interview with former soldier, Onambango, 1 October 2016.
[125] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[126] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 12 October 2016.
[127] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016.

more rules and regulations in the military, and that its members could not just beat civilians. In contrast, 'in Koevoet, when someone lost their mind, nobody would care. … You could do whatever you wanted'.[128]

Of course, this is not to say that no civilian was ever assaulted, abused, or killed by members of SWATF. Such a claim would be absurd, especially given that some of my interviewees told me that they beat and even killed civilians to obtain information about SWAPO.[129] Instead, I suggest that SWATF, due to its distinct military culture, was a significantly more disciplined unit than Koevoet, and imagined itself as such. In other words, discipline was central to the unit's military culture. An important case in point is the above-mentioned fact that the members of 101 Battalion were also paid *kopgeld,* in an attempt to model Koevoet's military success measured in 'kill rates'.[130] It was the only SWATF battalion to receive such money, which was allegedly paid out by the Military Intelligence fund in Oshakati.[131] Despite the same practice, the payout of *kopgeld* does not seem to have led to similar levels of violent behaviour displayed by members of Koevoet.

As discussed above, it is possible that 101 Battalion, as well as 32 Battalion, could not be held accountable to the same degree as Koevoet because the military operated predominantly in Angola, 'another country [where] there were no rules', in the words of a white former 101 Battalion officer.[132] However, former high-ranking officers of PLAN whom I spoke with confirmed the

[128] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016.
[129] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016; interview with former soldier, Pretoria, November 2016. See also R. Munayama, '101 Man Says Why He Quit the Army', *The Namibian*, 30 September 1988.
[130] Interview with two former soldiers, Pretoria, 20 November 2016.
[131] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, November 2016.
[132] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, 17 November 2016.

differences in discipline and behaviour between Koevoet and SWATF. Niilo Taapopi said the members of SWATF were 'disciplined soldiers' in contrast to those of Koevoet who were 'very aggressive' and 'showed no mercy'.[133] In much the same vein, Charles Namoloh confirmed this contrast and described Koevoet as 'brutal and cruel' and a 'unit created to instil fear in the local population'.[134]

32 Battalion

With regard to the imposition of discipline, the military culture of 32 Battalion differed drastically from those of both SWATF and Koevoet. From 32 Battalion's inception, discipline was strictly and often brutally enforced.[135] According to Breytenbach,

> Before the South Africans arrived, the local FNLA had taken what they wanted, without recompense, from the locals, including women, whenever they felt the need. … One of Sybie's [Commandant Sybie van der Spuy] first actions was to install the disciplinary code agreed with the former FNLA soldiers of Bravo group as an instrument by which troops, not subject to South African military law, could be disciplined within Angola. … The positive effect on the FNLA was instantaneous and they quickly fell into line.[136]

In the first three years of the unit's existence (1975-77), an unknown number of soldiers were executed for various offences, further complicating their portrayal as self-interested mercenaries. According to my interviewees, the reasons for executions ranged from desertion or retreat during battle to stealing or refusing

[133] Interview with Niilo Taapopi, Windhoek, 6 November 2016.
[134] Interview with Charles Namoloh, Windhoek, 7 November 2016.
[135] Nortje, *32 Battalion*, 71.
[136] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, 90. Similarly to Breytenbach, John Marcum writes that 'Chipenda's freebooters probably "spent more time looting, robbing banks, raping," and jousting for positions against UNITA than they did fighting the MPLA': Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Vol. II*, 276.

an order.[137] One former soldier claimed that in cases where deserters decided to return to the base, they were arrested and told they would be sent to Pretoria to be judged by a general in the SADF. Their colleagues were told that the person had been sentenced to prison in Pretoria for 30 years. Some of their white officers later informed them that that had been a 'pure lie' and that the deserter had in fact been executed in the bush. As a result, 'people were scared about asking questions'.[138]

Some of these accounts may be exaggerated and are impossible to verify but there is no doubt that executions took place.[139] Article 4 of the South African Military Disciplinary Code (MDC), which was abolished in late 1977, allowed the death penalty for treason. When I asked one man if he ever thought about running away, he referred to the article, saying: 'That time, the law wouldn't allow [you to run away]. … [According to] Article No. 3 [*sic*] of the South African army, you were executed if you did not obey'.[140] According to a white former commander, white leaders and some of the black platoon sergeants carried out executions:

> under Article 4 of the MDC, I know of platoon commanders who carried out executions of their own troops in the field at that stage, at the beginning of 32 Battalion. Basically it was easy to carry out these types of executions because the troops were not registered or were not part of the Defence Force at that stage.[141]

[137] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016; interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[138] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016. See also interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[139] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 266-69; interview with Jan Breytenbach, Sedgefield, 2 October 2005; and interview with Oppie Opperman, Witbank, 17 November 2008; both available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.5 and B.1.10, respectively.
[140] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[141] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 266.

These executions were explicitly aimed to enforce fighting discipline among troops as another white former commander, Oppie Opperman, explained:

> I know of a guy who right at the beginning of the war put one of the soldiers against the tree and killed him … because he deserted. So that was dealt with then and he was tried … because of that, but that's how we brought the guys into line, and they were the best and we were dependent on each other, and we knew that.[142]

One of the white SWATF officers I interviewed said that white staff members of 32 Battalion 'were on their own' and 'could do whatever they wanted'.[143] There are similar accounts about FNLA leaders, indicating a violent continuity between the FNLA and 32 Battalion. As Nortje writes about Pedro Gomes, the former FNLA commander nicknamed *Kioto*, who joined Bravo Group/32 Battalion in 1975:

> Kioto was a hard, ruthless leader who took no nonsense from his men. While deployed with Alpha Group at Novo Redondo, some of his men fled in the face of the enemy. Kioto afterwards lined them up and shot them as an example to the rest of what was to happen if they did the same under fire.[144]

These accounts also echo similar stories about Alpha Group/31 Battalion, whose members, according to SATRC testimony, were also 'subjected to a regime of harsh discipline [where] dissent was dealt with ruthlessly', including summary executions.[145]

Some of my interviewees felt that the violence 'worked' in the sense that it 'drove fear out of them'.[146] One man, for instance, argued that those troops who had disobeyed commands by retreating 'had to be killed' because 'otherwise how would you make war like that, coming back when they shout at you to go

[142] Interview with Oppie Opperman, Witbank, 17 November 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.10.
[143] Interview with former soldier, Pretoria, November 2016.
[144] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 153.
[145] TRC, *Volume 2*, 23-4.
[146] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 8 August 2016.

forward?'.[147] Other interviewees disagreed and did not see themselves as fearless soldiers but as 'prisoners' or 'slaves'.[148] As Brinkman notes, 'slavery has remained an important word for many Angolans' used, for example, to compare pre-colonial slave raids to the abduction of civilians by guerrilla forces during the war of independence.[149] Hence, in the words of one former soldier, life in 32 Battalion 'was a life in slavery and bondage'.[150]

The use of the *sjambok* as a disciplinary measure further aggravated the soldiers' sense of being imprisoned and enslaved. According to one former soldier,

> The life in Buffalo was complicated … Some [soldiers] got 50 *sjamboks* [to the point] that they stopped being a man. All the veins were visible in their backs. … Our [black] sergeant majors were the ones who beat us up. If you did not get [the punishment] they wanted, they would beat you. … We were punished like prisoners.[151]

The battalion's leadership used the *sjambok* for reasons of 'expediency' as one white former officer explained: 'we found that, especially in a military environment, [it] was the way to get it over with … because we didn't want long, drawn-out matters'.[152] A black former sergeant major in the unit justified the punishment:

> There had to be a strong punishment. For the war to work, there had to be something that would make you really scared, and make you hold on … If I did something wrong, I had to be punished so that I would always do the right thing. On one side, it was bad [but on the other] we were pushed to always do better. … I followed the rules. Those who did not follow would get punished. … Discipline is fear. Respect yourself [by] not getting punished. Avoid bad behaviour or you suffer as a black man.[153]

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[147] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[148] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016.
[149] Brinkman, *A War for People*, 156-7.
[150] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 24 May 2016.
[151] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[152] Interview with former soldier, via Skype, 30 August 2016.
[153] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.

In the bush, soldiers would be hit mainly for refusing to follow orders or sleeping while on guard duty.[154] In the base, reasons for lashes with the *sjambok* included alcohol abuse, illegal trade, entering the married section as a single man, and complaining about salaries.[155] The punishment was also extended to civilians, such as soldiers' wives accused of adultery.[156] After a basic investigation and brief hearing to determine guilt, the person would be lashed while bent over a cement-filled barrel and held down by two sergeant majors or military policemen. According to one former soldier, the unit commander would watch, and after 10-25 lashes, many people would faint and have to be brought to the hospital for medical treatment.[157]

There was some disagreement among my interviewees as to who had introduced the *sjambok* punishment and until when it was practiced. Most said that it was introduced by the black sergeant majors of the battalion, former FNLA commanders like *Kioto*, and abolished in the mid-1980s.[158] As one interviewee explained:

> The problem was not indiscipline. The problem was that our black leaders decided … they would give us the *sjambok*. [It was] our sergeants, the black leaders who decided that. … They thought the *sjambok* was only for the black soldiers but then the black leaders started to get the *sjambok* as well. … A commander from the artillery … was the one who came and … stopped it.[159]

[154] Interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.16.
[155] Interview with former soldier, via Skype, 30 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.
[156] Interview with Peter Williams, Durban, 15 February 2008, available at HPRA, A3079, D.16.
[157] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016. See also interview with Meriam Nainda, Pomfret, April 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.45.
[158] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[159] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.

Others asserted that a black sergeant major had been forced to do so under threat of execution by the Officer Commanding and that the punishment was only stopped after the battalion had relocated to South Africa in 1989.[160] In either case, the *sjambok* was the order of the day and formed an integral part of the unit's military culture throughout most of its existence.

With regard to training, the soldiers of 32 Battalion underwent regular retraining from 1977 onwards. One interviewee recounted:

> In … 1975-76, we trained with the South Africans in the bush. When we finished, we got the registration numbers [referring to their official SADF force numbers]. But the trainings never ended: day and night; this week, next week; up and down; you go to the bush [to fight], you come back. With those nerves and all that strength, we got so strong.[161]

According to Colonel Gert Nel, he instated regular retraining in response to the state he found 32 Battalion in when he took over command from Breytenbach in 1977:

> They sent me to take over 32 Battalion. … When I got there, they were actually terrorists, I've got no other words for them. There was no organisation, there was no nothing … My first priority was to get leaders for quality purposes. And then, to make them [into] soldiers [and to] start training them. So the moment they were out of operations, they went down to a training area where they were actually trained as soldiers.[162]

They operated in the bush for at least six weeks before returning to base for about six weeks. During their off period, the troops had some leave but spent most of the time in retraining.[163] As one man recounted, '[we] never left the trainings'.[164]

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[160] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[161] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[162] Interview with Gert Nel, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.
[163] Interview with former soldier, via Skype, 30 August 2016; D16.
[164] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

Relations Between Black and White Soldiers

32 Battalion

Whereas the recollections by black former SWATF and Koevoet members of their relations with white soldiers were generally more favorable, most black former 32 Battalion members referred to the relationship with their white officers as one of 'apartheid' and 'colonialism', and again compared themselves to 'prisoners' and 'slaves'. In Nortje's book, *The Terrible Ones*, a black former senior-ranking soldier relates his experience of life in the battalion with particularly strong anger and resentment:

> the high ranks, the officers, were all racists, because they were part of the regime. We had to work for them, fight for them; they were the ones who brought us from Angola and Namibia. They placed us in the refugee camp. They needed to create a black unit and closed the camp. I cannot say there was a good white.
> *Question: So why did you work for the regime?*
> We got used to the regime. We had no way of running away – it was all controlled. If you tried to run away and got caught, you were killed. We had to put up with the good and the bad. In the base we were separated; we also had a camp for the married and unmarried. In the base whites and blacks did not mix. In the bush, in the operations, the troops had to work together. There were several mad ones: you could not eat from the same plate or drink from the same mug, and they would break the mug. Once we arrived back at base we had no liberty to go on leave; if on leave one tried to leave, you got the *sjambok* – 60 lashes for anyone breaking the law.[165]

The claim of 60 lashes was most likely an exaggeration but many of my interviewees' accounts, while more moderate in their tone, reflected similar sentiments. For them, apartheid manifested itself in the fact that a small minority

[165] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1139.

of white leaders was in charge of a unit consisting largely of black soldiers, who made up the vast majority of the casualties.[166] According to one interviewee, this demonstrated that they, unlike white soldiers, were dispensable and had 'no value'.[167] A second central issue was the racial segregation in the base with separate sleeping quarters, mess, and bar.[168] For many interviewees, apartheid in the base not only stood in stark and often hurtful contrast to 'being one' during operations in the bush, but signified that their 'white leaders had more value'.[169]

Some other interviewees, however, portrayed their white former leaders in a more favorable light.[170] One man, for instance, said that 'some [white officers] were good'.[171] Another interviewee recounted:

> We were working together. We were fighting the enemy. We gained their trust. … Those guys went drinking with us so they started trusting us. Sometimes they would invite us [to their] home, and when they told us [that we should stay], we would stay.[172]

One interviewee emphasised 32 Battalion's relatively integrated organisation that stood in extreme contrast to the wider context of apartheid at the time:

> 32 [Battalion] did not have that separation. The whites in South Africa were known [for their] tribalism but during the war there was no colour. There was no black, there was no white. We ate in the same place, drank from the same mug. We walked together. If the white got hurt, the black came. When the black got hurt, the white came. … In the bush, there was respect [because] we were working together.[173]

[166] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[167] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.
[168] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[169] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 9 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[170] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August.
[171] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.
[172] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016.
[173] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.

However, generally, even those interviewees who spoke more favorably of their relations with white soldiers in the unit, resented the fact that 'black soldiers just had to follow'.[174]

Among those former soldiers first recruited into 32 Battalion, many accounts of racial discrimination focused on issues around payment during the early days of the unit. One interviewee, for example, recounted:

> If they wanted to pay us, they paid us. If they didn't, they didn't. I speak no lies. I worked for two months in the bush [and] when I arrived to the Buffalo base, [a sergeant] major who was the one to pay us pointed a gun at me, accusing me of already having been paid. At that time, in Buffalo, they could kill you … No one was going to miss you. You were worth nothing.[175]

According to another black former soldier,

> life in the unit was very difficult. Those days of apartheid, a black man could do nothing. Those days, the pay was R10 per month, but before you could receive the R10, one had to wash one's hands with soap three times. They used to place on a table three basins with water. Once your hands were clean, you got the R10.[176]

Although this practice was abolished in the early 1980s, the story of black soldiers having to wash their hands three times before being paid was brought up in nearly every interview. Nortje suggests that the washing of hands might be rationalised as a measure to ensure 'that the papers on which the signatures or thumbprints were placed for the auditor stayed clean for auditing purposes'.[177]

More likely, the practice was part of the SADF's 'civilising' programmes, similar to those of Alpha Group/31 Battalion. Based on the assumption that black people are unclean, the programmes stressed not only white supremacy but hygiene and 'neatness', which were strictly imposed, if deemed necessary, with

[174] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.
[175] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[176] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 162.
[177] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 162.

the *sjambok*.[178] At the same time, it served to reinforce the soldiers' discipline and obedience because, as one interviewee put it, he and many of his black colleagues were 'too stubborn to accept apartheid'.[179] To them, the hand washing was a racist and highly demeaning practice symbolic of their status as 'prisoners' and 'slaves'.[180] According to one black officer, there were occasions where soldiers first had to bend over for several lashes of the *sjambok* before receiving their money.[181] Two of my interviewees recounted that, after having washed their hands and having received their payment, they were ordered to buy something from the Colonel's wife, for example, some pastry she had made. If they refused, they would again be hit with the *sjambok*.[182] Referring to one such occasion, one man exclaimed, 'that's how we lived! Where could you report that?'[183] Payments soon increased from R10 to R60 and then to R600 per month in 1981-82 but many interviewees felt that their salaries stood in no relation to the continued hardships and injuries they sustained during the war.[184]

The 32 Battalion 'civilising' measures also included the formalisation of soldiers' family relationships through enforced marriage. Like the commanders of other colonial and settler armies, the leadership of 32 Battalion believed that formalising their black troops' family relationships would improve the unit's order, discipline, and morale. For instance, as Parsons writes with regard to the King's African Rifles, British colonial officers 'strongly believed that married

[178] Gordon and Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth*, 190; R.B. Lee, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy, But the State Has a Plan: Government Policies Towards the San in Namibia', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 20, 1 (1986), 95, 97.
[179] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[180] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 24 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016
[181] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 162.
[182] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 9 August 2016.
[183] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.
[184] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.

[soldiers] were more stable and easier to discipline'.[185] During his command of 32 Battalion, Colonel Gert Nel emphasised 'discipline, organisation and order', which included the attempted abolishment of adultery and polygamy. In 1978, Nel held a mass marriage ceremony for about 350 couples:

> That is the other side of the story, that's not the soldiering side. … I told them, this nonsense [referring to adultery and polygamy] stops now. They [the troops] now have to legally … marry the women, according to South African law, so that we can get this thing sorted out. If they get shot or something … who is going to get their money, or their whatever? … I told them [that] in three weeks time we will have this wedding ceremony. … The women were more happy than the men about this because most of them wanted order … I told them [that] I'm going to marry them, and [am] the only one that can divorce them … According to [South African] law, I couldn't marry them but they didn't know that … I did all the talking [while] the [Portuguese-speaking] Padre did the sermon, and he just said, 'You're married'. … Where [the Padre] fitted in they never realised … He said that he had the power of authority to do so but they believed that I married them … That sorted out a lot of problems.[186]

Nel's initiative was likely part of new SADF regulations implemented in April 1978, according to which 'only one wife [was] provided government housing on a military base'.[187] In any case, the black former members of 32 Battalion remembered the marriage episode quite differently than Nel did. One interviewee, for instance, recounted:

> People started to marry because of the *sjambok*. There was an order: the ones who did not have a wife had to go to [Rundu]. The *sjambok* was [used] to punish the single men who slept with the wives of the married men. … There

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[185] T.H. Parsons, 'All *Askaris* are Family Men: Sex, Domesticity and Discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964', in D. Killingray and D. Omissi (eds.), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 166. See also J.M. Thompson, 'Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops in French West Africa, 1817-1904', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23, 3 (1990), 423-53; S. Zimmerman, '*Mesdames Tirailleurs* and Indirect Clients: West African Women and the French Colonial Army, 1908-1918', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44, 2 (2011), 299-322; C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 142, 158.

[186] Interview with Gert Nel, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.

[187] U.S. Embassy in Cape Town, 'Prospects for Change: Racial Policies in the SADF', 20 June 1978, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1978CAPET01223d.html, retrieved 28 May 2018. See also Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, 72.

> was no obligation to marry but single men were not allowed to go out … alone so they invented leave … to Rundu for them to get a wife.[188]

According to João Apolinário,

> You could go and look for a lady. First, you had to pay [R40] and go out for a week to find a lady and then, on your return, you had to return to the operations tent. If you bought a lady, you get your [R40] back, but if you did not bring a lady, you get 40 lashes with the *sjambok* and you lost the money you had paid.[189]

Relations between white officers and black troops seem to have significantly improved from the early 1980s, especially under the command of Colonel Eddie Viljoen, the Battalion's OC from 1982-86. Viljoen transformed the unit into a more conventional SADF unit with a more conventional approach to training and discipline.[190] As one former soldier recounted:

> After [Breytenbach] founded 32 Battalion, the white South Africans came and said to him: 'You cannot lead this battalion of foreigners anymore. We, as South Africans, will lead this battalion'. … So we stayed behind now with the proper South African leaders, the racists themselves. It was very tough for us to get across that barrier of racism. If you are holding a coffee cup of a white guy and he sees that, he is going to break that mug. Then another guy called Viljoen came [and] he started to reduce those things. He had worked with the blacks in the mines so he was used to working with them [and] so he started eliminating those things.[191]

Another interviewee agreed, saying:

> [In the early 1980s,] we got holidays [leave] and we started to go out. So those were good times. … By then, the hand-washing before [getting] the money was gone … The colonial system was gone. … 1976-77 was a problem. You couldn't even talk to a white. By the '80s, [that] was gone.

[188] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[189] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 328.
[190] I thank Professor Christo Doherty for this point.
[191] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.

Nevertheless, he added, 'I did not become friends with the whites'.[192] According to Tshisukila Tukayula De Abreu, black troops first had to gain their white officers' trust before their relationship improved:

> The South African government was worried about recruiting black soldiers[. T]hey never trusted us and they watched our every move. No Angolan soldier was ever allowed to hold or use a radio as the white soldiers were worried we would sell them out to the Angolan enemy, it took a long time before they started to trust us. We did many operations and a few years more of training. We did a good job and we killed many people. They started to like us.[193]

As one former soldier explained, these changes in the 1980s opened up space for black troops to more openly resist and fight back against the violence by white officers without being brutally punished:

> We were troublemakers. We did not accept the things of apartheid. When a white got upset, there would be beatings. Then there would be meetings where the whites would go and say, 'There was this black guy who beat a white. We have to eliminate him. This can't happen'. But there were whites who defended us and said, 'If the beating happened, it was something between a man and a man. … They should not have provoked the blacks'. … Things started to change.[194]

As I will discuss in Chapter 7, despite these improvements, many former 32 Battalion members felt that they had been 'used' by their white leaders and the SADF: 'they used us as spades. But after using the spade, they threw us away'.[195]

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[192] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[193] Quoted in Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, 69-70.
[194] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[195] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.

Koevoet and SWATF

In comparison to 32 Battalion, the accounts of both former SWATF and Koevoet members of the relationship with their white leaders were overall much less damning. Most of my interviewees said they had a close bond with their white officers and emphasised that, in the context of apartheid at the time, they ate, drank, and slept together.[196] They saw the sharing of food and drink as a significant sign of equal treatment. One, for instance, recalled that 'we had a good relationship, treating each other equally and eating together'.[197] Similarly, another one asserted that 'we didn't have any problem. We would be eating from the same plate and drinking from the same cup as brothers'.[198] Another former soldier stressed not only the fact that black and white soldiers ate together but also that, in certain units, black officers were in charge of white troops,

> I have to be honest with you. In the military, if you are a white man who is a private, you will eat where the black people eat. If you are a white man who is a corporal or lieutenant, you will eat where the black lieutenants and corporals are eating. So there was no discrimination. ... In Koevoet and in Ovambo Battalion [101 Battalion], there were black lieutenants that had white troops under them. ... Like that other guy … who doesn't even know how to read, he was a commander of a whole company [in Koevoet] but under him there were white people who even knew better how to read and write than him … because of the capacity he had.[199]

[196] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 18 August, 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; see also interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.
[197] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.
[198] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 29 August 2016.
[199] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014.

Even when interviewees referred to discrimination or partiality, they argued that 'apartheid' was secondary to the training they received by their white officers.[200] One interviewee highlighted the utility of military service in SWATF,

> a bit of apartheid was there, because that's normal where people are together. But what is more important is to look at what the person is teaching and bringing to you, whether it is something that will benefit you or not.
> *What do you mean by that?*
> The things that the person is teaching you, that's what you have to analyse, whether these things are good, whether they will bring protection or calamity. If they will bring protection, then these will be the right things![201]

Some interviewees maintained that their white leaders had to respect them because they depended on their language and tracking skills and experience.[202] One man recounted that,

> the work was good. Nobody could shout at us or abuse us for many reasons. First, because we were helping them [the white soldiers] in almost everything. Second, because we were sent by the chiefs and headmen so they had to respect us.[203]

Others asserted that any sort of discrimination or racism, often referred to as 'politics', was strictly forbidden in their unit. In his autobiographical account, Sisingi Kamongo claims,

> there was no place for politics or apartheid. Those [white members] who could not adapt were sent back. To a large extent, the black members determined the fate of a new recruit. If he was racist or arrogant, he was out. The white commanders and team leaders understood this. We had to work together as a unit and there were no exceptions. The black members were the people with the experience and if they were not happy, there was a problem.[204]

A former Koevoet member recounted such an incident where he reported a white South African officer to his superior for telling them, 'you, black people, are

[200] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 09 October 2016.
[201] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 24 September 2016.
[202] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[203] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 4 October 2016.
[204] Kamongo and Bezuidenhout. *Shadows in the Sand*, 49-50.

stupid for just killing each other'. Before being sent back to Pretoria, the officer was told that there was 'no politics' and 'no black and white' in Koevoet, and they were 'one team in the bush'.[205]

Of course, neither Koevoet nor SWATF constituted a non-racial utopia. A small minority of white officers remained firmly in charge of the large majority of black soldiers, and the extent to which black troops could question their white superiors' leadership and authority was limited. Like in other colonial and settler state forces, these limits were constantly negotiated as black soldiers challenged their officers when they felt mistreated.[206] Some white team leaders whom their black troops deemed racist, incompetent or unfit were removed but others were not.

The above-mentioned Koevoet member related another confrontation with a white officer in his Koevoet team, who had just arrived from South Africa. The officer not only lacked combat experience but also had difficulties reading a map. Instead of heading south back to their base, he was leading his team northwards into Angola and a potential contact with the enemy. Increasingly concerned, he decided to speak up and tell the officer that they were going in the wrong direction. After a brief argument, the officer told him that since he apparently knew better, he should lead them back to base, which he did. My interviewee was later reprimanded by his captain who told him that he understood his concerns but 'next time, don't refuse an order'.[207]

Other interviewees confirmed such accounts. The team of another former Koevoet member, for instance, twice tried to get a white officer removed, both

[205] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[206] Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 47.
[207] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.

times unsuccessfully. According to my interviewee, the first officer engaged in borderline criminal activities and 'after we had worked with him for six months, he tried to impose his will on us'. When the troops tried to take up the issue with the head office, they were told to 'come together as a team [because] he [the white officer] will stay'. The second officer 'was a person who beats people, just beats people' but again the team's efforts to have him removed were unsuccessful because, as my interviewee speculated, 'maybe we didn't get the main office to understand us'.[208]

More open challenges or complaints to white officers were dealt with more drastically. When the members of one of Eugene de Kock's teams 'mutinied' against their white officer, he listened to their grievances before asking for the name of their leader. De Kock later ordered the leader to his office where he beat him until he required hospitalisation.[209] Unsurprisingly, such experiences led some of my interviewees to say the relationship with their white leaders was 'very difficult' and that the 'white people did not care about them'.[210]

Mission and Ideology

According to Wilson, 'a mission provides an institution with a common purpose that justifies its existence and claim on resources' but 'is rarely singular, identified with one clear task'.[211] The accounts of both former SWATF and

[208] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 10 October 2016.
[209] Interview with Eugene de Kock, Pretoria, 30 July 2016.
[210] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; see also interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[211] Wilson, 'Defining MIlitary Culture', 18.

Koevoet members about their units' mission largely resembled each other: they explained that they had fought against communism and for democracy. Former SWATF soldiers, however, also referred to the Civic Action programmes that their unit engaged in during the war. In the case of 32 Battalion, former soldiers often understood their unit's mission and purpose quite differently from one another: to return to Angola; to defeat SWAPO; or for survival?

SWATF and Koevoet

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, the official narrative of South Africa's security forces sought to frame Namibia's liberation struggle not as a conflict between 'white and black' but between 'black and black' and between communism and democracy.[212] For instance, Colonel Johan Vorster, Senior Staff Officer of SWATF, contended that,

> at this stage [in September 1985], 61% of the fighting forces in the operational area are black or brown soldiers or policemen. I think that puts pay to the lie of this being a white/black confrontation. This is actually turning into a confrontation between black and black, it is turning into an example of democracy fighting a Marxist onslaught. At this stage we are quite happy with the situation.[213]

Throughout the war, Radio Wambo, the local mouthpiece of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, would not only announce when the security forces were recruiting members but also propagate the narrative of the battle against

[212] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016. See also de Meneses and McNamara, 'Parallel Diplomacy, Parallel War', 366-89.
[213] J. Vorster, 'Essence of the Bush War: A struggle for attitudes', *Pergamus – Newspaper of the SWA Territory Force*, September 1985, 7.

'communism, atheism, terrorism'.[214] The same narrative continued to be repeated after Namibia's independence. In January 1990, for instance, the Namibian Administrator-General, Louis Pienaar, praised SWAPOL and Koevoet for their contribution 'to maintain peace and democracy in Namibia'.[215]

Almost all of my interviewees, to some extent, adopted this official narrative although they never underwent extensive political training beyond an introduction to 'anti-communist information'.[216] Like most black members of SWATF and Koevoet, one interviewee first learnt about 'politics', meaning communism and democracy, during training:

> when I joined South Africa, I didn't know about politics. I didn't know about communism and democracy. When I became a commander, that is when I now started to learn these things. When I was a soldier and had finished training, I learnt what is communism and what is politics.[217]

My interviewees explained that SWAPO was a communist party that 'wanted to take over the country with firearms', in contrast to SWATF and Koevoet that fought for democracy and freedom (see also Figure 3).[218] When asked how they understood democracy and communism, they usually replied that democracy meant 'private property', whereas under communism 'everything belongs to the government'.[219]

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[214] Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 72.
[215] 'Pienaar Thanks SWAPOL's General Gouws for his Contribution to Democracy', *The Namibian*, 29 January 1990.
[216] Interview with Willem Welgemoed, Worcester, 15 November 2016; interview with two former soldiers, Pretoria, 20 November 2016; interview with Eugene de Kock, Pretoria, 30 July 2016.
[217] Interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016. See also Kamongo and Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand,* 119.
[218] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[219] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016; and interview with Er former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 24 September 2016.

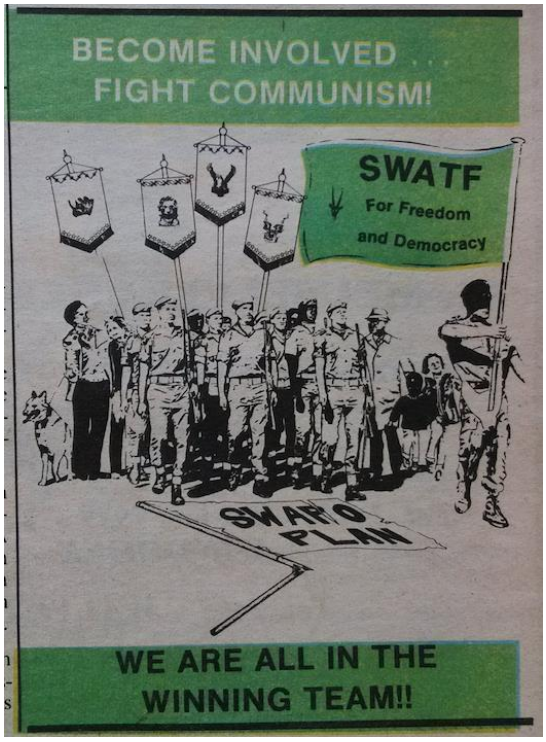


Figure 3: Propaganda picture in the SWATF newspaper, *Pergamus*. Photographed by the author in September 2014.

These accounts should not be dismissed as simple parroting of South Africa's official narrative at the time or retrospective explanations after the facts. For many members of SWATF and Koevoet, the post-independence situation in Angola represented a cautionary example of the disastrous effects communist rule could have on Namibia. Referring to the country's destruction during the post-independence civil war, one interviewee explained, 'when I entered Angola for the first time ... I learned that communism can destroy a country'.[220] Even those members critical of the official narrative acknowledged its effects. One former Koevoet member, for instance, learnt the 'political language' of South Africa during an officers training course in Koevoet. During the course, the attendees were shown a film about the 1983-85 famine in Ethiopia and told that

[220] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014.

the famine was caused 'because they [the Ethiopian people] chose a communist government'. He explained that the film had a strong impact on him, and that 'they [the South Africans] were educated people who knew what they were doing [because] politics changes someone's mind'.[221]

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the political geography during the war determined the effectiveness of South Africa's official narrative. Particularly in regions where SWAPO was struggling to gain support, the security forces' concerted efforts to portray the war as a conflict as a 'civil war' fell on fertile ground. In Kaokoland, for instance, SWATF's 102 Battalion depicted SWAPO as 'terrorists' and promoted political slogans such as 'Kaoko – No go for SWAPO', 'SWAPO has to kidnap men to fight for them because no one supports SWAPO', and 'SF [security forces] gives, SWAPO takes'.[222] This rhetoric of the security forces as the protectors and SWAPO as the enemy significantly shaped the understanding of the black members of SWATF and Koevoet. They portrayed their role as 'protecting the country and the people' against SWAPO, 'a terrorist group that was sending terrorists to kill people'.[223] One interviewee related his experience with SWATF in stark contrast to that with SWAPO:

> at first, I was apprehensive because I was young and I thought these people [SWATF] were really colonisers. But they never killed or beat anyone when they came here. … They were fighting those who were enemies in the war. They did not go to the houses of people and kill any civilian. That is when I realised that this people's aim was to protect and not to kill. Those [SWAPO] who claimed to be our own brothers were killing their own mothers and fathers, while those they were saying are colonising us are not killing us.[224]

[221] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016. For SADF propaganda and ideological training primarily aimed at white SADF conscripts, see Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 42-5.
[222] SWATF Situation Reports available at SANDF Archives, Pretoria, KO Bn, Box 100, B-SAKE, 328-3-3-1-4-4, 102 BN.
[223] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 24 September 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.
[224] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 23 August 2016.

When asked about the military's mission, some former members of SWATF referred to the Civic Action programmes, such as the building of roads, servicing water pumps, providing veterinary services and medical aid, and handing out food and tobacco.[225] They argued that these programmes improved the quality of lives of the civilian population they were defending. One interviewee claimed that the relationship between SWATF and the civilian population was 'one hundred per cent' because soldiers 'were teaching in schools, teaching people, sending people to trainings in South Africa, … [and] supporting them living in agriculture'.[226] Another interviewee agreed and recounted that,

> the military used to have a special day, like on Wednesday. That day, they were going out to treat either [primary] school children or secondary school children. Everyone was called to see that treatment is free. … The same treatment that was given to the soldier was given to the civilians.[227]

The relationship between the civilian population and the military was certainly not 'one hundred per cent' as the military's combat efforts frequently undermined its programmes to win the hearts and minds of people.[228] Nonetheless, Civic Action programmes and various social services they provided did have an important, positive impact on the lives of some civilians.[229] Since then, they have played a key part in former SWATF members' narrative of having protected and supported the civilian population during the war.

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[225] SWATF Situation Reports available at SANDF Archives, Pretoria, KO Bn, Box 100, B-SAKE, 328-3-3-1-4-4, 102 BN; interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014; interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014; L. Scholtz, 'The Namibian Border War: An Appraisal of the South African Strategy', *Scientia Militaria,* 34, 1 (2006), 41.
[226] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 29 July 2014.
[227] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 1 October 2014.
[228] Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, 205; Scholtz, 'The Namibian Border War', 41.
[229] K.W. Grundy, *The Rise of the South African Security Establishment: An Essay on the Changing Locus of State Power* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1983), 19; Nampala, 'Okongo', 213-4.

32 Battalion

The accounts of certain former 32 Battalion members also echoed the South African regime's anti-communist narrative. They explained that their unit had fought 'against the Cubans and Russians, against communism in South Africa and for their own country', 'against communism in Angola and for democracy in South Africa', and 'for Angola and against communism'.[230] In other words, they explained that they were engaged in an inter- and transnational war against communism. These statements also reflect the peculiar position that the first recruits of 32 Battalion, particularly the ex-FNLA troops, found themselves in. Were they primarily engaged in a war to liberate Angola from the Cuban and Soviet-backed MPLA or to protect South Africa against communism or both? For Breytenbach, their situation was unambiguous:

> We were by then fighting South Africa's war, not a war of liberation to bring 'freedom' back to a Marxist dominated Angola. And we were certainly not fighting at the behest and on the behalf of a distant and very absent FNLA hierarchy.[231]

As discussed in Chapter 4, many of the men recruited by Breytenbach, at least initially, understood their mission differently. They did not feel that they were fighting for South Africa but to return home, and had placed their hopes in the hands of the SADF.[232] As in the case of the first recruits of Alpha Group/31 Battalion, they saw their stay in the military as temporary and wanted to return

[230] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016; and interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[231] Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword,* 75.
[232] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 4 July 2016.

to Angola as soon as circumstances permitted.[233] João Mucaba explained, 'they told us that they were going to help us to go back to our country. And we believed that they were really going to help us to return to our country'.[234] According to another former soldier:

> We were fighting against Russians and Cubans … because they are communists. We were trained [by the SADF] to stop communism … We were doing that so we could go back to our country by chasing away the MPLA from government. The South Africans were helping us and we were helping [them] so that we could go back to Angola.[235]

Another interviewee claimed that Breytenbach himself had told them that 'we decided you are not going back to Angola, you are staying here [in Namibia]. When the civil war is over, FNLA will be going back'.[236] According to Tshisukila Tukayula De Abreu:

> We were not patriotic to South Africa when we were in 32-Battalion. In the beginning we didn't say we were fighting for South Africa, we just said we were fighting against the communists, so we both had the same enemy, a common enemy. To me these communists were going to destroy the continent. They had already destroyed my country.[237]

Certain FNLA veterans, some of whom had joined the movement as early as 1961, retained a sense of loyalty to the organisation and its leadership.[238] As one interviewee recounted, he and others hoped to return to Angola because their leaders had told them that 'one day when Holden Roberto is president, we will go back to Angola'.[239] Others felt their former leaders had abandoned them.[240] In

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[233] Gordon and Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth*, 185.
[234] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[235] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[236] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[237] Quoted in Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, 71.
[238] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 8 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016. See also C. Claassen, *The Fathers of the Revolution': History, Memory and the FNLA Veterans of Pomfret* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 2016), 118-136.
[239] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.

either case, over the years, they resigned to the fact that they and their families were to stay in Namibia to fight for the SADF. In the words of De Abreu:

> When I joined 32-Battalion I expected to attack the enemy and finish then go back to FNLA and back to Angola. But things never changed. The fighting never stopped so we had no reason to go back to Angola. We just stayed in 32-Battalion.[241]

With the change in leadership and mission, the principal enemy was no longer MPLA (nor UNITA) but SWAPO. Mucaba recounted that Breytenbach 'assembled us and said, "you withdrew from your country, but we go to help you to return there soon. But right now, you have to help us to fight against SWAPO"'.[242] They were told that 'SWAPO is the enemy of South Africa. SWAPO is also in Angola working together with MPLA'.[243]

For some ex-FNLA troops who knew about SWAPO, South Africa's fight against the Namibian liberation movement was strategically connected to FNLA's fight against the MPLA and its allies:

> when we withdrew from Angola, we had to fight against the Cubans and the MPLA. At that time the South Africans had their own enemy that was SWAPO. SWAPO was also inside Angola. The South Africans were following their enemy [SWAPO]. And because SWAPO was working together with MPLA, it was also our enemy. It was MPLA, SWAPO and the Cubans. SWAPO was also making trouble in Namibia. The South Africans wanted to know where was their enemy because MPLA was protecting it [SWAPO].[244]

In other words, SWAPO was the enemy of South Africa and an ally of the MPLA, and therefore the enemy of 32 Battalion.[245] Other members, however, had had no previous knowledge of SWAPO and its struggle for Namibia's independence, and

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[240] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 3 June 2016.
[241] Quoted in Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, 70.
[242] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[243] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[244] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[245] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 4 July 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 9 August 2016.

only learned about the movement in the SADF.[246] This was true for soldiers of later generations as well. One interviewee a former UNITA member who joined the battalion in 1982, related having to swear to serve to keep SWAPO out of Namibia:

> I said I wanted to serve the country and the [South African] government. That was a complete lie because my country was Angola. … At the time, I did not know that SWAPO was fighting for its country. … I only realised that when Nujoma took power [in 1989]. … We were only interested in money and did not know what SWAPO was fighting for. SWAPO was only the enemy.[247]

Many others agreed with him. They asserted that, over time, the unit fought only 'for food' and 'for a living'.[248] According to one man, '32 Battalion only fought for survival'.[249] The following message of Colonel Viljoen to his troops in 1984, eight years after the unit's establishment, further reflects the lack of clarity in the unit's mission. Referring to a recent bomb attack on a petrol station by PLAN guerrillas, Viljoen stated that,

> this incident is yet another proof that despite current talks, you must be prepared to face and contend with such incidents and be ready for any eventuality or task you may be called upon to preform [*sic*]. You must, above all, follow your commanders' instructions, be disciplined and vigilant and fit to fight when and if so required. We fight for a good cause and I am proud of you all.[250]

Viljoen referred to his men's obedience and discipline, two integral features of 32 Battalion's military culture, but the 'good cause' the unit was fighting for remained unspecified. At the unit's ten-year anniversary in 1986, none of the

[246] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 4 August 2016; interview with P former soldier, Mafikeng, 8 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 8 August 2016.
[247] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[248] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016.
[249] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 12 July 2016
[250] E. Viljoen, 'Mensagem do Col Viljoen', *Avante 32 BN* (April 1984), 1-2, available at SANDF Archives, Pretoria, 32 BN GP 2A, Box 132, Inligting, 32 BN Sielkundige Aksie.

SADF leadership's messages made any mention of the unit's mission either. General Geldenhuys instead praised the unit's 'readiness for battle, professionalism, and ability in combat', and wrote: '32 Battalion is a way of life; a mystery, an enigma, a mode of survival for those who are in the battalion [my translation from Portuguese]'.[251]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have challenged the portrayal of black former soldiers in apartheid South Africa's security forces as one homogenous group by exploring the differences and divisions within and between the military cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF's 101 Battalion. The accounts of black former soldiers make it clear that these units were far from united, certainly not by a supposed national identity, and further challenge their popular depiction as self-interested collaborators. Their accounts also demonstrate that the military cultures of the units they fought in differed, often substantially, with regard to how black troops were trained and disciplined, how they experienced the relationship with their white officers, and how they described the war and their unit's mission in it.

The reasons for these differences, as I have argued, are to be found in the units' geographical and institutional origins, and the trans- and un-national dynamics of the wars they fought in. The particularly distinct and often violent

[251] Quoted in 'O Batalhão 32 – A Festa de Aniversário', *Pergamus – Newspaper of the SWA Territory Force*, April 1986.

treatment of black troops in 32 Battalion, for instance, was shaped by the unit's origins with the FNLA in Angola. In the cases of both Koevoet and 32 Battalion, their founding commanders enjoyed little oversight, and purposefully formed their troops into unconventional units distinct from the rest of the security forces. Due to SWATF's origins in the SADF, 101 Battalion remained a more conventional combat unit, certainly with regard to training and enforcement of discipline.

The military cultures of these units, however, were not static. In the early 1980s, elements of 101 Battalion began to adopt Koevoet's organisation and tactics, which led to a rivalry between the two units, where they competed against each other for 'kills', and regularly engaged in notorious off-duty fights. At around the same time, 32 Battalion began to transform from an irregular force that sought to 'out-guerrilla the guerrillas' to a more conventional SADF unit with more conventional methods of training and disciplining. As a result, relations between the white leadership and black troops also improved. However, due to its Angolan origins, the unit and its military culture remained distinct from the rest of the SADF, notably in terms of black troops' education and language (see Chapter 7).

Neither were the military cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF internally unified. While the units were racially integrated in stark contrast to apartheid South Africa, they ultimately remained divided, primarily along racial lines that corresponded to hierarchical lines of authority and control. Nonetheless, the units' military cultures have since endured as a crucial part of the post-war trajectories of black former soldiers, which I will discuss in the next two chapters.

Chapter 6 – The Post-War Politics of Black Former SWATF and Koevoet Members in Namibia

The post-war trajectories of local allies of settler and colonial armies have varied significantly across contexts, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 4. The *harkis* in Algeria were brutally defeated, whereas certain Kenyan loyalists found themselves victorious and in control of the state.[1] Their counterparts in southern Africa, in turn, have seemingly disappeared – with the remarkable exception of former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia. Since independence in 1990, different groups of these former soldiers have repeatedly and publically demonstrated for recognition and compensation by the government led by their former enemy, SWAPO. In order to justify their inclusion in post-war reintegration and veteran policies, they have sought to challenge the ruling party's conceptions of history, citizenship, and belonging in the nation.

While previous research on ex-combatants in Namibia has touched on the post-war marginalisation of former SWATF and Koevoet members, it has not adequately addressed the puzzle of why and how different associations of former soldiers have been able to politically mobilise and make claims on the government, in certain instances, with some success. To the limited extent possible – given how little is known about black former soldiers in the colonial and security forces in southern Africa – I adopt a comparative angle in exploring this puzzle.[2] I argue that two main factors explain the particular position of

[1] Anderson and Branch, 'Allies at the End of Empire', 3.
[2] My comparative focus is mainly on southern Africa, in particular Zimbabwe and Mozambique. For the unique post-independence trajectory of Kikuyu loyalists in Kenya, see, for example, Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*; and D.M. Anderson, 'Making the Loyalist Bargain: Surrender,

former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia: the ruling party's approach toward the former soldiers, characterised by both disregard and reconciliation; and, more importantly, significant support for the former soldiers' grievances, particularly by various opposition parties and civil society organisations of SWAPO dissidents and ex-detainees.

For struggling opposition parties, the former soldiers have represented an important potential constituency, and their post-war marginalisation has become 'a vehicle for the articulation of ethnic politics', similar to the ex-detainee issue.[3] Organisations of SWAPO dissidents and ex-detainees, in turn, have formed relationships with associations of former SWATF and Koevoet members due to their similar history of stigmatisation as 'traitors' and exclusion from government reintegration benefits.[4] The two most important organisations are NamRights and the Forum for the Future (FFF), which have attempted to make the stories of former detainees more accessible and accepted both in Namibia and abroad.[5] In the words of Jessica Schafer writing on ex-combatants in Mozambique, the former soldiers have thus articulated their post-war demands not in isolation but 'in interaction with other actors in the political scene'.[6] In addition, they have taken advantage of Namibia's relatively open and independent media environment in order to make themselves heard.[7]

Amnesty and Impunity in Kenya's Decolonization, 1952-63', *The International History Review*, 39, 1 (2017), 48-70.

[3] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 162, 167.

[4] McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 126-7.

[5] NamRights was formerly known as National Society for Human Rights (NSHR).

[6] Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: The Post-War Politics of Demobilised Soldiers in Mozambique*, 7.

[7] G. Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, 1 (2001), 49-51; H. Melber, *Understanding Namibia: The Trials of Independence* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014), 43. See also Pearce, 'Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics', 117.

My interviewees' often bitter accounts of their post-war lives were clearly shaped by the political and economic context at the time. Virtually all of the former soldiers I interviewed either were never reintegrated or had later resigned from the army or the police, and, at the time of our interview, often had been unemployed or without formal employment for several years. In the case of interviewees originally from former Kaokoland, their economic livelihood was made even worse by the fact that many of them had lost most, if not all, of their cattle and goats due to several years of severe drought in the region from 2014-2017. Out of desperation, they had moved to a camp at the Commando Hall in Katutura, Windhoek, set up by NAMVET, in late 2015. Since then, they have publically protested for government recognition under the 2008 Veterans Act, which excluded former SWATF and Koevoet members.[8]

In the following sections, I first briefly discuss the immediate post-war reintegration experience of these soldiers, and SWAPO's approach toward them since. I then trace the history of political engagement of different associations of former soldiers, and the context in which it took place until the end of 2014. In addition, I highlight different aspects in which the southern African context, particularly Zimbabwe and South Africa, shaped SWAPO's discourse. In order to legitimate their arguments for government recognition and compensation since independence, former SWATF and Koevoet members have consistently referred to SWAPO's liberation narrative, the policy of national reconciliation, and regional and ethnic discrimination. It is necessary to provide a brief overview of

[8] See, for example, E. Ndeyanala, 'Shanghala tells Camping ex-SWATF Members to Leave', *Confidenté*, 21 April 2016; 'Destitute ex-SWATF, Koevoet Live in Riverbed', *New Era*, 15 September 2016; 'Inside the Camp Where Over 1000 Ex-SWATF, ex-Koevoet Soldiers Live in Abject Poverty', *New Era*, 16 September 2016; 'Homeless ex-SWATF, Koevoet Soldiers Appeal for Shelter', *New Era*, 3 November 2016.

these contextual factors in order to situate the rhetoric of these former soldiers and to properly understand their claims.

Three Contextual Factors: Liberation, Reconciliation, and Discrimination

SWAPO's Liberation Narrative

Since independence, SWAPO, like many other liberation movements-turned-ruling party, has sought to ground its own political legitimacy and authority in the liberation struggle.[9] Like the ANC in South Africa, the party has done so through relatively free and fair electoral competition and with significant success: it has dominated every local, regional, and national election, and has maintained a two-thirds majority in parliament since 1994.[10] As a result, it has been able to establish a de facto one-party system, blurring the boundaries between party, government, and state.[11] Despite numerous criticisms that SWAPO has used state power to consolidate its position, the ruling party's power has remained 'founded upon the broad consent of the majority of Namibian

[9] See, for example, N. Kriger, 'The Politics of Creating National Heroes: The Search for Political Legitimacy and National Identity', in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (eds.), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (London: James Currey, 1995), 139-62; J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 254; Pearce, 'Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics', 103-7.

[10] Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence', 42; E. Zuern, 'Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50, 3 (2012), 496. See also S. Dorman, 'Post-Liberation Politics in Africa: Examining the Political Legacy of Struggle', *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 6 (2006), 1092.

[11] Melber, '"Namibia, Land of the Brave"', 323; Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 100-2; Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 194.

voters'.[12] As Reinhart Kössler writes, 'the political hegemony of [the ruling party] has not been seriously contested' by opposition parties or other organisations.[13]

SWAPO's continued popular support since 1990, as Ian Cooper argues, can be 'attributed to [the mobilising capacity of] its liberation narrative'.[14] This narrative contrasts SWAPO's patriotism with the treason and collaboration of its Namibian opponents and other parties.[15] In other words, it is not primarily concerned with the struggle against colonial occupation but instead the internal division within Namibian society 'between those who led the fight and won and those who compromised and should therefore be denounced as unpatriotic and as sell-outs' – that is, former SWATF and Koevoet members.[16] The supposedly unifying narrative of national liberation, as Metsola points out, thus 'becomes a way of drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion, separating those who really belong to ['the nation'] from those who [do not]'.[17]

However, SWAPO's liberation narrative has not gone unchallenged. As Kössler notes, 'the most important and telling [challenges] have arguably come from ex-detainees and from war veterans', including former SWATF and Koevoet members.[18] Both groups have found themselves on the 'wrong side' in SWAPO's official narrative. Their stories have been largely excluded from official history or stigmatised as the words of 'traitors' and 'collaborators'.[19] Since 1990, the

[12] Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, 102.
[13] R. Kössler, 'Images of History and the Nation: Namibia and Zimbabwe Compared', *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 1 (2010), 32. See also Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence', 42-3.
[14] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 139.
[15] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 139; R. Kössler, 'Facing a Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 2 (2007), 362.
[16] Saunders, 'History and the Armed Struggle', 14.
[17] Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 137.
[18] Kössler, 'Images of History and the Nation', 32. See also Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 237-8.
[19] Williams, *National Liberation*, 152.

liberation narrative has become crucial in determining access to government and veteran benefits, and thus the wartime identities of former soldiers and ex-detainees have remained not only an enduring stigma but also an important political resource.[20] Due to their similar post-war experiences, some associations of former soldiers have found common ground and established relationships with organisations of ex-detainees and SWAPO dissidents, namely NamRights and FFF. With the aim of challenging SWAPO's official narrative and its political legitimacy, former soldiers and ex-detainees have drawn on the policy of national reconciliation as a 'legitimating discourse'.[21]

National Reconciliation

In March 1989, the SWAPO Central Committee issued a press release declaring its resolution 'to adopt a policy of national reconciliation'. According to the release, the Committee had decided that the policy was necessary 'to enhance the chances of peace in Namibia' and 'to heal the wounds of war'.[22] In practice, the policy of national reconciliation translated into a political compromise between the old and new emerging elites, whose primary objective was to ensure Namibia's political and economic stability. Whereas the old elites comprised white settlers as well as black politicians, civil servants, and professionals such as teachers and nurses, the new elites comprised black senior administrators,

[20] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 608. See also Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 176.
[21] Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War*, 4-5.
[22] SWAPO, 'SWAPO Press Release on the Resolution of the Central Committee of SWAPO Luanda, May 23, 1989'; Williams, *National Liberation*, 185.

politicians, and business people.[23] The old/new elites also included black former high-ranking SWATF officers, such as Alois Gende of former 202 Battalion and Karel Ndjoba of former 101 Battalion.

At the same time, no official 'truth-seeking initiatives' to promote reconciliation, such as to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, were implemented.[24] A general amnesty for SWAPO's internal and external wing was adopted in June 1989 before being amended in February 1990 to extend to South Africa's security forces.[25] Neither SWAPO nor South Africa, as Saunders writes, 'wanted the past history of human rights violations investigated'.[26] SWAPO leaders instead repeatedly called on Namibians to move on from the past – to 'forgive and forget' – for the sake of national unity.[27] The party's leadership particularly feared political damage to the party caused by a formal investigation into the ex-detainee issue.[28] Since then, many SWAPO officials have deemed any criticism of the policy of national reconciliation or any other attempts at reconciliation as unpatriotic and even dangerous attacks on the Namibian nation.[29] According to them, any discussion of past injustices – 'the

[23] C. Tapscott, 'National Reconciliation, Social Equity and Class Formation in Independent Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (1993), 30-1; H. Melber, 'Poverty, Politics, Power and Privilege: Namibia's Black Economic Elite Formation', in Melber (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia*, 120-1; J. Hunter, 'No Man's Land of Time: Reflections on the Politics of Memory and Forgetting in Namibia', in Baines and Vale (eds.), *Beyond the Border War*, 308-9.
[24] Hunter, 'No Man's Land of Time', 302; G. Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation': The Long Struggle for Transitional Justice in Namibia* (Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg University, 2013), 11.
[25] Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia*, 130.
[26] C. Saunders, 'From Apartheid to Democracy in Namibia and South Africa: Some Comparison', in H. Melber and C. Saunders, *Transition in Southern Africa – Comparative Aspects: Two Lectures* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2001), 13.
[27] Lindeke et al., 'Namibia's Election Revisited', 135; C. Lombard, 'The Detainee Issue: An Unresolved Test Case for SWAPO, the Churches and Civil Society', in I. Diener and O. Graefe (eds.), *Contemporary Namibia: The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2001), 183.
[28] Dobell, 'Silence in Context', 373; Saul and Leys, 'Lubango and After', 334; Hunter, 'No Man's Land of Time', 308.
[29] Dobell, 'Silence in Context', 373; Melber, '"Namibia, Land of the Brave"', 324.

opening of old wounds' – would lead to 'witch-hunting and retribution' and thus threaten 'the peace and stability of Namibia'.[30]

As a result, both civil society actors and academics have described SWAPO's approach critically as 'reconciliation by silence'.[31] However, recent literature has begun to question whether this metaphor is appropriate.[32] Christian Williams, for instance, argues that 'to use this language … overlooks the fact that Namibian citizens are speaking with one another about the past prodigiously and establishing social relationships through reference to it'. He further argues that reducing the histories of marginalised individuals to 'silence' robs them of 'the agency that they assert through narrating their experiences to others'.[33]

The stories of former SWATF and Koevoet members (as well as those of ex-detainees) have not been silenced. To the contrary, since independence, groups of former soldiers have publicly articulated their stories and experiences that run contrary to the dominant official history. In making their claims on the government, they have sought to challenge SWAPO on its own terms by invoking the language of national reconciliation, and accusing the ruling party of regional and ethnic discrimination in violation of its own policy.

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[30] M. Parlevliet, 'Truth Commissions in Africa: the Non-case of Namibia and the Emerging Case of Sierra Leone', *International Law Forum du droit international,* 2 (2000), 104. See also Zuern, 'Memorial Politics', 499; Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 40-1. For the use of the language of 'old wounds should not be reopened' to silence post-war debates, see Alexander et al., *Violence and Memory*, 257-8.

[31] A. du Pisani, R. Kössler, and W.A. Lindeke, 'Introduction', in du Pisani et al. (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War*, xi; Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 12; Groth, *Namibia*. Melber refers to a 'culture of silence' as a constitutive part of Namibian politics: Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 42.

[32] Williams, *Exile History*, 218-67; Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 19-21; Williams, *National Liberation*, 185-214. See also, Becker, 'Against Trauma'.

[33] Williams, *National Liberation*, 212.

Claims About Regional and Ethnic Discrimination

A third central aspect to the claims of many former SWATF and Koevoet members has been the accusation that SWAPO, contrary to its rhetoric of national unity and reconciliation, is a 'tribalist' party that primarily represents the interests of Namibia's Oshiwambo-speaking majority, which has historically constituted the party's main support base.[34] This fear and resentment of perceived Ovambo domination is shared by broader segments of Namibia's minority groups, and has remained a divisive legacy of the struggle era. As we have seen, the South African regime and military strategically exploited perceptions that SWAPO was an 'Ovambo' organisation, and allegations that SWAPO cadres from ethnic and linguistic minorities constituted the majority of detainees.[35]

Since independence, as Heike Becker writes, many non-Oshiwambo-speaking Namibians have felt alienated by the ruling party's official history and its 'hegemonic politics … which they equate with an ethnic Owambo domination'.[36] In their study on ex-combatants, Colletta et al. argue that 'ethnic divisions' were 'behind the general unwillingness of Herero ex-combatants and community leaders in Gobabis area to be interviewed about a war "won" by Ovambos'.[37]

Among my non-Oshiwambo-speaking interviewees, particularly those from former Kaokoland, many accused SWAPO of a new form of 'apartheid' of

[34] Compare to J. Pearce, 'Changing Nationalisms: From War to Peace in Angola', in E. Morier-Genoud (ed.), *Sure Road? Nationalisms in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 200, 213.
[35] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 116; Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 71-80; Williams, *National Liberation*, 123-48.
[36] Becker, 'Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana', 530; H. Becker and P. Bruhns, *Sa Xu-I Ge A Sa. What Is Yours Is Yours: Popular Perceptions of Political Institutions in Namibia* (Windhoek: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1998), 12-3.
[37] Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 191 n58.

Ovambos, represented by the ruling party, against other groups.[38] One interviewee, for instance, claimed that ex-SWATF and Koevoet were being discriminated against 'because of tribalism and apartheid'.[39] As John Friedman finds, many people in Kaokoland use the concept of apartheid not in reference to South Africa's colonial regime 'but to the present independent and supposedly democratic dispensation', including perceived political and ethnic discrimination.[40] Referring to this new form of apartheid, some interviewees recounted a specific story that is shared among broader segments of the Herero ethnic group. The story goes that Hosea Kutako had given his personal walking stick to Sam Nujoma as a symbol of inter-ethnic support before the latter went into exile.[41] As one man explained:

> The Hereros [led by Kutako] sent the Ovambos [i.e. SWAPO] outside the country but when [SWAPO] came back they [became] the boss? How is that possible? [Nujoma] left with the stick of the Hereros and he still has it. …
> *Why didn't Kutako also send Hereros?*
> [Interpreter answering:] He did that so people can be together. So that people can be one nation. When Nujoma came back he cut the Herero out, which is apartheid.[42]

According to another interviewee, Kutako and the Hereros had given political and financial support to Nujoma who, after returning from exile, betrayed them by not returning Kutako's walking stick and creating a new form of apartheid.[43]

People close to SWAPO have also voiced criticism of regional and ethnic discrimination. In a letter to the editor of the *Namibian Sun*, a former SWAPO

[38] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016. See also N. Kahiurika, 'SWAPO is an Apartheid Govt – Ya Nangoloh', 14 June 2016; 'Why Only Now? Koevoets Ask Govt', *The Patriot*, 10 March 2017.
[39] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016.
[40] Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 77, 76-81.
[41] See also E. Muzeu, 'Over 340 NUDO members cross over to SWAPO', *Swapo Party*, undated, available at http://www.swapoparty.org/over340nudomemberscrossovertoswapo.html, retrieved 28 May 2018.
[42] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.
[43] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 25 August 2016.

activist, Lukas Jars, accused the government of neglecting SWAPO supporters from southern Namibia in awarding war veteran benefits:

> We [who were fighting from inside the country] were here directly in constant contact with the enemy … whilst some of our comrades, especially the leadership were enjoying a luxury life … outside the country.[44]

In short, these more widespread allegations of regional and ethnic discrimination, which undermine the ruling party's narrative and its claims to represent all Namibians, have created space for the demands of former SWATF and Koevoet members to be voiced.[45]

Before moving on to the next section, I want to provide some further evidence that the claims and arguments of former soldiers have enjoyed considerable support not only by opposition parties and civil society organisations but broader segments of the Namibian population, and even SWAPO members and officials.[46] For instance, a representative survey conducted by Afrobarometer in 2017 found that, in stark contrast to SWAPO's official stance, 43 per cent of respondents (strongly) agreed with the statement that former SWATF and Koevoet members should receive veterans' benefits while 37 per cent (strongly) disagreed.[47]

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[44] J. Beukes, 'War vet status "deceitful"', *Namibian Sun*, 22 February 2018. For a response by the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, see E. Haufiku, 'Office of the Vice President: Veterans Affairs', *New Era*, 13 March 2018.

[45] Compare to J. Pearce, 'History, Legitimacy and Renamo's Return to Arms in Central Mozambique', paper presented at the European Conference on African Studies, Basel, 30 June 2017.

[46] See also McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 105.

[47] Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'Namibians who fought for South African-backed security forces before independence, like SWATF and Koevoet, should receive benefits?'. 13 per cent of respondents said they did not know or had not heard enough to say, and 7 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed: Afrobarometer, 'Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 7: Survey in Namibia, 2017' (2018), 53, available at http://afrobarometer.org/publications/namibia-summary-results-2017, retrieved 30 June 2018.

In early 2016, the *New Era*, a state-owned daily newspaper, asked people in northern Namibia whether former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers should be recognised and compensated as war veterans. While most did not agree, several people did, with one person saying that the former soldiers 'should get the money for the sake of harmony and democracy. They can get less than what other recognized veterans [ex-PLAN fighters] are getting but they should get something'. Another person argued that,

> We have national reconciliation in this country. [In 1990], the South African government handed over money to the Namibian government that was meant for SWATF/Koevoet. Everyone knows that the money was not given to the recipients but … was used for the country – maybe it's not a big deal, but they should be just treated equally. They too have fought.[48]

Friedman quotes one of his research participants, an Oshiwambo-speaking SWAPO supporter born in former Kaokoland, who explained to him: 'Our friends who were fighting the SWAPO guerrillas were heroes. … They are heroes because they took part in the struggle. The heroes are the Namibians who died in the struggle, regardless of what side they were fighting on'.[49]

Even high-ranking SWAPO officials have acknowledged and criticised the discrimination against former SWATF and Koevoet members. The then Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Kazenambo Kazenambo, for example, has argued for 'balancing the promotions' of ex-combatants in the Namibian army in the spirit of national reconciliation. In a speech in parliament, Kazenambo not only insinuated the existence of ethnic discrimination within the

[48] 'Should former Koevoet/SWATF be recognized as war veterans', *New Era*, 3 February 2016. See also, for example, 'Rukoro Supports War Vet Status for Ex-Koevoets', *New Era*, 12 February 2016; J. Shipanga, 'Don't Ignore Apartheid Soldiers', *The Namibian*, 30 September 2016.
[49] Friedman, *Imagining the Post-Apartheid State*, 196.

army but challenged his own party's portrayal of former SWATF and Koevoet members as not genuinely Namibian:

> As [NDF members] are retiring and new ones will be moving up in the ranks, let the top ranks also reflect the demographic set-up of this country from a tribal point of view. … Let our Army and all other institutions, for that matter, reflect the tribal, racial and gender set-up of this country. … [There] are Namibians who were recruited to Koevoet and SWATF under conscription. They were forced to become Koevoet and SWATF and these people are serving in the Army. … [A]s much as we have National reconciliation in politics and where former Koevoet and SWATF members are in the ranks of SWAPO, let us for the sake of reconciliation balance the promotions. These people belong here, they are Namibians.[50]

In short, it is necessary to qualify the extent to which former SWATF and Koevoet members have been socially and politically marginalised since independence.

Military Reintegration and SWAPO's Approach Towards Its Former Enemies, 1990-95

Before I discuss SWAPO's approach to former SWATF and Koevoet members, I will provide a brief overview of the latter's reintegration experience in the early post-independence period for context. This topic has been well documented by other scholars and I will therefore only briefly discuss it here.

Officially, the creation of the new Namibian Defence Force (NDF) (as well as the police) was to be 'integrative' with ex-combatants being recruited in equal numbers from PLAN and SWATF, a measure that SWAPO and the DTA had

[50] Parliament of Namibia, 'National Assembly Hansards – Volume 126', 261.

agreed on at independence.[51] By late 1990, however, it became apparent that the Ministry of Defence and SWAPO, seeking to create a military loyal to it, favoured ex-PLAN fighters at the expense of former SWATF soldiers. As SWAPO nominated officers, former PLAN cadres came to dominate the NDF's ranks.[52]

By 1993, the only NDF commander from SWATF was the director at the military school in Okahandja.[53] In total, there were only 700 former SWATF soldiers in the NDF, and no former Koevoet members had been recruited.[54] Thus, former SWATF members came to constitute less than ten per cent of the NDF.[55] Rosemary Preston asserts that by 1993 'nearly all NDF members were united in their support of SWAPO and their experience with PLAN'.[56] This bias foreshadowed subsequent measures, such as the Development Brigade Corporation, which also primarily benefitted ex-PLAN fighters and thus continued to entrench the economic marginalisation of former SWATF and Koevoet members.[57]

In 1993, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Defence, Paul Kanyemba, denied reports that there was a 'witch hunt' against former SWATF members. He

[51] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 459; L. Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum: A Description and Assessment of the Formation of the Namibian Defense Force and Police', *Southern African Perspectives*, No. 4 (Cape Town: Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western Cape, 1990), 8; interview with Alois Gende, Rundu, 18 October 2016. See also A. du Pisani, *Rumours of Rain: Namibia's Post-independence Experience* (Johannesburg: South Africa Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 172.
As we will see in Chapter 7, this reintegration process differed greatly from neighbouring South Africa four years later where the SADF, due to its dominant position during the military negotiations, essentially 'absorbed' most non-SADF ex-combatants into its structures: R.M. Williams, 'Integration or Absorption?, The Creation of the SA National Defence Force, 1993 to 1999', *African Security Review*, 11, 2, (2002), 20; L. Mashike and M. Mokalobe, 'Reintegration into Civilian Life: The Case of Former MK and APLA Combatants', *Track Two*, 12, 1 and 2 (2003), 12.
[52] Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum', 9; Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 459-60; Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 132.
[53] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 460.
[54] McMullin. *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 84.
[55] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 459-6'; Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 149; interview with Alois Gende, Rundu, 18 October 2016.
[56] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 460.
[57] See Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 155-67; Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 464-67; McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State,* 112-4.

explained that 37 seven officials at the Ministry of Defence were to be dismissed and deported from Namibia unless they could provide documentation proving they were not 'illegal aliens'. Kanyemba further alleged that it was 'well known that most of [former SWATF members] are non-Namibians who came here on different missions prior to the independence of the country'.[58] SWAPO officials have made similar claims about the recruitment of non-Namibians into SWATF and Koevoet in order to portray their former members as not genuinely Namibian and delegitimise their claims. According to Namoloh, for instance, 'these people are mostly Angolans that's why they were committing this horrendous crimes [*sic*] because they were not emotionally attached to the people here'.[59] As I will discuss in the next chapter, SWAPO officials repeated these claims in an attempt to prevent the return of former Koevoet members from South Africa in 1994.

In our interview, the former Chief of the NDF, Martin Shalli, said that discrimination against former SWATF members in the NDF was neither 'systemic' nor 'official NDF policy' but happened on an individual basis. Instead, he asserted, many former soldiers resigned because they felt intimidated by the 'sheer numbers' of ex-PLAN fighters in the army.[60] Former SWATF members, in contrast, have argued that they resigned from the NDF as a result of discrimination by ex-PLAN fighters, often their commanders. My interviewees most frequently spoke of having been harassed and bullied by former guerrillas, or having been repeatedly being passed over for promotion by less qualified ex-

[58] C. Maletsky, '37 Defence Officials to be kicked out', *The Namibian*, 30 March 1993.
[59] 'Namoloh Tells Former Koevoet Where to Get Off', *New Era*, 6 November 2014.
[60] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 8 November 2016.

PLAN fighters.[61] One former soldier, for example, asserted that his commanders had repeatedly transferred him to different posts across Namibia in a deliberate effort to get him to resign, which he did in 2009.[62] Another interviewee, in turn, recounted:

> I joined the army in 1990 but since [then] I only had one rank as a corporal. … My juniors, who I had taught, are now lieutenant colonels and majors. … So how can I feel [about] the people, who I have been teaching and have now become my commanders? I resigned in 2012 because I saw [that] I was just wasting my time; it was better to go home and suffer. It was not my intention [to resign] but [in] the way they treat us they [ex-PLAN fighters] are discouraging us to be in the army. They don't want us to be there.[63]

According to Preston, 'there was visible ethnic tension [in the NDF from the beginning] as the non-Owambo minority began to feel that their opportunities were being circumscribed'.[64] As Metsola notes, since ex-PLAN fighters were predominantly Oshiwambo-speakers from northern Namibia, SWATF members from other regions and ethnic groups came to see their discrimination as not just politically motivated but also ethnically based.[65]

In one of the first protests in April 1990, a group of former SWATF soldiers met with Herero Chief Kuaima Riruako of the DTA to complain about the preferential treatment of PLAN soldiers in the intake for the NDF. They asked Riruako to approach the authorities on their behalf, alleging that they had been chased away at gunpoint from the Luiperdsvalley military base while ex-PLAN

[61] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016; interview with Alois Gende, Rundu, 18 October 2016. See also Preston, 460, and Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 136-7.
[62] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 4 November 2016. For similar allegations by other former SWATF members, see T. Namutewa, 'NDF gives Grootfontein claims the boot', *The Namibian*, 29 June 1994.
[63] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 29 July 2014.
[64] Preston, 'Integrating Fighters after War', 461.
[65] Metsola, 'Out of Order', 137. According to Martin Shalli, more than 80 per cent of those who fought for SWAPO were Oshiwambo-speaking: interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 8 November 2016.

fighters had been bussed in from Ovamboland for enlistment. They further claimed that not only Herero but former SWATF members from other non-Ovambo ethnic groups were also being discriminated against.[66] Later that year, Mishake Muyongo of the DTA argued that the disproportionate number of senior posts given to former PLAN commanders could not only lead to resentment among former SWATF soldiers but also result in the 'domination of the army by Ovambo-speaking people'.[67] Phil ya Nangoloh, a former PLAN dissident and the executive director of NamRights, has voiced similar criticism:

> all the top brass of the NDF are Oshiwambo speakers and former PLAN cadres. Although senior ex-SWATF soldiers were recruited into the defence force, they were given junior ranks that led to many of them resigning from the military.[68]

For many of my interviewees of ethnic and linguistic minorities, the army's ranks became practically synonymous with Oshiwambo-speaking: 'in the NDF, 70 to 80 per cent of people with rank are Ovambo'.[69]

SWAPO's Approach of 'Partial Inclusion and Exclusion'

The post-independence fate of former SWATF and Koevoet members is hardly surprising. In Zimbabwe, for example, reintegrated former Rhodesian soldiers, primarily black members of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR), constituted only five per cent of the new Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA) before most of them

[66] R. Nunamava, 'Unhappy soldiers threaten action', *The Namibian*, 12 April 1990.
[67] Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum', 9.
[68] Quoted in Mwange, *Civil-Military Relations in Namibia*, 144.
[69] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 August 2016.

retired due to low prospects for promotion.[70] In neighbouring South Africa, black former members of the SADF and the Bantustan defence forces have claimed that they have been discriminated against in favour of ex-guerrillas of MK and Azanian People's Liberation Army.[71] What is perhaps more surprising is SWAPO's moderate approach and near absence of violent retribution against its former enemies, as happened in other contexts, particularly Mozambique and Algeria (as well as Angola, as we saw in Chapter 4).

In Mozambique, the new Frelimo government decided on 'the social and political "rehabilitation" of the former colonial "collaborators" … through their interment in "re-education camps".[72] Some of those detained, together with other former colonial soldiers, later fled across the border into Rhodesia, and came to form the nucleus of the *Resistência Nacional de Moçambique* (Renamo), an armed rebel movement first founded by Rhodesian intelligence and later supported by apartheid South Africa.[73] In the by far most extreme case of Algeria, the *Front de Libération Nationale* government engaged in widespread and brutal retribution against the *harkis* after the French exit from the country. Estimates of those killed range from 10,000 to 150,000.[74]

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[70] Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, 131, 138; Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 234. However, unlike former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia, they received full gratuity payments and were entitled to pensions: M.T. Howard, *Meet the Enemy: Black Rhodesian Veterans in Zimbabwe's Army*, forthcoming.

[71] See, for example, P. Zwane, 'Challenges Facing the SANDF: From Integration to Affirmative Action', *African Security Review*, 4, 1 (1995), 33; L. Heinecken, 'South Africa's Armed Forces in Transition: Adapting to the New Strategic and Political Environment', *Society in Transition*, 36, 1 (2005), 84; Mashike, 'Age of Despair', 449-51.

[72] Oliveira, 'Saved by the Civil War', 138.

[73] Borges Coelho, 'African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army', 150; M. Hall, 'The Mozambican National Resistance Movement (Renamo): A Study in the Destruction of an African Country', *Africa*, 60 (1990), 39-40; G. Morgan, 'Violence in Mozambique: Towards an Understanding of Renamo', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28, 4 (1990), 603.

[74] See, for example, Evans, 'The *Harkis*'; Evans, 'Reprisal Violence'.

I argue that SWAPO's particular approach towards former SWATF and Koevoet members was shaped by the policy of national reconciliation and, more significantly, the lack of internal military or political threats to the new ruling party's authority. As mentioned, SWAPO adopted a policy of national reconciliation towards its former enemies, similar to that of ZANU(PF) towards former Rhodesian soldiers. According to Laurie Nathan, spokespersons of the Ministry of Defence, opposition leaders, and NDF officials in the early 1990s explained that there had 'been virtually no [violent] antagonism among soldiers that previously fought in opposing armies', which they attributed in part to the policy of national reconciliation.[75] In fact, the new NDF's role and function was not only to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Namibia but also to assist with the processes of nation-building and national reconciliation.[76] As President Sam Nujoma explained during the NDF's 12th anniversary celebrations:

> the NDF's primary task was to promote the implementation of the Policy of National Reconciliation. By integrating former warring foes, those from ex-SWATF, Koevoet and PLAN Combatants into one united national army, [the Policy] paid off well, leading to the [early] consolidation of a unified and strong nation.[77]

Many of my interviewees' accounts of the early 1990s echoed the optimistic attitudes of rank-and-file members of the NDF interviewed by Nathan, who commented that '"the war is over", "we are making a fresh start", "live and let live", "we are professional soldiers", and "we are all Namibians"'.[78] Despite many valid criticisms, the SWAPO-led government's extensive efforts at national

[75] Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum', 14.
[76] Dzinesa, and Rupiya, 'Promoting National Reconciliation and Regional Integration' 208; R.J. Griffiths, 'Democratisation and Civil-Military Relations in Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique', *Third World Quarterly*, 17, 3 (1996), 418.
[77] Dzinesa and Rupiya, 'Promoting National Reconciliation', 209.
[78] Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum', 14. See also Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 226.

reconciliation, including the provision of general amnesty, appear to have been fundamental to Namibia's relatively non-violent transition and reintegration process.[79]

However, the more important factor seems to have been that neither any of the opposition parties nor former SWATF and Koevoet members posed a significant political or military threat to the new SWAPO-led government. In other words, the new ruling party did not face a foreign-sponsored armed rebel movement like its counterpart in Mozambique or another armed liberation movement like its counterparts in Angola and Zimbabwe. Here, the contrast with Zimbabwe, where ZANU(PF) became the ruling party in 1980, appears to be most instructive.

Comparing the different post-independence trajectories of Namibia and Zimbabwe, Kössler notes that SWAPO, unlike ZANU(PF), did not have 'to deal with a challenge of the calibre of … ZAPU in the 1980s'.[80] In Zimbabwe, black former members of the Rhodesian security forces initially formed the basis of the new ZNA, and acted 'as something of a balance [between] former ZANLA and ZIPRA cadres'.[81] Then in the early 1980s, ZANU(PF) deployed black former Rhodesian units, including the RAR, to help brutally suppress uprisings by ex-ZIPRA guerrillas in order to enhance its control over both the army and the country.[82] As White writes, 'the use of the former RAR to defeat former ZIPRA

[79] Nathan, 'Marching to a Different Drum', 5-6; W.A. Lindeke, 'Transformation, Hegemony, and Reconciliation in the Education and Security Sectors in Namibia's Transition from Prolonged Collective Violence', in du Pisani et al. (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War*, 95.
[80] Kössler, 'Images of History and the Nation', 39. See also Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', 178.
[81] P. Jackson, 'The Civil War Roots of Military Domination in Zimbabwe: The Integration Process Following the Rhodesian War and the Road to ZANLA Dominance', *Civil Wars*, 13, 4 (2011), 382.
[82] Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 233.

served to redefine who was a true enemy of the regime', i.e. ZAPU.[83] Although on a much smaller scale, the violence against so-called 'dissidents' also targeted black former Rhodesian soldiers who had left the army or police.[84] In short, many black former Rhodesian soldiers were 'silenced' through relatively successful careers in the ZNA as well as the brutal and widespread violence against 'dissidents' throughout most of the 1980s.

In Namibia, the vast majority of the black former members of South Africa's security forces found themselves largely leaderless and left to their own devices. While the black leadership corps was part of the 'transitional pact', most of the white leadership corps, together with 32 Battalion and a fifth of all Koevoet members, had withdrawn to South Africa before independence (see Chapter 7).[85] The DTA, which initially provided a political home to many former soldiers, soon began its steady decline due to internal political and ethnic fragmentation.

Similarly to the DTA and other opposition parties, associations of former SWATF and Koevoet members, including NAMVET, have also remained largely divided along regional and ethnic lines, and have been unable to collectively organise in such a way as to pose a significant challenge to SWAPO's political dominance.[86] Their inability to do so is a direct legacy of apartheid South Africa's policies and the former soldiers' corresponding organisation into regionally and ethnically based military units. This observation corresponds with David Killingray's finding that the different (pre-)war backgrounds and divisions

[83] L. White, '"Whoever Saw a Country with Four Armies?": The Battle of Bulawayo Revisited', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 621.
[84] Howard, *Meet the Enemy*, forthcoming. See also Alexander et al., *Violence and Memory,* 188-91; Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, 131-9.
[85] Compare to the similar 'exodus' of white former soldiers from Zimbabwe in 1980: Jackson, 'The Civil War Roots of Military Domination in Zimbabwe', 382-3.
[86] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 19 August 2016.

among African colonial veterans, including ethnicity, prevented them from forming a strong and cohesive political interest group upon their return home.[87]

In addition, as others have noted, the post-war reintegration experiences of former soldiers in Namibia have varied across regions and ethnic groups.[88] Those who remained or settled in SWAPO's regional strongholds in northern Namibia, particularly in former Ovamboland, often faced considerable hostility. There, former soldiers have feared intimidation and retaliation if they attempted to organise and demonstrate.[89] When I asked a former SWATF soldier why former SWATF and Koevoet members had found it difficult to come together, he replied:

> if you try that, SWAPO will kill you. In the night, they send these people to kill you. No one can talk and say, 'that man, a member of SWATF, was killed by SWAPO'. Everyone is afraid … because when you talk against SWAPO, they will come again and kill you again.[90]

His claim is doubtful but it reflects the prevalent sense of fear in former Ovamboland, which traces back to the assassination of SWATF and Koevoet members by PLAN during the war, and the violence during the transition to independence.[91] In other regions, where recruitment into South Africa's security forces had been well-known and widespread, if not actively supported by family and community, former SWATF and Koevoet members experienced fewer

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[87] D. Killingray, 'Soldiers, Ex-Servicemen, and Politics in the Gold Coast, 1939-50', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21, 3 (1983), 523-4; Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique*, 12.
[88] See Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 188-92; Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 226.
[89] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 29 July 2014; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 4 November 2016.
[90] Interview with former soldier, Oshakati, 4 August 2014.
[91] 'Former Koevoet man shot dead by Swapo gunmen', *The Citizen*, 17 November 1989; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 2 October 2016; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 3 October 2016.

problems of reintegration.[92] As we have seen, in these regions, SWAPO historically enjoyed less legitimacy and, at times, was even perceived as a foreign, invading force.

Despite some efforts at creating a national umbrella organisation, virtually all associations that have been formed since independence have drawn their members from specific regional and ethnic bases outside of SWAPO's strongholds in former Ovamboland. As a result, former SWATF and Koevoet members have not posed a unified threat to SWAPO's power and legitimacy. For the most part, the ruling party, firmly in power since 1989, has not perceived them as a security or political threat either.[93]

In short, the government's response to the repeated demonstrations and demands by former SWATF and Koevoet members has been characterised by a combination of both reconciliation and disregard.[94] As Metsola write, 'the history of the former SWATF and Koevoet fighters … is one of partial inclusion [driven by the policy of national reconciliation] and exclusion [legitimised by official history]'.[95]

[92] Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 188-92; Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 226.
[93] See also Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 223-4.
[94] Since 1999, police have twice briefly detained former soldiers, once members of the Communist Party and once members of NAMVET, when they were perceived as a security threat: 'Police Detain Ex-SWATF-Koevoet Activists to Foil UN Petition', *Confidenté*, 26 June 2014; and 'Police Act on NAMVET Threats', *New Era*, 4 March 2015.
[95] Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 137.

The 'Peace Project' and the 'Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union', 1995-2000

By the mid-1990s, it had become clear that previous measures had failed to provide a comprehensive and lasting solution to the issue of ex-combatant reintegration.[96] First in 1995 and again on a larger scale in 1997-98, thousands of unemployed and disenchanted ex-PLAN fighters publicly demonstrated for government employment.[97] Ahead of the 1999 general elections, ex-combatants' prolonged protests and public sympathy for their grievances put SWAPO under political pressure, and prompted the government to register unemployed ex-combatants for employment.[98] It was decided to solve the ex-combatant problem by providing all unemployed ex-combatants with jobs in the public sector.[99]

The government's scheme came to be called the 'Peace Project', which provided employment to close to 15,000 ex-combatants between 1998 and 2002. The Peace Project initially only targeted ex-PLAN fighters. From 1998 onwards, however, all unemployed former exiles, and not just ex-combatants proper, were included as official beneficiaries.[100] Since the Peace Project, as Metsola observes, 'public employment [has become] an indicator of citizenship', which 'appears less as a constitutionally defined set of individual rights than as empirical practices through which one can properly become a full member of the nation and the state'.[101]

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[96] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 107.
[97] Dzinesa, 'Postconflict Disarmament', 80; Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 106-7; McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 115.
[98] McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 115. See also Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 120, n104.
[99] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 106-7; Dzinesa, 'Postconflict Disarmament', 80; McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 116.
[100] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 107-9.
[101] L. Metsola, '"Reintegration" of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters: A Lens into State Formation and Citizenship in Namibia', *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 6 (2006), 1126-7.

In addition to the Peace Project, the government passed the War Veterans Subvention Act of 1999, establishing the War Veterans Fund, which delivered regular payments to aged and disabled ex-combatants.[102] The Act defined a veteran as someone who had participated in the liberation struggle (as would the Veterans Act of 2008), and thus codified the exclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet members from any payments. By further excluding any person who 'at any time during the war deserted the liberation force', the Act also rendered SWAPO dissidents and ex-detainees ineligible for reintegration assistance.[103]

The demonstrations of ex-PLAN fighters and the extending circle of the Peace Project's beneficiaries encouraged groups of former SWATF and Koevoet members to begin to apply pressure on the government.[104] In letters to the government and during public demonstrations, they expressed anger and disappointment over their persistent marginalisation and the preferential treatment of ex-PLAN fighters. These first protests reflected three issues discussed above, which have remained central to the claims and arguments of former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers: the language of national reconciliation; contestations over the official narrative of Namibia's liberation struggle; and accusations against the SWAPO-led government of political and ethnic discrimination.

In April 1997, an organisation named the 'Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union' made national headlines claiming that the former members of South Africa's security forces had not been paid their fair share of 'the N$36 million', discussed below. In a letter addressed to President Nujoma, the group threatened violent

[102] McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 119; Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 108.
[103] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 108-9.
[104] Metsola, 'Out of Order', 132-3.

action, including suicide bombings, if the government did not issue a reply within ten days: 'If you forget us, we will become terrorists and destroy peace and stability'.[105]

The N$36 million mentioned by the organisation referred to ZAR36 million that South Africa had offered the SWAPO-led government in 1989 for cash payments to former SWATF and Koevoet members. The Namibian government, however, insisted that the money be distributed to ex-combatants from both sides in the spirit of national reconciliation.[106] A compromise was negotiated whereby a total of ZAR24 million would be paid to all formally unemployed ex-combatants from both sides (ZAR12 million for each side) with a cash payment of ZAR1,400 allocated to every eligible recipient. As the two governments did not agree on the use of the remaining ZAR12 million, South Africa eventually transferred only ZAR24 million.[107]

Among my interviewees, some claimed they had been paid the ZAR1,400 while others said they had received more, less, or nothing at all.[108] Unsurprisingly, all agreed that the small payment was not enough, and their accounts were rife with allegations of corruption by government officials involved in the process. Since then, the issue of the '36 million' has been central to former SWATF and Koevoet members' claims on the government. For many of my interviewees, the distribution of the money took place 'according to the policy of national reconciliation', as SWAPO officials also had explained, and thus

[105] C. Maletsky, 'War of words hots up in ex-Koevoet pay saga', *The Namibian*, 12 June 1997.
[106] 'PM's Ultimatum on SA's R36 Mil', *The Namibian*, 1 November 1990.
[107] Colletta et al., *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition*, 145; McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 108.
[108] Interview with former soldier, Oshakati, 4 August 2014; interview with former soldier, Ondangwa, 5 October 2016.

stood in stark contrast with subsequent reintegration initiatives, which primarily targeted ex-PLAN fighters.[109]

In the face of the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union's threats, the government reacted calmly, rejecting their demands and saying that no action would be taken against them.[110] In parliament, Prime Minister Hage Geingob declared that 'we reject this ultimatum, and we do not accept threats' but warned that '[i]f anyone intends to compromise peace, we will not sit idly by'.[111] He further explained that South Africa had allocated a total N$24 million of which one half had been paid out to former SWATF and Koevoet members, and that the Namibian government had added another N$12 million only given to ex-PLAN fighters.[112]

In a follow-up letter sent to Cabinet the next month, the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union demanded clarification about the payment process of the 36 million, and further complained about the small percentage of former SWATF and Koevoet members employed in the army and other government agencies, and asserted they were being treated 'like foreigners' when applying for jobs. At the same time, the group justified their earlier threats to resort to violent action as an act of desperation: 'can you hold us liable for the decision to take up arms and bombs against you? No one wants to listen and assist us to become normal citizens of this country'.[113]

In a last letter addressed to the government in June 1997, Salmon Fleermuys, a former SWATF soldier and the group's chairperson, accused the government of

[109] Interview with a woman, whose brother served as a policeman during the war, Windhoek, 17 August 2016.
[110] C. Inambao, 'Ex-Koevoets stick to demand', *The Namibian*, 6 May 1997; C. Inambao, 'Govt challenged to come up with proof on war-payouts', *The Namibian*, 22 May 1997.
[111] C. Maletsky, 'War of words hots up in ex-Koevoet pay saga', *The Namibian*, 12 June 1997.
[112] The Namibian dollar (N$) replaced the South African Rand (ZAR) as Namibia's currency in 1993.
[113] C. Inambao, 'Govt challenged to come up with proof on war-payouts', *The Namibian*, 22 May 1997.

ethnic discrimination in the registration process of ex-combatants, which at the time was taking place in former Ovamboland. He claimed that as almost 85 per cent of the group's members came from other regions, they were deliberately being excluded from the process and hence government benefits. The group also reasserted its distrust about the policy of national reconciliation:

> we are treated like scum, like creatures from another planet, maybe because we fought under the former South African government. … We still have doubts about the reconciliation process in Namibia. We challenge you to prove us wrong and accommodate us in one Namibia and one nation.[114]

Fleermuys questioned why former SWATF and Koevoet were being marginalised and discriminated against in spite of the government's supposed commitment to the policy of national reconciliation.[115] My interviewees, like Fleermuys, also argued that SWAPO was only paying lip service to the policy. Referring to the ruling party, a former Koevoet member said that 'inside people's hearts there is no reconciliation' and 'they let us suffer'. In his view, the SWAPO-led government's treatment of former SWATF and Koevoet members was in fact a continuation of the war, whereas genuine reconciliation would mean that 'we are not at war anymore'.[116] The government, however, continued to reject the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union's pleas, and the group soon disappeared from the limelight. As Martin Shalli acknowledged, 'forgetting completely is not normal'.[117]

In late January 1999, more than 100 former SWATF and Koevoet occupied the Multi Purpose Youth Training Centre in Katutura, Windhoek's former township,

[114] C. Maletsky, 'War of words hots up in ex-Koevoet pay saga', *The Namibian*, 12 June 1997.
[115] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 18 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 18 August 2016.
[116] Interview with former soldier, Rundu, 24 October 2016.
[117] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 8 November 2016.

demanding jobs. The members of the unnamed group explicitly distanced themselves from the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union, but also expressed resentment at the fact that only ex-PLAN fighters were targeted by the Peace Project. During the protest, one former soldier explained: 'we are ready for any jobs. We have been waiting for a long time'. Another one asserted that 'we do not want to fight the Government but all we need is to get jobs'.[118] Some former SWATF and Koevoet members were eventually registered from late 1999 onwards but recruited in much smaller numbers than ex-PLAN fighters.[119]

The SWAPO-led government most likely gave in to the former soldiers' demands, as well as those of their PLAN counterparts, in response to the formation of a breakaway party, the Congress of Democrats (CoD), ahead of the 1999 general elections. The former SWAPO members explained their defection by 'the failure of [the party] to transform itself from a secretive and exiled armed nationalist movement to a mass-based governing party', and accused President Nujoma of copying 'the tactics of his old ally and good friend, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe'.[120]

'Unlike the DTA's leadership', as Tom Lodge notes, 'the founders of the new party had no embarrassing record of collaboration with apartheid'.[121] The CoD's president, Ben Ulenga, a high-ranking official who resigned from SWAPO in August 1998, had been an ex-PLAN fighter, Robben Island prisoner, and trade

[118] C. Inambao, 'Centre besieged by ex-fighters', *The Namibian*, 26 January 1999; C. Inambao, 'Ex-soldiers stick to their guns', *The Namibian*, 27 January 1999.
[119] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 108-9.
[120] P. Kalenga, 'The Congress of Democrats', *Southern Africa Report*, 15, 1 (1999), 26-7; Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence', 44.
[121] T. Lodge, 'The Namibian Elections of 1999', *Democratization*, 8, 2 (2001), 196. In late 2017, the DTA actually renamed itself the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) to shed its 'colonial' name: S. Iikela, 'Exit DTA, Enter PDM', *The Namibian*, 6 November 2017.

union leader during the struggle.[122] Ulenga's credentials suggested that the CoD might obtain significant support in SWAPO's strongholds in northern Namibia.[123] In addition, as McMullin writes, the CoD sought to capitalise on ex-combatants' feelings of neglect and betrayal by SWAPO, and made their persistent unemployment a campaign issue:

> For the first time since independence, the threat of a challenger who could exploit intra-SWAPO divisions existed, and suddenly the allegiance of disgruntled former fighters was up for grabs. … The timing of the Peace Project … was therefore both a concerted government effort to stop the protests as well as a political move by SWAPO to undermine support for the CoD.[124]

In combination with attacks against CoD members, the disruption of party meetings, and destruction of campaign materials, SWAPO's strategy worked.[125] The ruling party increased its parliamentary majority to 76 per cent while the CoD won 10 per cent, primarily at the expense of the DTA.[126] Similarly to other opposition parties, the CoD has since continued to campaign for government benefits for former SWATF and Koevoet members.[127]

By November 2000, former SWATF and Koevoet members represented only about 15 per cent of all registered Peace Project applicants. In terms of actual employment, in November 1999, a third of the registered 2,000 former SWATF and Koevoet members had been employed, compared to two thirds of the 12,000

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[122] Bauer, *Labor and Democracy*, 77-80; Metsola, '"Reintegration" of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters', 1133, n24.
[123] Lodge, 'The Namibian Elections of 1999', 196.
[124] McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 98-9. See also A. du Pisani and W.A. Lindeke, *Political Party Life in Namibia: Dominant Party with Democratic Consolidation* (Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2009), 7.
[125] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 107; Lodge, 'The Namibian Elections of 1999', 204-7. See also Bauer, 'Namibia in the First Decade of Independence', 44, 47.
[126] McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 99.
[127] See, for example, 'CoD will reform Veterans Act if put in power: Ulenga', *NAMPA*, 21 July 2014.

registered former exiles.[128] In other words, the majority of job placements went to ex-PLAN fighters and former exiles.[129] In addition, the overall level of formal employment of former SWATF and Koevoet members remained considerably lower than that of ex-PLAN fighters. According to a survey conducted in 2005, 69 per cent of the latter were formally employed, compared to 45 per cent of former SWATF and Koevoet members.[130]

The provision of government jobs through the Peace Project pacified ex-combatants and former exiles for several years but produced new problems.[131] In his assessment of the Peace Project, McMullin concludes that the programme entrenched pre-existing political and ethnic tensions, and deepened the marginalisation of both former SWATF and Koevoet members and ex-detainees. For these groups, the government's reintegration programmes were 'emblematic of the political intimidation and social exclusion they say characterize the one-party dominant system of Namibia'.[132] With regard to ex-PLAN fighters, Metsola argues that once the Peace Project had provided most of them with government employment, their demands shifted towards monetary compensation.[133] As previously, the successful protests of ex-PLAN fighters again encouraged claims by former SWATF and Koevoet members.

[128] Republic of Namibia, 'Final Report of the Technical Committee on Ex Combatants to the Cabinet Committee on Defence and Security (CCDS)' (Windhoek: Technical Committee on Ex-Combatants, n.d.), 3, 9
[129] McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 119, 125.
[130] D. LeBeau, *An Investigation into the Lives of Namibian Ex-fighters Fifteen Years after Independence* (Windhoek: P.E.A.C.E. Centre, 2005), 72-3; Metsola, 'Out of Order?', 133.
[131] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 111.
[132] McMullin, *The Soldier and the Post-Conflict State*, 126-7.
[133] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 119.

The Veterans Act of 2008 and the 'Grey Areas' of the Struggle

In June 2006, a new group of ex-PLAN fighters submitted a number of demands to President Hifikepunye Pohamba, who had succeeded Nujoma in 2005.[134] Their demands included financial compensation for the time spent in exile, a monthly remuneration, free education and medical services, housing, appointments to positions, income-generating projects, and setting up an ex-combatants' fund.[135] After an initially harsh response, the government soon began to accommodate the ex-fighters' demands after they decided to mobilise for protests, and opposition parties joined the debate criticising SWAPO's response.[136] In October 2006, the government set up a Ministry of Veterans Affairs and the concept of 'ex-combatant' was yet again given a new and more inclusive definition. President Pohamba explained that 'our Government regards all those patriotic Namibians who took part in the struggle for national liberation of Namibia, regardless of whether such citizens were in exile or not, as ex-combatants'.[137]

In October 2007, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Ngarikutuke Tjiriange, had tabled a new Veterans Bill that, as its name indicates, no longer used the term 'ex-combatant' but 'veteran'. The Bill's purpose was to provide monthly grants and loans not only to veterans but also their dependants. It came into force as the Veterans Act in August 2008.[138] Section 1 of the Act defines a 'veteran' as:

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[134] The Committee later became the 'Namibia Ex-Freedom Fighters and War Veterans' Association'.
[135] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 111.
[136] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 594-5; 'Nujoma lashes out at divisive forces', *Die Republikein*, 26 July 2006. See also S. Gaomas, 'Nujoma Blasts Ex-Fighters', *New Era*, 24 July 2006; P. Sibeene, 'Nujoma Firm on Ex-Combatants', *New Era*, 31 July 2006; C. Sasman, 'Veterans Bill Tabled', *New Era*, 24 October 2007.
[137] K. Kangueehi, 'New Ministry for war veterans', *New Era*, 5 October 2006.
[138] B. Weidlich, 'Veterans Bill passed', *The Namibian*, 16 November 2007.

> any person who (a) was a member of the liberation forces; (b) consistently and persistently participated or engaged in any political, diplomatic or underground activity in furtherance of the liberation struggle; or (c) owing to his or her participation in the liberation struggle was convicted, whether in Namibia or elsewhere, of any offence closely connected to the struggle and sentenced to imprisonment.[139]

Although the definition of 'veteran' was in principle no longer restricted to former exiles or SWAPO members (unlike the previous category of 'ex-combatant'), it clearly excluded those who fought on the South African side, and thus emphasised the importance of loyalty to the struggle for independence and liberation war credentials.[140]

The wording of the Act, despite its broader definition, seems to have been clearly inspired by the Zimbabwean War Veterans Act of 1992, which defines the term as 'any person who underwent military training and participated, consistently and persistently, in the liberation struggle which occurred in Zimbabwe and in neighbouring countries'. [141] SWAPO officials have acknowledged the influence of similar legislation in Zimbabwe and other countries on the formulation of the Veterans Act. In 2012, Nickey Iyambo explained:

> We have … followed some other countries which were in the same situation as Namibia, such as Zimbabwe, the Republic of Mozambique and Algeria. Those countries who fought colonial occupation …, they too had people who collaborated with the enemies and those governments have never accorded veteran status to [them]. In this respect, Namibia is not going to accord veteran status to the collaborators.[142]

Before tabling the Bill, Tjiriange had said that 'not everyone in Namibia is a

[139] Republic of Namibia, 'Veterans Act, 2008' (2008).
[140] Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 590. Compare to N. Kriger, 'From Patriotic Memories to "Patriotic History" in Zimbabwe, 1990-2005', *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 6 (2006), 1151-69.
[141] Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 'Zimbabwe', in C. Gould and G. Lamb (eds.), *Hide and Seek: Taking Account of Small Arms in Southern Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2004), 309-10.
[142] Parliament of Namibia, 'National Assembly Hansards – Volume 147', 17.

veteran [and] not anyone outside [i.e. exile] was a veteran [but] people wanted to take advantage of the grey areas that existed'. Nonetheless, Tjiriange added that he did 'not see any controversy around this Bill'.[143] The Bill and subsequent Veterans Act, however, since sparked debates on the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, and the various 'grey areas' of Namibia's liberation struggle. The first group to publically remember stories of these grey areas were in fact ex-PLAN fighters who argued that their participation in the war was not always voluntary. As one ex-fighter explained: 'Some of us were taken by force to the bush and removed from school to go into exile'.[144]

Opposition politicians were the first to criticise the exclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet members. Namibian opposition parties, as Melber notes, primarily compete with each other through specific appeals to minority electoral constituencies, which include former SWATF and Koevoet members and ex-detainees.[145] However, in the debates around the Veterans Act, opposition politicians also articulated their own complex stories at odds with SWAPO's liberation narrative. Similarly to the former soldiers, they referred to national reconciliation, accused the ruling party of regional and ethnic discrimination, and challenged the stigmatised portrayal of the former soldiers as traitors and collaborators. In their arguments, they sought to negate SWAPO's claims to legitimacy on the basis of representing and promoting the welfare of all Namibians in the spirit of national unity and reconciliation.[146]

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[143] C. Sasman, 'Veterans Bill Tabled', *New Era*, 24 October 2007.
[144] 'Protesters stick to their guns', *New Era*, 7 June 2007. See also Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 596.
[145] H. Melber, 'Post-Liberation Democratic Authoritarianism: The Case of Namibia', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 42, 1 (2015), 51.
[146] Compare to Pearce, 'History, Legitimacy and Renamo's Return to Arms in Central Mozambique', 12.

The president of the Republican Party, Henry 'Henk' Mudge, for instance, criticised the preferential treatment of ex-PLAN fighters and appealed to the policy of national reconciliation:

> the Government initiated various projects after Independence to employ former Plan fighters … We want to plead with President Hifikepunye Pohamba for the sake of justice, reconciliation and humanity, to include these former members of SWATF and Koevoet so they can also benefit from this new ministry.[147]

Similarly, McHenry Venaani of the DTA also argued for the inclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet members in the name of national reconciliation:

> In accordance with the policy of national reconciliation … you gave jobs to SWATF [and Koevoet] and accommodated them in the new Namibia, in the new order. Now you are coming back and say, in fact all along these guys are just bad, so let us leave them out and help these ones. Why did you not from the onset do the same thing with the 36 million of South Africa?[148]

Also referring to the 36 million, Philemon Moongo of the DTA accused SWAPO of hypocrisy for having shared the money, originally destined for former SWATF and Koevoet members, among all ex-combatants in the spirit of national reconciliation while now excluding the former soldiers from the Veterans Act:

> Remember that it is the same SWAPO Government who, when South Africa gave money to the SWATF and Koevoet that time, decided to share with those who were in exile and they shared the cake. Now … they have already forgotten that they shared the cake by South Africa with Koevoet and SWATF. Now … they make a special law only for themselves. … This is really naked discrimination.[149]

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[147] B. Weidlich, 'Ex-Koevoet, SWATF should also benefit from Veterans' Ministry', *The Namibian*, 16 October 2006

[148] Parliament of Namibia, 'National Assembly Hansards – Volume 105', 20. See also B. Weidlich, 'Ex-Koevoet, SWATF should also benefit from Veterans' Ministry', *The Namibian*, 16 October 2006.

[149] Parliament of Namibia, 'National Assembly Hansards – Volume 105', 56-7. Moongo himself had joined SWAPO in Zambia in the 1960s, where he became a platoon commander in PLAN. During SWAPO's 'Shipanga Crisis' in 1976, he belonged to a group of exiles who openly criticised the SWAPO leadership, in particular Nujoma. The group was imprisoned for two years until 1978, first in Zambia and then Tanzania. Moongo later became a founding member of SWAPO-D, a party of SWAPO dissidents, before joining the DTA in 1990: S. Elischer, *Political Parties in Africa: Ethnicity and Party Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 115-6; Leys and Saul, 'Liberation Without Democracy?', 138; 'Ex-SWATF Theron was fat cat – Moongo',

In an attempt to challenge SWAPO's stigmatisation of former soldiers as mercenaries and collaborators, Nora Schimming-Chase of the CoD argued for the inclusion of former SWATF members who had been forcibly conscripted, particularly in central and southern Namibia:

> Conscription was one of the most draconian laws. Young boys were picked up from schools, from the streets, from their houses, running errands for their parents and forced into the army. No one was safe. … Many died fighting for a cause they did not believe in. Some went into exile and did not return, caught in the cross-fire. … Let us think of them when we generalise and not throw them in the same pot with those who wilfully joined the side of the South African regime, those, some of whom today are regarded as comrades because they joined SWAPO. … We as leaders of this country will be condemned by history if we do not recognise the evils of apartheid, not just physically, but emotionally.[150]

In a letter to *The Namibian* newspaper, Samson Ndeikwila of the FFF, argued for the inclusion of former soldiers, in particular SWATF conscripts, as well as ex-detainees:

> A 'war veteran' is a person with long experience in military service. Namibia has 'war veterans' who fought on both sides of the War of Liberation. On the one hand are former members of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia … They include some ex-detainees who, for reasons still unclear, found themselves languishing in the Lubango dungeons after many years at the battlefields. On the other hand are former members of [SWATF] and Koevoet paramilitary. Many young Namibian men were conscripted into SWATF … Some of the Lubango detainees were people who fled the country to avoid conscription into SWATF.[151]

Arnold Tjihuiko of the NUDO referred to accusations of ethnic discrimination within the military, and claimed that unlike most black former SWATF soldiers, their white former commanders had been successfully reintegrated in the

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Namibian Sun, 15 June 2014.
[150] Parliament of Namibia, 'National Assembly Hansards – Volume 105', 48.
[151] S. Ndeikwila, 'Quo Vadis Tjiriange And The Vets?', *The Namibian*, 26 January 2007.

NDF.[152] The alleged favourable treatment of their white former commanders was also brought up by some of my interviewees. One of them explained that 'those people [SWAPO] are afraid because they know that if they touch the whites the war will start again'. Our interpreter, also a former SWATF soldier, agreed and referring to the ruling party exclaimed: 'Today the whites are their best friends!'[153]

SWAPO's stance on the exclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet members, however, has remained firm and consistent. After the Ministry of Veterans Affairs began with a process of countrywide registration of veterans eligible for a monthly payout of N$2,000 in March 2008, a group of former SWATF and Koevoet members unsuccessfully tried to sign up for veteran benefits after they had heard about the registration process.[154] After Tjiriange allegedly received death threats from former SWATF and Koevoet members disgruntled over their continued exclusion, Prime Minister, Nahas Angula, warned that,

> they will regret it. … They should know that we know them. If they start to threaten the ministers, then they threaten Swapo and the Government of the Republic of Namibia. … There were some Koevoets, SWATF and spies who allowed themselves to be used by the enemies and they must bow their heads in shame. The struggle was long and bitter because some sided with the enemy that committed heinous crimes.[155]

These arguments mirror those of Mozambique's Frelimo-led government against pensions for former Renamo combatants, claiming that they should not be rewarded because they were responsible for the post-independence war, and, in the words of one Frelimo deputy, 'the history of Renamo is connected to

[152] C. Maletsky, 'Accommodate all war vets', *The Namibian*, 19 April 2007.
[153] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 17 August 2016.
[154] C. Inambao, 'Penniless Ex-Fighters "Chased" Away', *New Era*, 17 March 2008.
[155] F. Rhodes, 'Angula in No-nonsense Mood', *New Era*, 21 April 2008; K. Kangueehi, 'Tjiriange Threatened With Death', *New Era*, 14 April 2008. See also 'Tjiriange Non-committal on Swapo Ex-Detainees', *New Era*, 7 April 2008.

apartheid … you belong to the racists that created you and nothing more'.[156] In our interview, Martin Shalli explained that while the Namibian government might address the plight of former SWATF and Koevoet as Namibian citizens, their recognition as veterans would constitute the 'biggest betrayal' of the liberation struggle.[157]

In contrast to former SWATF and Koevoet members, other groups were more successful in their demands to be registered and compensated as veterans.[158] In August 2009, for instance, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs announced that ex-detainees would also qualify for veteran status – if they were 'not convicted of any offence [but were] caught in the crossfire', according to Tjiriange.[159] This significant shift, Godwin Kornes argues, was a sign of 'rehabilitation [which went] along with the earlier practice of integrating ex-detainees into civil service and parastatals' as well as into the army and police.[160]

As previously, the government likely made these concessions in response to pressure by opposition parties, in particular the newly formed Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), which threatened SWAPO's political hegemony in the 2009 elections.[161] The RDP was another breakaway party established in 2007 by Hidipo Hamutenya, a former SWAPO heavyweight. The party was considered a serious challenge to the ruling party, particularly because of its

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[156] V. Igreja, 'Memories as Weapons: The Politics of Peace and Silence in Post-Civil War Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 34, 3 (2008), 549; Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique*, 124.
[157] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 8 November 2016.
[158] For the case of the so-called 'struggle children', see, for example, Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 118. See also G. Lister, 'Political Perspective', *The Namibian*, 19 October 2012; 'RDP cries foul over jobs for "struggle children"', *The Namibian*, 25 October 2012.
[159] D. Isaacs, 'Swapo Lubango dungeon victims also war veterans', *The Namibian*, 13 August 2009. See also 'Veteran status not enough for ex-detainees', *The Namibian*, 17 August 2009; McMullin, *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State*, 111.
[160] Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 19. See also Geingob, *State Formation in Namibia*, 204.
[161] B. Weidlich, 'MPs battle with veterans bill', *The Namibian*, 2 November 2007.

leaders' connections to parts of SWAPO's regional strongholds in northern Namibia.[162] In its election manifesto, the RDP promised that:

> [an] RDP-led Government would formulate a genuine National Reconciliation policy whereby past mistakes and wrong doings are to be openly admitted and forgiven … This is the only way to bring about true reconciliation.[163]

Similarly to its response to the formation of the CoD, SWAPO's reaction to the RDP's challenge was aggressive. SWAPO officials verbally and physically attacked RDP supporters, disrupted party meetings, and attempted to prevent the party from campaigning in pro-SWAPO areas.[164] Again, SWAPO's strategy worked as it won 74 per cent of the vote while the RDP, at the expense of the CoD and the DTA, secured 11 per cent and became the largest opposition party.[165]

By 2012, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs had granted veteran status to 27,000 individuals of whom about 8,500 received a monthly payment of N$2,200, and about 10,000 had received a lump sum of N$50,000.[166] Additionally, more than 5,000 dependants of deceased veterans had been registered as beneficiaries.[167] In this context of widening criteria of inclusion but continued exclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet members from the Veterans Act, new groups of former soldiers began to form.

The focus in the following sections will be on NAMVET, the largest and most well known organisation of former SWATF and Koevoet members, and the

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[162] Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 47; Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 109.
[163] Quoted in K.S. Groop, 'The Church, the State and the Issue of National Reconciliation in Namibia', *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 11 (2012), 77, n67.
[164] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 109; Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 47-48. See also A. Ntinda, 'Opposition Parties in Shambles', *Swapo Party*, undated, available at http://www.swapoparty.org/zoomin149.html, retrieved 28 May 2018.
[165] Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 150; Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 62.
[166] The monthly grant is paid to veterans who are unemployed, retired or below the tax threshold: A.T. Kaure, '"A bird with only one wing" The War Veteran Issue: A Reflection', *The Namibian*, 20 January 2012.
[167] 'Koevoet soldiers treated like aliens: Kaura', *The Namibian*, 8 November 2012.

Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), which successfully rallied for the support of former SWATF and Koevoet members in the 2014 general elections. Since these groups could not invoke struggle credentials to claim recognition as veterans, their public rhetoric first appealed to national reconciliation (like the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union had done previously) before turning toward contesting SWAPO's liberation narrative. In both lines of argument, they have sought to challenge the ruling party's conception of citizenship and its associated rights and benefits as codified in the Veterans Act of 2008. They have expressed doubt about their substantive citizenship status, and have held the SWAPO-led government responsible for their post-war marginalisation.

'It Is Cold Outside of SWAPO': The General Elections of 2014

Appeals to National Reconciliation

In 2009, Jabulani Ndeunyema resigned from the NDF and, a year later, moved to Windhoek in order to organise former SWATF and Koevoet members into what would become NAMVET. In our interview, Ndeunyema explained that this idea arose in response to previous failed initiatives of former soldiers to secure benefits in South Africa. In March and April 2011, Ndeunyema, then executive director of NAMVET, and four other representatives had two meetings with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Nickey Iyambo, to discuss the exclusion of former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers from the Veterans Act.[168] At the meeting,

[168] Interview with Jabulani Ndeunyema, Windhoek, 4 November 2016.

Ndeunyema asked Iyambo to amend the Veterans Act, asserting that it was a deliberate act of discrimination and retaliation against former SWATF and Koevoet members who 'were quiet and patient when the Government of Namibia channeled [*sic*] our N$36 million to financial speculation and "gangstership networks"'. In response, Iyambo said the former soldiers were 'just' citizens:

> you have met with my predecessor Ngarikutuke Tjiriange, who gave you his position. The position remains the same. According to the law, you are not a veteran, full stop. … You have the right to seek any assistance accorded to you as a Namibian person, seek employment wherever, be it Government or parastatal, and should there be any welfare and you fall under the categories then you are entitled to benefit.[169]

After the Minister's rebuff, NAMVET as well as other groups temporarily drew new hope for compensation from the South African Military Act of 2011, which, in principle, recognised veterans from all sides of the South African liberation war.[170] The then chairperson of NAMVET, Pastor Jan Jaars, argued that South Africa was at least partially responsible for the marginalisation of former ex-SWATF and Koevoet members since Namibia's independence:

> the world knows that South Africa used people of the then South West Africa to fight in the army; many people have died, were mutilated, lost family members. The peace in South Africa now was created by SWATF and Koevoet. There is thus no way that South Africa can wash its hands and say it wont [*sic*] pay.[171]

When NAMVET first contacted the South African government in order to negotiate some form of compensation, it was advised to first form a legally recognised organisation and start with the registration of former SWATF and

[169] S. Ikela, 'Ex-SWATF/Koevoet insist on veterans' benefits', *Namibian Sun*, 15 April 2011.
[170] Republic of South Africa, 'Military Veterans Act' (2011).
[171] C. Sasman, 'Ex-SWATF, Koevoet veterans on move, but not without controversy', *The Namibian*, 7 May 2012.

Koevoet members.[172] In March 2012, NAMVET was officially registered as a trust with the Master of the High Court. At the end of April 2012, the trust held its first public meeting at the UN Plaza in Katutura, Windhoek, where they introduced the organisation to former SWATF and Koevoet members. It also started with the registration of former soldiers in its own database to be presented to both the Namibian and South African government for consideration for benefits.[173] By May 2012, NAMVET claimed to have registered 10,550 ex-SWATF and Koevoet members from all 13 regions of Namibia with more than 1,700 people from the north-eastern Kunene region (former Kaokoland).[174] Ndeunyema explained:

> we are registering all Namibians who fought under the South African government because the colonial master left without compensating us. One cannot be part of the war without being rewarded financially and materially, hence our demand for compensation from the South African government. We had a meeting with the [Namibian] Minister of Veteran Affairs last year and he told us that the Veterans Act does not recognize us because we were 'cowardly collaborating with the enemy'. … I find the law to be discriminatory and in contradiction with the policy of national reconciliation.[175]

In July 2012, NAMVET met with a delegation of the South African Department of Military Veterans where Jaars restated that 'there is no way that [South Africa] can refuse to pay the veterans in Namibia' because SWATF and Koevoet constituted 'an integral part of the South African Defence Force', and that 'the world is a witness that [South Africa] used the veterans in Namibia'.[176] By then, however, it had become clear that Namibian former SWATF and Koevoet

[172] O. Nkala, 'Namibia war veterans vow to press SA for war compensation, benefits for ex-Koevoet, Territorial Force vets', *defenceWeb*, 17 October 2012. According to Ndeunyema, Iyambo had also told him 'to come back as an organisation not as individuals' in April 2011.
[173] C. Sasman, 'Ex-SWATF, Koevoet veterans on move, but not without controversy', *The Namibian*, 7 May 2012.
[174] 'Ex-Koevoet demands recognition', *Namibian Sun*, 15 May 2012.
[175] O. Nkala, 'Namibia war veterans vow to press SA for war compensation, benefits for ex-Koevoet, Territorial Force vets', *defenceWeb*, 17 October 2012.
[176] Jaars, 'Wie praat die waarheid?', *Die Republikein*, 24 July 2012; my translation from Afrikaans into English.

members would not be recognised as South African military veterans. Despite earlier hopes and expectations, the South African Act only recognises South African ID holders 'who rendered military service to any of the military organisations'.[177] The Act thus excludes all former members of Koevoet because it was an organisation of the former South African Police, and virtually all former SWATF soldiers because most do not hold South African citizenship.[178] As a result, NAMVET's engagement shifted back to the Namibian government.

In May 2013, NAMVET arranged a meeting with Prime Minister Hage Geingob, which was cancelled the day before. Addressing the media, Ndeunyema still expressed hope in the Prime Minister's respect for the constitution, and argued that former SWATF and Koevoet members had remained peaceful despite the vengeful threats and insults by SWAPO representatives:

> the current prime minister was the chairperson of the Constituent Assembly. He knows the constitution. We believe the prime minister will not betray the constitution of this country like the others. There are always greedy individuals, and some are ministers, who are living in hatred, brainwashed by what happened 23 years ago. … We always have an interest in finding an amicable solution, as we are not seeking any confrontation with anybody, despite knowing there are those who are committed to our destruction.[179]

By that time, different opposition parties had begun to take up the concerns of former SWATF and Koevoet members in the run-up to the general elections in November 2014.[180] Due to internal political and ethnic fragmentation, the DTA, which had championed the former soldiers' cause following independence, had

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[177] Republic of South Africa, 'Military Veterans Act' (2011).
[178] Personal communication with Nico Kruger, South African Department of Home Affairs, via email, 10 December 2014.
[179] S. Ikela, 'Former Koevoets allege Govt spy game', *Namibian Sun*, 21 May 2013.
[180] One of these parties not discussed here was the United People's Movement (UPM): 'Deport Chinese, not Koevoet- UPM', *Namibian Sun*, 4 December 2013; N. Kangootui and N. Kahiurika, 'UPM eyes ex-Koevoet and SWATF vote', *The Namibian*, 10 June 2014; L. Cloete, 'No murderers in war - De Klerk', *The Namibian*, 16 September 2014; 'Colonial soldiers "scratching a healed wound"', *New Era*, 9 October 2014. See also C. Sasman, 'DPA says vets benefits divisive', *The Namibian*, 7 December 2011.

lost most of its ground to SWAPO and other opposition parties, even in its strongholds in central and southern Namibia, from 1994 onwards.[181] In the 2009 elections, the DTA obtained a mere 3 per cent of the vote.[182] As a result, former SWATF and Koevoet members had become disillusioned with the DTA and turned to SWAPO and other opposition parties, such as the CoD.[183]

In its 2014 election manifesto, the CoD, which had been weakened by internal differences since 2008, announced that, if in power, it would extend veterans' benefits to all ex-combatants regardless of their political affiliation. Ulenga argued that 'it is very regrettable that even our President in this country who is generally a very good citizen made statements to the effect that if you were fighting as a Koevoet or SWATF member you cannot get assistance from the State'.[184]

The WRP, whose leadership included Salmon Fleermuys of the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union and Benson Kaapala, another former SWATF soldier, appears to have had the most success in taking up the issue of former SWATF and Koevoet members.[185] In its election manifesto, the WRP wrote:

> In January 1971 the UNO declared SWAPO a tribal organization the Sole and Authentic Representative of the Namibian People, thereby renouncing the right to self-determination of the Namibian People … [After independence] SWAPO willingly not only reconciled with the colonial ruling classes, it became the white corporate ruling classes' boss-boy, but seized N$36 million of the SWATF/KOEVOET pension.[186]

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[181] J.B. Forrest, 'Namibia – The First Postapartheid Democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 5, 3 (1994), 99; Fosse, 'Negotiating the Nation', 441-2.
[182] Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 62.
[183] Interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014.
[184] 'CoD will reform Veterans Act if put in power: Ulenga', *NAMPA*, 21 July 2014. See also T. Haidula, 'Govt running like headless chickens – Ulenga', *The Namibian*, 7 July 2014; and 'Time for CoD to take over – Ulenga', *Namibian Sun*, 13 October 2014.
[185] 'Former SWATF and Koevoet members join Communist Party', *NAMPA*, 18 July 2013.
[186] Workers Revolutionary Party, 'Election Manifesto 2014', available at http://workersinternational.info/wp-content/uploads/WIRFI-Journal-14-November-2015.pdf, retrieved 11 October 2018.

The WRP's attack on SWAPO's legitimacy clearly drew on the more widely shared perception that SWAPO, contrary to its own claims and those of the UN and OAU, was not the 'sole and authentic' representative of the Namibian people but a 'tribal' organisation. In July 2013, Attie Beukes of the WRP declared that his party would sue the government over the N$36 million, and argued that Namibians who were conscripted into SWATF should be recognised as veterans because 'they were under colonial rule and did not voluntarily take up arms against [SWAPO]'.[187]

Similarly to NAMVET, the WRP also sought support from abroad when Beukes sent an open letter on behalf of former SWATF and Koevoet members to the former South African President F.W. de Klerk in November 2013. The party hoped that de Klerk might be able to assist the former soldiers who had been under his authority as Commander-in-Chief of apartheid South Africa's security forces. In the letter, Beukes referred to the alleged failure of Namibia's SWAPO-led government to reintegrate former SWATF and Koevoet members and its refusal to accord them veteran status, and asked about what had happened to the 'disputed N$36 million'.

In response, de Klerk's spokesperson said that the former president 'no longer has any locus standi in this matter and is unfortunately not in a position to intervene'. He advised 'those who feel that they have been treated unfairly … to make use of all the mechanisms available under the Namibian constitution – including your courts'. With regard to the N$36 million, the spokesperson recommended that the former soldiers take up the issue with the South African

[187] G. Lister, 'War of words over war veterans', *Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa*, 31 July 2013; E. Muraranganda, 'Koevoets turn to FW De Klerk', *Namibian Sun*, 24 November 2013.

President Jacob Zuma.[188] The WRP's double-edged move, made out of desperation, revealed the persistent ties of military identity and loyalty that some former soldiers have sought to maintain to South Africa's former regime. To SWAPO, the move exposed them as a remaining foreign threat.

In late November 2013, Nujoma was the first to respond, warning 'elements of Koevoet' in the Namibian civil service 'to stop sabotaging government programmes': 'we know you. We defeated you during the liberation struggle. We'll just deport you out of the country'.[189] For many former SWATF and Koevoet members, Nujoma's remarks confirmed their long-standing perception that SWAPO considered them neither full citizens nor not part of the Namibian nation but a threat that can be deported.[190] One former SWATF member expressed his concern: 'I don't know where we can be deported as we are fully Namibian'.[191] In an open letter addressed to all former SWATF and Koevoet members, the WRP responded by saying that 'this land called Namibia is not a private property of Sam Nujoma or Swapo, but it belongs to all of us'.[192]

Contesting SWAPO's Liberation Narrative

Nujoma's threats and former soldiers' subsequent reactions marked a shift in the rhetoric of NAMVET and the WRP away from the language of national

[188] E. Muraranganda, 'Koevoets turn to FW De Klerk', *Namibian Sun*, 24 November 2013.
[189] L. Cloete, 'Nujoma warns "elements of Koevoet" in civil service', *The Namibian*, 28 November 2013.
[190] See also 'Koevoet soldiers treated like aliens: Kaura', *The Namibian*, 8 November 2012.
[191] Interview with former soldier, Oshakati, 6 August 2014.
[192] L. Cloete, 'Nujoma dared to deport "elements of Koevoet"', *The Namibian*, 5 December 2013. For the reaction of another opposition party, the UPM, see: 'Deport Chinese, not Koevoet- UPM', *Namibian Sun*, 4 December 2013.

reconciliation toward the contestation of SWAPO's official history. As a result, the public disputes between SWAPO representatives and NAMVET and the WRP became increasingly aggressive. In the letter mentioned above, the WRP's leadership first rejected Nujoma's assertion that SWAPO had defeated SWATF and Koevoet during the war arguing that:

> the independence of the country was … achieved not through the barrel of the gun, but was negotiated – also not by Swapo but by the aforesaid parties [South Africa, Cuba, and Angola]. And let us face it, if we should talk about who defeated who between SWAFT [*sic*]/Koevoet and Plan, then certainly it was SWAFT [*sic*]/Koevoet who were superior on the battlefield.

The party even went a step further, and, referring to the ex-detainee issue, directly attacked Nujoma and SWAPO's leadership:

> what the Swapo death squad [referring to PLAN] … successfully carried out under Sam Nujoma's leadership … was to capture, incarcerate, torture, main [*sic*] and kill thousands of innocent Namibians to 1 April 1989. … Their favourite hobby was to entertain themselves by raping hundreds and hundreds of revolutionary-minded female freedom fighters. … This is the sordid legacy of Sam Nujoma and his fellow Swapo leadership ... Everything else the Swapo leadership politically tells Namibians are lies for they never fought in the liberation struggle, but had in fact betrayed it.[193]

Like many SWATF and Koevoet members, the WRP's leadership sought to refute SWAPO's claims to legitimacy as the liberator of the Namibian people through the armed struggle with two arguments. First, they argued that South Africa's security forces had roundly defeated PLAN, including in the incursion of early April 1989, and instead stressed the role of international diplomatic negotiations, such as the UN Resolution 435, in bringing about independence.[194] Second, to them, both SWAPO's treatment of the detainees and PLAN's incursion

[193] L. Cloete, "Nujoma dared to deport 'elements of Koevoet"', *The Namibian*, 5 December 2013.
[194] Interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 22 July 2014; interview with former soldier, Katima Mulilo, 28 July 2014. See also 'Ex-SWATF and Koevoet members demand veteran status', *Namibian Sun*, 13 April 2014.

demonstrated the organisation's incomprehensible and illegitimate violence perpetrated against the Namibian people throughout the war. In a column in the *Confidenté* newspaper in February 2014, Ndeunyema echoed the WRP's statements:

> The propaganda that SWAPO and its Alliance defeat[ed] SWATF/SADF was the only way they camouflaged their total failure to accomplish their mission of putting their foot in the streets of Windhoek. … I will be regarded as [an] enemy if I thank the former [Koevoet members] for saving the situation on the 1st April 1989, as the grave catastrophe could have been observed. The nine days war was planned by SWAPO leadership, who underestimate[d] the capability of [Koevoet] and powerful [SWATF]. Many Namibians died innocently during the nine day war.

With regard to former SWAPO detainees, Ndeunyema wrote:

> [w]hile there are many citizens who are still suffering from colonial memories, there are equal[ly] thousand Namibian[s] who are suffocated by the memories [of the] Lubango Dungeon, especially when they cross with [the] perpetrators in the street[s] of Namibia.[195]

To the former SWATF and Koevoet members, the ex-detainee issue and the events of early April 1989 decidedly demonstrated that there were perpetrators of violence on all sides of the war. In particular their references to the ex-detainee issue aimed to undermine SWAPO's narrative that its use of violence during the war was justified and heroic. As Metsola writes, 'former SWATF and Koevoet members [have questioned] Swapo's monopolization of the moral high ground in terms of how the nation's history is remembered and their own stigmatization in particular'.[196] In our interview, Peter Katjavivi of SWAPO said that it was 'politically impossible' to amend the Veterans Act to include former

[195] J. Ndeunyema, 'Our African Leaders Have Failed Us', *Confidenté*, 19 February 2014.
[196] Metsola, *Reintegration as Recognition*, 237-8.

SWATF and Koevoet members because 'it would put veterans of both sides in the same moral category'.[197]

The groups' letters constituted an exercise in moral equivalence: the former soldiers questioned why PLAN veterans were awarded government benefits under the Veterans Act when they had perpetrated illegitimate acts of violence against Namibians both at home and in exile. Put differently, SWAPO's claim that former SWATF and Koevoet members were not granted veteran status because they were 'killers' did not hold. This assertion also mirrors one of the main arguments behind the policy of national reconciliation's general amnesty, namely that the actions of all ex-combatants were to be forgiven and forgotten. In this sense, former SWATF and Koevoet members saw the Veterans Act as being in violation of the policy. Such claims of moral equivalence resemble those made by Renamo officials challenging Frelimo's political legitimacy, as Victor Igreja writes: 'Renamo also claim that they were not the only ones to have killed and destroyed, but that Frelimo also participated in the process of destruction and the harrowing of Mozambique'.[198]

Following consultative meetings about the 2014 general elections with both the DTA and the RDP, NAMVET declared its official support for the DTA in May 2014.[199] SWAPO's response to NAMVET's meeting with the RDP and the start of its campaign for the DTA was unsurprising. The Deputy Minister of Defence, Petrus Ilonga, stated: '[w]e have forgiven them and even recruited them for the jobs in our government, but we will not forget the atrocities they have

[197] Interview with Peter Katjavivi, Windhoek, 3 November 2016.
[198] Igreja, 'Memories as Weapons', 542.
[199] 'Ex-SWATF, Koevoet declare DTA support', *Namibian Sun*, 6 May 2014. See also 'Ex-Koevoet to campaign for DTA', *Namibian Sun*, 4 March 2014; E. Muraranganda, 'Ex-Koevoet are also war veterans – Venaani', *Namibian Sun*, 5 March 2014; 'HH meets with ex-colonial soldiers', *Namibian Sun*, 23 March 2014.

perpetuated against our people'. Ilonga further described opposition parties as 'agents of disunity' and 'tribalism'.[200] The retort by President Pohamba was more aggressive:

> I am asked to give veteran status to [former SWATF and Koevoet members]. 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 [i.e. back to war], 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. … They must go to South Africa, but I will tell [South African president Jacob] Zuma not to accept them.[201]

In the eyes of many former SWATF and Koevoet members, Pohamba's threats 'to go to the bush' were not just needlessly provocative but demonstrated that they were not being treated as equal citizens free to voice their grievances.[202] In a letter to *The Namibian* newspaper, a former SWATF soldier wrote:

> I listened to the hate speech by President Pohamba, particularily [*sic*] the manner in which he so conveniently tried to wage a war against the ex-SWATF and Koevoet members … Calling us back to the bush ... that was not only provocative but clearly gave us the reason why inequity, nepotism and tribialism [*sic*] continue in the public service.[203]

At a protest march in September 2014, Ndeunyema again contrasted Pohamba's aggressive threats with the peaceful demonstration of former SWATF and Koevoet members, ignoring previous threats by the Ex-SWATF and Koevoet Union:

> [w]e want to express our unhappiness about President Hifikepunye Pohamba's statement that if we are not happy with the way we are being

[200] 'Swapo says no to former SWATF', *The Namibian*, 7 April 2014; 'Ex-SWATF and Koevoet members demand veteran status', *Namibian Sun*, 13 April 2014.
[201] L. Jason, 'Ex-SWATF, Koevoet are not "war veterans"', *New Era*, 23 May 2014; 'Pohamba says no to ex-SWATF soldiers', *The Namibian*, 23 May 2014; P. Hilukilwa, 'Pohamba tells Zuma to ignore Koevoets', *Namibian Sun*, 22 May 2014. For reactions to Pohamba's remarks, see G. Lister, 'Political Perspective', *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014; 'The soldiers of oppression', *Namibian Sun*, 29 May 2014; 'SWATF conscripts were not mercenaries', *Namibian Sun*, 4 June 2014.
[202] Interview with former soldier, 17 August 2016; interview with former soldier, 18 August 2016; interview with former soldier, Windhoek, 4 November 2016.
[203] 'Going back to War?', *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014.

> treated in an independent Namibia … We are law-abiding citizens and will continue to air our legitimate grievances in a peaceful manner. … There are some people who would be happy if we were to resort to violence, but we will disappoint them by remaining peaceful. Contrary to some people's misperceptions, we are peace-loving and law-abiding citizens as we have proved for the past 24 years.[204]

As Igreja writes, similar criticism has been raised against Mozambique's ruling party: 'Frelimo deputies are permitted to make serious accusations against Renamo, but Renamo must not reciprocate'.[205]

Pohamba's statements drew wider criticism from beyond former soldiers, reflecting more widespread support for, or at least sympathy with, the latter's claims and grievances. Critics primarily focused on the ruling party's selective and hypocritical treatment of former 'collaborators': while it recognised wealthy businessmen and political and military leaders who had been close to the apartheid regime as veterans and heroes, it continued to stigmatise the black former rank-and-file of SWATF and Koevoet.[206] As Dlamini writes with regard to South Africa, 'to talk about collaboration under apartheid is to probe the nature of the post-apartheid political settlement'.[207]

The founder and editor of *The Namibian* and prominent anti-apartheid activist, Gwen Lister, asked:

> If the sins of Swapo are forgiven, then why not those of Swapo's erstwhile enemies? … Most of our people had family members who fought for the 'other side', and many have been 'forgiven' and accommodated in current government structures. Not so, however, the former Koevoets, according to President Pohamba and others.[208]

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[204] 'Former apartheid soldiers start 140km protest march today', *Namibian Sun*, 15 September 2014; 'Ex-soldiers continue their march under police watch', *Namibian Sun*, 17 September 2014. See also 'Namvet has no intention of going to war: Ndeunyema', *NAMPA*, 10 September 2014.
[205] Igreja, 'Memories as Weapons', 549.
[206] See also A.K. Shindjoba, 'What has Become of our President?', *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014.
[207] Dlamini, *Askari*, 8.
[208] G. Lister, 'Political Perspective', *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014.

The already heated debate following Pohamba's speech was further fuelled by two controversial government decisions involving two prominent Namibians who had been on the 'other side'.

First, in April 2014, it was revealed that the Ministry of Veterans Affairs had awarded veteran status to Frans Aupa Indongo, a multi-millionaire businessman. The revelation caused consternation, not just among former SWATF and Koevoet members, because of Indongo's political position during the liberation struggle. In the early 1970s, Indongo became a leading member in the National Democratic Party, which became part of the DTA in 1977.[209] From 1975 onwards, Indongo worked as a minister in the Ovamboland administration, and, like other businessmen at the time, would have directly depended on the South African government for supplies, liquor licenses, and transport.[210] In the late 1980s, he withdrew from politics in order to focus on his business but became a member of SWAPO just after independence. During a speech in July 1992, Nujoma referred to Indongo as a 'prominent SWAPO member'.[211]

Veterans Affairs Minister, Nickey Iyambo, defended the decision to award veteran status to Indongo by saying that, during the struggle, the businessman had donated vehicles and other items to SWAPO and had hid a prominent SWAPO leader who was wanted by the security forces. Iyambo further maintained that Indongo had been assigned a task but added that 'the details of what [he] did is not for me to say'. The minister's statements raised eyebrows

[209] According to Herbstein and Evenson, members of the National Democratic Party had close ties to the South African military's Civic Action programmes in Ovamboland: Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 113.
[210] See Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils Are Among Us*, 113.
[211] S. Nujoma, *Ten Years of Freedom, Peace and Prosperity: Speeches of the President of Namibia. Part 1: March 1990 – March 20, 1995* (Windhoek: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2000), 221.

because the previous week he had vowed to 'smoke out' and punish former members of South Africa's security forces who received veterans' benefits after joining SWAPO.[212]

At a later protest, Ndeunyema of NAMVET contrasted the post-war experience of former SWATF and Koevoet members with that of former South African-backed leaders, such as Indongo, who they had been tasked to protect against SWAPO during the war: 'Where are the people we protected in pre-independent Namibia? Where is Oswin Mukulu of Ombalantu [a South African-backed headman] who was protected by SWATF? We even protected 'Aupa' Frans Indongo. Where is he?'[213]

The second controversy arose two months later when it was reported that the government accorded official hero's status, and offered a state funeral and burial at the National Heroes' Acre to another 'apartheid collaborator', Chief Kuaima Riruako. In 1978, after the assassination of Chief Clemens Kapuuo, Riruako was elected Herero Paramount Chief and president of NUDO. That same year, he became vice chairman of the DTA, and opposed a UN-sponsored plan for independent elections because he feared a SWAPO victory.[214] From 1982 until 1991, Riruako served as the president of the DTA. Under his leadership, NUDO withdrew from the DTA in 2004 but, unlike Indongo, he remained a firm adversary of SWAPO until his death. Gwen Lister pointed out the 'double standard' of SWAPO and President Pohamba, who threatened former SWATF and Koevoet members but called the deceased Riruako his 'best friend':[215]

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[212] 'Govt defends Aupa Indongo's veteran status', *Namibian Sun*, 16 April 2014.
[213] C. Sasman, 'Rukoro sympathises with ex-soldiers', *Namibian Sun*, 12 February 2016.
[214] V.L. Tonchi, W.A. Lindeke, and J.J. Grotpeter, *Historical Dictionary of Namibia,* 2nd Edition (Lanham: The Scarescrow Press, 2012), 370.
[215] G. Lister, 'Political Perspective', *The Namibian*, 13 June 2014.

> As part of DTA, Riruako was a pivotal force in the anti-Swapo campaigns that also involved state-sponsored violence. During colonialism, the DTA encouraged people to join the apartheid South African army and its extensions such as Koevoet and the South West Africa Territory Force (SWATF). … Clarity is required. How does the Swapo-led government justify the total vilification of former apartheid foot soldiers (for example Koevoet and SWATF members), but glorify their leader/s?

Lister argued that the SWAPO-led government's decision was a 'shameless' strategy to put 'the State machinery into overdrive to rake in votes' in the upcoming elections.[216] McHenry Venaani of the DTA later remarked that '[i]t is is painful to see that we, as Namibians, have made peace with people that were commanding Koevoet and SWATF, but as a nation we cannot make peace with our own'.[217] In the *New Era* newspaper, a reader argued that:

> We are all Namibians, so when they get compensated they will not go and spend the money in South Africa. … After all, some puppets in the former South African administration – including chiefs and those that served in the cabinet – are living well and have received veteran status from the Namibian government, when we know for sure that they were puppets. So, Jabulani has a case. He has seen his masters getting recognition. [218]

For its critics, then, the government's decisions concerning Indongo and Riruako were indicative of the ruling party's pact with the old elites, and its discriminatory application of the policy of national reconciliation for political gain. To them, SWAPO's behaviour belied its own claims to legitimacy based on having fought against apartheid and its collaborators, and since having improved the lives of all Namibians, not just a select few that included powerful former collaborators.

In a last public challenge to SWAPO before the elections, NAMVET organised a

[216] G. Lister, 'From Villain to Hero in Death', *The Namibian*, 6 June 2014.
[217] 'Former Koevoet, SWATF petition parliament, Ombudsman', *New Era*, 25 February 2016.
[218] 'Should former Koevoet/SWATF be recognized as war veterans', *New Era*, 3 February 2016.

two-day march from Oshakati to Ondangwa and a subsequent public meeting.[219] The event aimed at publicly contesting Pohamba's argument that former SWATF and Koevoet would not be awarded veteran status because they were 'killers'. NAMVET representatives argued that PLAN fighters were equally guilty of killing 'our people', and presented a list of individuals who were allegedly abducted and killed by guerrillas during the war. Israel Katjaimo, a former SWATF soldier and NAMVET representative, asserted: 'If we are killers, then more so are the former PLAN fighters'.[220] In order to give its critiques more weight, NAMVET invited Phil ya Nangoloh of NamRights, and Samson Ndeikwila of the FFF to address the meeting.[221]

Both ya Nangoloh and Ndeikwila are prominent NGO leaders and former SWAPO detainees, and have been outspoken critics of the ruling party. Ya Nangoloh joined SWAPO in Angola in 1975, and was briefly imprisoned in 1976 after being accused of acting as a South African spy. The following year, SWAPO guerrillas allegedly killed his brother. He later defected from the liberation movement and returned to Namibia in 1986 where he headed the Parents' Committee, which was established to find out what had happened to the 'disappeared' exiles detained by SWAPO. In 1989, ya Nangoloh founded the Namibia Society for Human Rights (later NamRights).[222] Ndeunyema explained that NAMVET invited him 'to come and tell us what we should do when we are

[219] O. Shivute, 'Ex-Koevoet urged to challenge veterans' law', *The Namibian*, 5 November 2014.
[220] P. Hilukilwa, 'PLAN combatants committed atrocities too – Namvet', *Namibian Sun*, 4 November 2014.
[221] 'SWATF and Koevoet ex-combatants on protest walk in the North', *NAMPA*, 31 October 2014; P. Hilukilwa, 'Apartheid soldiers on the road again', *Namibian Sun*, 31 October 2014. Both ya Nangoloh and Ndeikwila first put me in contact with Jabulani Ndeunyema in 2014.
[222] C. Saunders, 'Life Histories from the Liberation Struggle', *Social Dynamics*, 32, 2 (2006), 230; Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 12. According to Cooper, ya Nangoloh 'is not an independent observer of SWAPO politics; indeed, his organisation sometimes appears to be more interested in attacking the ruling party than in constructing a human rights agenda': Cooper, *Parties, Factions and Votes*, 201.

being discriminated against and when we are being vilified publicly'.[223]

Ndeikwila became one of SWAPO's earliest political prisoners in Tanzania in the late 1960s when he and six other exiles were incarcerated for two years after they had voiced criticism of SWAPO's political functioning and military strategy.[224] After independence, Ndeikwila became the first chairperson of the Breaking the Wall of Silence Committee, which was formed to politically mobilise former detainees, relatives, and supporters. In 1998, Ndeikwila co-founded the FFF with a focus on grass-roots human rights education.[225] According to Ndeunyema, he was invited to share his own experiences as a former PLAN fighter.[226]

Speaking of both ex-PLAN fighters and former members of South Africa's security forces, Ndeikwila repeated the claim of moral equivalence, saying: 'We are all guilty in one way or another'. In his speech, Ndeikwila referred to the bomb attack on the First National Bank (FNB) branch in Oshakati on 17 February 1988, which killed 27 and wounded more than 40 people. Nobody ever claimed responsibility nor was anyone ever convicted for the attack but SWAPO and South African authorities blamed each other.[227] Ndeikwila asserted that the FNB bomb attack was carried out by a PLAN fighter, Leonard Sheehama, referring to a book by Bryan O'Linn who was Sheehama's defence lawyer during his trial for

[223] P. Hilukilwa, 'Apartheid soldiers on the road again', *Namibian Sun*, 31 October 2014.
[224] Dobell, 'Silence in Context', 378, n32; Williams, *Exile History*, 205, n593. See also S. Ndeikwila, *The Agony of Truth: Autobiography of Samson Tobias Ndeikwila* (Windhoek: Kuiseb, 2014).
[225] G. Kornes, *Whose Blood Waters Whose Freedom? Gegenerinnerungen in der namibischen Interniertenfrage* (Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg University, 2010), 58-67, 89-92; Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 14, n21.
[226] P. Hilukilwa, 'Apartheid soldiers on the road again', *Namibian Sun*, 31 October 2014.
[227] *The Namibian* claims that 'in 2002 a former SWATF member, Herman Kleynhans, told a local daily newspaper that he was responsible for the bombing of many places in Namibia, including the FNB branch in Oshakati' without any further sources or references: N. Smit, 'Oshakati bomb victims want compensation', *The Namibian*, 8 February 2012. Ya Nangoloh has made the same argument demanding compensation for the victims of the attack: N. Smit, 'Namrights wants compensation for Oshakati bomb victims', *The Namibian*, 21 February 2012.

another bomb attack in 1986.[228] Ndeikwila further criticised 'spiritual leaders' for spreading 'falsified history' by placing the blame on the wrong people, and called on former SWATF and Koevoet members to make public new information about the war:

> With such information available, Namibia can then embark on writing the policy of national reconciliation, because genuine reconciliation is always based on the truth. … When the painful past is narrated truthfully, such a past can allow itself to be buried finally. In the face of such truth, uncertainty about the present and the future will melt away on its own, and the vision for a new Namibia will emerge.[229]

Ndeikwila's call echoes not only the long-standing demands for 'genuine reconciliation' by other ex-detainees in Namibia but also the efforts of Renamo officials in Mozambique who, in the words of Igreja, 'have not officially established their own version of past violence [and thus] believe they can only do so by publicly calling for the creation of a truth commission on a national scale'.[230]

In his keynote speech, ya Nangoloh introduced NamRights as an impartial organisation, which had previously assisted ex-PLAN fighters in obtaining government recognition and financial compensation. Similarly to the WRP and NAMVET's claims of moral equivalence, Nangoloh emphasised that there were 'killers' on all sides, and argued that the former soldiers, like ex-PLAN fighters, were 'full citizens' of Namibia:

> according to President Pohamba, you are not entitled to recognition as war veterans presumably simply because you are 'killers' who have fought against PLAN combatants during the liberation struggle. The fact that ex-SWATF-Koevoet forces have committed numerous serious war-related crimes against real or perceived enemies cannot be denied! … However, we, ex-PLAN

[228] B. O'Linn, *Namibia: The Sacred Trust of Civilization: Ideal and Reality* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2010).
[229] P. Hilukilwa, 'PLAN combatants committed atrocities too – Namvet', *Namibian Sun*, 4 November 2014.
[230] Igreja, 'Memories as Weapons', 553.

> fighters, have also committed untold atrocities against, not only our real or perceived enemies, but also against our own comrades in exile as well as against numerous innocent civilians inside the country. These included unarmed women and children. The mass killings … have been committed by PLAN forces with consent, tolerance or acquiescence of the SWAPO leadership! … Like anyone else, you are full citizens of this country. Hence, both ex-PLAN and ex-SWATF-KOEVOET are entitled to be recognized as war veterans, exercising the same rights and enjoying the same benefits as all other war veterans. After all, herein lies the true meaning and significance that the war is truly over![231]

In short, NAMVET established relationships with NamRights and FFF precisely because their leaders articulated stories and critiques of SWAPO similar to those of former SWATF and Koevoet members. Given Ndeikwila and ya Nangoloh's background as ex-PLAN fighters and ex-detainees, NAMVET seemed to hope that these shared stories would be less easily dismissed as unpatriotic, apartheid-era propaganda or as exercises in moral equivalence of 'traitors' and 'collaborators'. These stories, however, have remained irreconcilable with the dominant official history.

The 2014 General Election Results

Ultimately, the efforts of NAMVET and the WRP were unsuccessful in challenging SWAPO's political dominance. With 86.7 per cent of votes, the ruling party's candidate, Hage Geingob, succeeded Hifikepunye Pohamba as the third president of Namibia. As Melber writes, Geingob 'entered office with a new metaphor [of] the "Namibian house", thereby deliberately reaching out beyond the party to

[231] P. ya Nangoloh, 'March and Meeting of Ex-SWATF/Koevoet Soldiers, Speech by Phil ya Nangoloh, Ex-PLAN Combatant and Executive Director of NamRights, Opuwo, September 21 2014', *Facebook*, 21 September 2014.

embrace all Namibians'.[232] In his inaugural address, Geingob stated: 'I take this oath on behalf of all Namibians and promise to serve all Namibians without exception. … Let us stand together in building this new Namibian house in which no Namibian will feel left out'.[233]

In the National Assembly, the ruling party won 80 per cent of votes while the DTA replaced the RDP as the largest opposition party with just short of 5 per cent of votes. To the surprise of many observers, the WRP obtained 1.5 per cent and thus two out of 96 seats in parliament.[234] A considerable number of the roughly 13,300 votes for the party appears to have come from former SWATF and Koevoet soldiers. NAMVET representative, Linus Tobias, explained that the government's decision not to award veteran status to former SWATF and Koevoet members 'caused [them] to regroup and express themselves through the DTA and the Workers Revolutionary Party'.[235]

Representatives of the WRP vowed to table two motions in parliament the next year asking the government to recognise former soldiers as veterans and pay them pension money: 'The Swapo government must rectify all this oppression they exercised on us and the pain and losses over the past 25 years'. In response, SWAPO Secretary-General Nangolo Mbumba cautioned them: 'I congratulate them for their victory, no matter how small. They worked hard. In

[232] H. Melber, 'From Nujoma to Geingob: 25 Years of Presidential Democracy', *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 18 (2015), 61.
[233] Republic of Namibia, *Inaugural Address by His Excellency Dr Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia at the 25th Independence Day Celebration and Swearing In of the 3rd President of the Republic of Namibia, Independence Stadium Windhoek, March 21* (Windhoek: 2015), 3, 8.
[234] T. Tjihenuna and D. Kisting, 'WRP exceeds expectations', *The Namibian*, 3 December 2014; Marxist Group, 'Credible Elections?', *The Namibian*, 12 December 2014.
[235] P. Hilukilwa, 'Namvet leader praises Geingob and Venaani', *Namibian Sun*, 3 December 2014.

Parliament there are ways of doing things and I will wait for them to say those things in Parliament'.[236]

In contrast to the WRP, NAMVET returned to striking a more conciliatory tone. Linus Tobias explained that many Namibians, even non-SWAPO members, had voted for Geingob because they saw him as a leader who would promote national unity: 'People feel that he is a unifier'.[237] This widespread perception among Namibians of Geingob was due to three reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, Geingob was closely involved in the conceptualisation and propagation of the policy of national reconciliation.[238] Second, given his Damara ethnic background, Geingob's election into the highest office signified a break with the political dominance of the Oshiwambo-speaking majority represented by the first two presidents, Nujoma and Pohamba.[239] Third, the new head of state was thought to be less close to Nujoma and his often aggressive attacks against 'traitors' and 'collaborators'.[240] In 1989, Geingob himself was allegedly detained in Zambia and about to be sent to the Lubango dungeons but was saved by the implementation of the UN Resolution 435.[241] In 2002, the then Prime Minister was removed from the Cabinet and SWAPO politburo after a falling out with Nujoma before returning to the ruling party three years later.[242] In other words, Geingob's own life story does not quite fit in with SWAPO's official history.

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[236] E. Muraranganda, 'Koevoet to wage war in Parliament', *Namibian Sun*, 3 December 2014.
[237] P. Hilukilwa, 'Namvet leader praises Geingob and Venaani', *Namibian Sun*, 3 December 2014.
[238] See, for example, also A.T. Kaure, 'Where Does the Policy of National Reconciliation Start And End?', *The Namibian*, 25 October 2016.
[239] Interview with Alois Gende, Rundu, 18 October 2016; T. Mongudhi, 'Never So Close', *Insight Namibia*, 2 May 2012.
[240] See also Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 180-1.
[241] Kornes, *Negotiating 'Silent Reconciliation'*, 19; 'Lubango Dungeons bring bad feelings', *Namibian Sun*, 12 February 2012; T. Mongudhi, 'Never So Close', *Insight Namibia*, 2 May 2012.
[242] G. Hopwood, *Guide to Namibian Politics* (Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2007), 138-9.

According to Ndeunyema, NAMVET had therefore 'high hopes' in the new president. Speaking of the ruling party's unbroken dominance and NAMVET's renewed approach toward the government, Ndeunyema conceded that 'it is cold outside of SWAPO'.[243]

Conclusion

Unlike their counterparts in the rest of southern Africa, former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia have not disappeared. Since independence in 1990, some of them have established different associations, and have repeatedly demanded compensation, recognition, and benefits by the SWAPO-led government. As I have argued, the remarkable fact that they have been able to politically mobilise and publically voice their claims and grievances is due to two main factors. On the one hand, the approach of SWAPO has been characterised by considerable restraint and efforts of reconciliation as well as disregard towards their former enemies who have not posed a serious security or political threat. On the other hand, former SWATF and Koevoet members have remained fractured along regional and ethnic lines but have enjoyed significant sympathy and support from opposition parties, civil society organisations, as well as broader segments of the Namibian population, particularly outside the ruling party's historical strongholds.

Similarly to groups of ex-detainees, the former soldiers and their supporters have sought to legitimate their claims by tapping into more widespread

[243] Interview with Jabulani Ndeunyema, Windhoek, 4 November 2016.

narratives of national reconciliation, and of regional and ethnic discrimination. At the same time, they have sought to challenge SWAPO's claims to legitimacy as the 'sole and authentic representative', and heroic liberator of the Namibian nation and its people. In doing so, they have contested the ruling party's conception of citizenship and its associated rights and benefits based on participation in the liberation struggle, as evident in the formulation of the Veterans Act of 2008.[244] The post-war trajectory of these soldiers has thus differed significantly from their erstwhile colleagues who left to South Africa at Namibia's independence, as we will see in the following chapter.

[244] See also Metsola, 'The Struggle Continues?', 594.

Chapter 7 – Citizenship and Belonging of Black Former 32 Battalion and Koevoet Members in Post-Apartheid South Africa

In early 2015, international media reported that the Nigerian government had hired several hundred South African mercenaries, including former Koevoet and 32 Battalion members, for its fight against Boko Haram.[1] In May 2006, authorities in the DRC arrested 19 South Africans, most of them former 32 Battalion members, on charges of conspiring to mount a coup against President Joseph Kabila.[2] On 7 March 2004, a group of about 70 suspected mercenaries – the majority of them black former Koevoet and 32 Battalion members – was arrested when their plane landed at Harare airport. Zimbabwean authorities accused the men of being involved in a plot to overthrow the President of Equatorial Guinea, Obiang Nguema.[3] The list goes on, and raises the question: how did former Koevoet and 32 Battalion members, many of them nearing retirement age, end up fighting as mercenaries around the globe?

In answering this question, I explore the consequences of the transnational wars and military cultures that these soldiers participated in for their citizenship and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that the former soldiers, and often their families, have become 'strangers' everywhere. The post-liberation governments in South Africa and Namibia have sought to exclude them

[1] See, for example, I. Tharoor, 'South African mercenaries join Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram', *The Washington* Post, 12 March 2015; A. Nossiter, 'Mercenaries Join Nigeria's Military Campaign Against Boko Haram', *The New York Times*, 13 March 2015; D. Smith, 'South Africa's ageing white mercenaries who helped turn tide on Boko Haram', *The Guardian*, 14 April 2015.
[2] B. Tromp and G. Hosken, 'Kashala is wanted by police in Kinshasa', *Independent Online*, 26 May 2006.
[3] See, for example, T. Amupadhi, '"Namibians among mercenaries' detained in Zimbabwe', *The Namibian*, 10 March 2004; C. Terblanche and P. Fabricus, 'Koevoet, 32 Battalion and the coup plot…', *Independent Online*, 14 March 2004; T. Amupadhi, 'Namibian "mercenaries" named', *The Namibian*, 15 March 2004. For a journalistic account of the coup plot, see A. Roberts, *The Wonga Coup: Simon Mann's Plot to Seize Oil Billions in Africa* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

through various bureaucratic and legal means. The former soldiers, in turn, have struggled to claim citizenship and belonging due to various issues related to documentation, language, and education.

In the early 1990s, South Africa became a major recruitment pool of mercenaries for both domestic and international private military companies, despite anti-mercenary legislation, such as the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act of 1998.[4] Many of these mercenaries had served in the security forces but resigned as these institutions, particularly the SADF, began to be 'downsized' and transformed in the post-apartheid era.[5] As William Reno writes, these former soldiers had become 'a political liability for South Africa's elected government', and began 'seeking their own fortunes as South Africa's military [shrank and was] assigned new tasks'.[6]

Prime among these former members of apartheid-era South Africa's security forces were the black former members of 32 Battalion and Koevoet who, often with their families, had relocated from Namibia to South Africa in 1989 and 1990. Authors such as Khareen Pech and Peter Singer have argued that these former soldiers became mercenaries because they were 'often not ready for the

[4] See, for example, M. Malan and J.K. Cilliers, *Mercenaries and Mischief: The Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 1997); R. Taljaard, 'Implementing South Africa's Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act', in A. Bryden and M. Caparini (eds.), *Private Actors and Security Governance* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 167-86. The rise of the private military industry after the end of the Cold War, both in South Africa and globally, has of course been extensively studied: see, for example, W. Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999); P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); D.D. Avant, *The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also M. Eichler, 'Citizenship and the Contracting Out of Military Work: From National Conscription to Globalized Recruitment', *Citizenship Studies*, 18, 6-7 (2014), 600-14.

[5] P. Lock, 'Africa, Military Downsizing and Growth in the Security Industry', in J.K. Cilliers and D. Fraser (eds.), *Peace, Profit or Plunder? The Privatisation of Security in War-Torn African Societies* (Pretoria: Institute of Security Studies, 1999), 11-36. See also R. Abrahamsen and M.C. Williams, *Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Between 1994 and 2004, the South African military lost about 58,700 members, of whom about 37,200 were former SADF soldiers: Mashike, 'Age of Despair', 447.

[6] Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, 62.

transition to civilian life', had 'few other marketable skills' than military ones, or were even 'still hungry for combat'.[7] My aim here is to provide a more nuanced understanding by focusing on questions of citizenship and belonging of the former soldiers and their families. I argue that their employment in the private security and military industry is the result of two interrelated factors: the post-war continuity of organisation and power relations among former military units; and the former soldiers' social and economic isolation in South Africa.[8] These factors are the direct legacies of the transnational war and military cultures that the former soldiers had been part of.

During South Africa's transition, these former soldiers became stranded in a country whose former regime they had fought for, and where they had sought refuge but felt they did not truly belong as they were unable to shed the labels of 'traitors' and 'mercenaries' that had followed them.[9] At the same time, they found it difficult, if not impossible, to go back to Namibia or Angola.[10] In the words of João Mucaba, a former 32 Battalion member: 'When we came from Angola, we didn't have [a] passport but now, if we want to go to Namibia, we need [one]. [Before,] our passport was our FNLA uniform'.[11] One interviewee explained the soldiers' dilemma after their move to South Africa: 'South Africans don't like us. When we go back to Angola, they say, "You're South Africans now". We have nowhere to go'.[12] Another interviewee described their situation more

[7] K. Pech, 'Executive Outcomes – A Corporate Conquest', in Cilliers and Fraser (eds.), *Peace, Profit or Plunder?*, 81; P.W. Singer, 'Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry and Its Ramifications for International Security', *International Security*, 26, 3 (2001), 193.
[8] These points are alluded to in Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, 62; and Singer, 'Corporate Warriors', 194.
[9] On the persistence of past loyalties in the case of Zimbabwe, see Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation'.
[10] See also Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare', 1360.
[11] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[12] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016.

metaphorically: 'When there is a river, the fish go with the flow but in a dried-up river the fish get stranded and die'.[13]

My interviewees' accounts of their lives in South Africa have been shaped by a deep sense of abandonment and betrayal by both the former South African government and their white former leaders.[14] By invoking images of family, such as 'elders' and 'twins', they argued that their former leaders had a moral obligation to them, which they had betrayed.[15] One former soldier expressed his anger and disappointment:

> Our elders, who we worked for, … are the same people who do not care about us. Honestly speaking, they are treating us as if we did not work with them. ... Now it even brings me to tears. We worked with them but now they are acting like our enemies. I can say that they betrayed us.[16]

The former soldiers' sense of betrayal by their one-time leaders has been deepened by the disparity of wealth and opportunity between them – a bitter reality of the post-apartheid political settlement similar to that of Namibia discussed in Chapter 6. As one interviewee put it: 'nowadays, [our white former leaders] own security companies, they have big farms, they own petrol stations but for us, who were in front of the bullets, there is nothing'.[17] This disparity led many of my interviewees to argue that they were being unjustly punished for their alliance with the apartheid regime. In the words of another interviewee:

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[13] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[14] On the sense of betrayal of white former soldiers in South Africa, see, for example, G. Baines, '"South Africa's Vietnam?" Literary History and Cultural Memory of the Border War', *Safundi*, 5, 3 (2004), 9; Baines, *South Africa's 'Border War'*, 40.
[15] On family metaphors in African politics, see, for example, M.G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and M.G. Schatzberg, 'Power, Legitimacy and "Democratisation" in Africa', *Africa*, 63, 4 (1993), 445-61. Also compare to Schafer, *Soldiers at Peace: Veterans and Society after the Civil War in Mozambique*, 156-9; and Bolliger, 'Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers', 206-7.
[16] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[17] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

> This situation is giving us pain. If it's only the blacks who did wrong, why didn't the whites do anything wrong? It is only us who are suffering. I have never seen anything like this. If you have twins, why would you beat only one? You must beat the two.[18]

In addition, all of my interviewees – none of whom still served in the military or the police – felt that the financial compensation for their service was inadequate given the sacrifice and suffering they had experienced. As one former soldier put it:

> As you can see, we are suffering together with our children and there is no one to help. We worked for many years but then we got nothing. … That is my journey. I grew up in a war but I got nothing.[19]

In principle, former 32 Battalion soldiers would be eligible for government benefits under the South African Military Veterans Act of 2011, which recognises veterans from all sides. However, with the exception of one former soldier who was given housing, all of my interviewees who had applied for benefits said they had received no benefits. According to them, the Department of Military Veterans deliberately held up or ignored their applications because they had fought in the SADF both in Angola and in South Africa after the unit relocated there in 1989. 32 Battalion's relocation process to South Africa, I suggest, must be understood in the context of the unit's history, particularly the transnational recruitment of black Angolan soldiers, and its military culture that extended to the soldiers' families.

[18] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[19] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.

'Now that the War is Over': 32 Battalion's Relocation to South Africa

In the run-up to Namibia's independence process in 1989, the SADF decided to relocate the members of 32 Battalion and their families to South Africa, more specifically to a military base at Pomfret, a remote and abandoned asbestos mining town in the North-West Province close to the South African border with Botswana.[20] The isolated location of Pomfret, which the South African government bought to house the battalion, was a deliberate choice. As Colonel Mucho Delport, Officer Commanding of the unit, explained in an interview with the military newspaper *Uniform*: 'We don't want the unit in the public eye too much'.[21] Colonel Gert Nel, a former Officer Commanding of 32 Battalion, concurred:

> The powers-to-be at this stage, being Pretoria, wanted a place where they could be isolated … you know the politics weren't so very good at this stage … we didn't want them to be hurt … so you have to put them where they were actually isolated, and not near a place where you could get … other people getting there easily and doing damage.[22]

According to my interviewees, they were not given much information about the relocation process.[23] One former soldier recounted that General Geldenhuys had come to visit their base in Namibia and explained to them that 'politics have changed [and] SWAPO will take over their country [but] fear not because we are

[20] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1098; '32 Battalion to move to Northern Cape', *The Namibian*, 18 April 1989; 'SA buys a village for 32 Battalion', *The Namibian*, 20 February 1990.
[21] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1104.
[22] Interview with Gert Nel, Centurion, October 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.1.
[23] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

all going to South Africa because we all belong to South Africa'.[24] Meriam Nainda remembered that Geldenhuys told them:

> Now that the war is over, because you were all good soldiers, we are taking you back to South Africa. You are not going to be at war anymore. You will be able to rest with your families. There is no war in South Africa. You will get homes, and everything. You can't stay in Namibia, we fought against them [SWAPO] and they will not receive you well here.[25]

When I asked one interviewee how he felt about leaving Namibia, he replied, 'I did not feel a thing. At the time, the Colonel called us and said, "I give you guys a week to organise your life. Go back to your families and see if you want to go to South Africa or stay"'.[26] In other words, the soldiers were given the choice of either going to Pomfret or demobilising in Namibia where their former enemy, SWAPO, was expected to come to power.[27] While some soldiers and their families decided to stay behind in Namibia, one interviewee said that he and the vast majority of his colleagues felt that they had little choice but to go to South Africa:

> When we left Namibia, we felt we really had to come to South Africa. We were serving as a South African Defence Force [unit] so we had no choice. Some soldiers did not want to come [but] I came to South Africa because I decided to continue working.[28]

Similarly, Meriam Nainda explained that, by that time, they had become completely reliant on the SADF: 'When we … were in Namibia, we lived there but we were dependent on South Africa. Our visas, everything, was South African.

[24] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[25] Interview with Meriam Nainda, Pomfret, April 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.45.
[26] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 7 July 2016.
[27] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 327.
[28] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016.

That's why they … organised a new life for us here at Pomfret'.[29] Daniel Kambinda said that 'the fear [of SWAPO] brought us here' to South Africa.[30]

Together with all other SADF units, the vast majority of the about 1,370 soldiers and their families withdrew from Namibia between March and July 1989.[31] According to one former soldier, each week, one company of the battalion and their families were transported via train from Grootfontein to Vryburg and then with buses to Pomfret.[32] Around 700 families initially had to live in ten separate 'tent towns' while the South African government, more specifically its Public Works Department, constructed 800 houses.[33]

Soon after their arrival, the Department of Home Affairs, likely after pressure from the SADF's top leadership, granted South African citizenship to the soldiers and their families. Some soldiers opted to retain their Angolan citizenship, and were immediately discharged from the army and had to return to Angola.[34] As part of the citizenship application process, about 60 soldiers and 300 women and children, originally from the Kavango region in northern Namibia, were found to already have Namibian citizenship. According to Nortje, the fact that they did not have Angolan but Namibian citizenship meant that they did not qualify for South African citizenship, and were repatriated to Namibia.[35] The

[29] Interview with Meriam Nainda, Pomfret, April 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.45.
[30] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[31] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1102-5.
[32] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016; '32 Battalion Boost for Northern Cape', *The Namibian*, 10 November 1989.
[33] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 328; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1104.
[34] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 329.
[35] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1110. For their repatriation, see also R. Munamava, '32 is Back', *The Namibian*, 20 December 1989.

remaining soldiers and their families received their identity documents two years later in July 1992.[36]



Figure 4: Street sign in Pomfret referring to the SADF's Operation Askari in December 1983 in which 32 Battalion was involved. Photographed by the author in August 2016.

From their new base at Pomfret, the battalion was deployed in various operations, often assisting the South African Police: to patrol the border with Zimbabwe; to combat unrest in the Bantustans, such as Gazankulu; and to prevent violent clashes in townships, primarily between supporters of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), across South Africa.[37] At the same time, 32

[36] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1110; Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 329. See also Gordon, *Forged in Battle?*, 194-5.
[37] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1116-20; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016. See also Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 333-6.

Battalion soldiers also engaged in more covert or clandestine operations of the military and police, often referred to as third force activities.[38]

These new operations required different tactics than the fighting in the Angolan bush, which the men were experienced in and used to. In a rather dismissive and patronising tone, Nortje writes that they first had to learn that 'in the urban environment they could not shoot at whoever they considered to be enemy'. In addition to new tactical training, the soldiers had to attend compulsory weekly 'communication periods' during which they were briefed about the political parties and political situation in South Africa.[39] Some soldiers, such as one interviewee, were initially taken by surprise by their new role and training:

> [In 1989,] they said, 'You are now going to South Africa to rest'. We said, 'Ok'. Then we got here and we started training on … how to get inside a house. [We asked ourselves,] 'How are we going to rest when we are now training how to get inside houses? [Is it] because this training is relevant for the civil war?! Well, we are soldiers so we are going to do it. We do what officials tell us to do'. … [In 1992,] at the base, they said that we had to go to the city [Johannesburg] the next week. We asked, 'What is happening there?' They said, 'You are now going to learn how to keep peace'. So we trained … and went to the city where the South Africans were burning each other because of the politics. Inkatha was burning the ANC, and the ANC was burning Inkatha. So we had to separate the two parties.[40]

In line with the SADF's official rhetoric at the time, all my interviewees referred to their operations as 'peacekeeping'.[41] One man, for example, said that: 'We came here to keep the peace. We went to protect the people. … We went to fetch

[38] Ellis, 'The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force', 270; Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare', 1356.
[39] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1112.
[40] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[41] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016. See also R. Torr, 'Troops bring calm to townships', *Paratus*, 41, 10 (1990), 40-41.

the bodies of the people who died and were left … when there were riots'.[42] Another man recounted:

> When Mandela was to be released [from prison], the UN and the Blue Helmets … were not invited to keep the peace. We, 32 Battalion, were the ones invited to keep the peace … The people of South Africa by that time were hiding [weapons] in their places [and] we were working with the police to take the guns from those people [and] bring them to the military base.[43]

One interviewee acknowledged that 'some people found it very difficult coming from the war in the bush and [to then] do peace keeping in the streets in South Africa'.[44] Referring to their peacekeeping operations, one man said that at the time they 'had no idea of what was going on'.[45]

The soldiers' difficulties with their new task became tragically obvious in the events in the Phola Park squatter camp, a pro-ANC area in the Thokoza township near Johannesburg, on 8 April 1992. That day, two people were shot dead and more than 100 injured after unknown gunmen attacked a 32 Battalion platoon and wounded one soldier. During the retaliatory raid on the camp, soldiers assaulted over 40 people, and allegedly raped or sexually assaulted several women.[46] The ANC immediately condemned the 'continued deployment of foreign mercenaries', and demanded that 'all mercenary forces be confined to base during this transition period, pending their formal disbandment and return

[42] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[43] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[44] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[45] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 3 July 2016. For the poor transfer of the security forces' experiences of the so-called 'border wars' into the urban landscape of South Africa, see Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare', 1360.
[46] TRC, *Volume 2*, 591; Republic of South Africa, *Interim Report on the Conduct of Members of 32 Battalion: 8 April 1992* (Pretoria: Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation / Goldstone Commission, 10 June 1992). These were not the first accusations of this kind against members of 32 Battalion: W. Annecke, 'Women and the War in Natal', *Agenda*, 6, 7 (1990), 14, 19.

to their countries of origin'.[47] To them, the 32 Battalion soldiers were foreign soldiers who did not belong in South Africa, no matter their citizenship status.

On 19 June 1992, an interim report by the Goldstone Commission found that the soldiers had acted in a manner 'completely inconsistent with the function of a peacekeeping force and, in fact, became perpetrators of violence'. However, nobody was criminally charged. The Commission further recommended that '32 Battalion should not again be used for peace-keeping duties anywhere in South Africa'.[48] The Chief of the Army, General Meiring, however, responded that the 'controversial 32 Battalion' would continue to be deployed to townships, and that there was 'no possibility of [it] being disbanded or returned to Angola'.[49]

'Like Someone Close to Us Had Passed On': The Disbandment of 32 Battalion

On 14 July 1992, President F.W. de Klerk announced that 32 Battalion, together with Koevoet and 31 Battalion, would be disbanded and integrated into other units of the SADF.[50] The South African government likely came to the decision in response to mounting pressure to disband the units following the Phola Park incident, and the alleged involvement of former Koevoet members in the so-

[47] African National Congress, *Statement on Battalion 32's Rampage Through Phola Park* (Marshalltown: Department of Information and Publicity, 10 April 1992).
[48] TRC, *Volume 2*, 591; Republic of South Africa, *Interim Report on the Conduct of Members of 32 Battalion*.
[49] Quoted in Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1157.
[50] G. Hopwood, 'The End of Koevoet', *The Namibian*, 16 July 1992.

called 'Boipatong massacre' on 17 June 1992 (see below).[51] The ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, criticised the announcement as a 'smokescreen' while the PAC joined the ANC's previous calls for the expulsion of the units' members from South Africa. The Namibian government was quick to declare that it regarded the Namibian citizens in those units as mercenaries who could face legal charges for enlisting in a foreign army if they returned to the country.[52]

To the members of 32 Battalion, the announcement came as a shock, especially because of the SADF leadership's previous promises to the contrary. João Mucaba remembered the initial confusion and uncertainty when he and his colleagues were first informed about the announcement:

> [We were told,] 'Listen, President Mandela is in the United States of America and he said that from today the 32 Battalion doesn't exist anymore. It is finished. 'Wow! And now what is going to happen to us?', we asked. 'I also don't know. You are Colonel Delport's soldiers. It was your Colonel who sent this message. Someone gave him the message. I also don't know anything. The General came here, but he didn't talk with me. I don't know what is going to happen to all of you. I don't know anything'.[53]

During a news report by the South African Broadcasting Agency (SABC) on the battalion's disbandment and the soldiers' potential return to Angola, one soldier explained that 'I haven't got any plan to go back to Angola because I haven't got any future [there] … I've got a few of my family here … and all of them [were] born in South Africa'. When asked if he planned to return to Angola, another soldier explained: 'I am now a South African citizen [so] I would love to stay in this country'.[54] In this context of uncertainty, other soldiers began to resign from

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[51] Africa Watch, *South Africa: Half-Hearted Reform* (New York: Africa Watch, 1993), 65; Foster, 39-40.
[52] 'ANC disputes FW's motives' and 'No welcome for mercenaries', *The Namibian*, 16 July 1992.
[53] Interview with João Mucaba, Pomfret, March 2005, available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.20.
[54] '1st Announcement of the disbandment of SADF: 32 Battalion on SABC News (26 March 1993)', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOwCKrqpaCI, retrieved 14 November 2017.

the SADF to join newly established private military companies, such as Executive Outcomes, that offered salaries many times higher than their military pay.[55]

On 23 March 1993, 32 Battalion was officially disbanded. Echoing his colleagues' sentiments, one interviewee recounted how on that day,

> No one felt well. Everyone was depressed. … We asked ourselves, 'What is going to happen to us, our families, and our children?' … It was like someone close to us had passed on.[56]

Over the following months, the majority of troops were integrated into the revived 2 South African Infantry (2 SAI) Battalion based at Pomfret, while others were transferred to other SADF units across South Africa, such as 1 Parachute Battalion in Bloemfontein, the Reconnaissance Commandos in Phalaborwa, and the 61 Mechanised Battalion at the Army Battle School in Lohatla.[57] As these new postings did not accommodate wives and children, the soldiers had to leave their families behind at Pomfret, and adapt to a changing military culture.[58] In the words of many interviewees, the transfers 'divided' the unit, its soldiers, and their families.[59] As one interviewee put it, 'we were divided and distributed. As we were soldiers, some had to go to Phalaborwa, others to this side [Lohatla], and others to Bloemfontein'.[60] One interviewee asserted that they were deliberately 'separated' because, after decades of fighting, 'we only thought about war'.[61]

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[55] H.M. Howe, 'Private Security Forces and African Stability: The Case of Executive Outcomes', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 2 (1998), 311; Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, 103.
[56] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[57] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers,* 345; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1161-73; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[58] Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers,* 345.
[59] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[60] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016.
[61] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.

In late 1995, the new SANDF started a process of so-called 'rationalisation', which meant the integration of the SADF with the armed wings of the ANC and PAC. As part of the process, soldiers were offered severance packages to voluntarily resign from the military.[62] These packages included a member's pension, leave payout, and an extra lump sum calculated based on current salary, rank, and years of service. According to Nortje, it was allegedly only then that the former commanders of 32 Battalion 'realised that the [black former rank-and-file] had never had any pension or medical benefit payment deducted from their salaries and therefore were not entitled to any pension benefits even though they qualified for them'.[63] In addition, they could also no longer benefit from the SANDF's medical services, which had previously been free for them. Despite the advice from some former leaders not to take the severance packages before these issues were sorted out, most of the former 32 Battalion soldiers took the money and resigned from the SANDF between 1996 and 1999. Most of my interviewees received severance packages ranging between R70,000 and R120,000 with a few being paid between R150,000 and R200,000.[64] Nortje claims that 'many of [them] did not listen to [their leaders'] advice; they just saw the money'.[65]

According to many of my interviewees, their decision to take the severance package was marred by uncertainty and confusion.[66] There were rumours about former soldiers receiving up to R500,000 while some expected to be paid R2-3

[62] L.B. van Stade, 'Rationalisation in the SANDF: The Next Challenge', *African Security Review*, 6, 2 (1997), 37-44; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[63] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1177.
[64] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016; Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 30 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 7 August 2016; interview former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016; interview former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[65] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1177.
[66] Interview with white nurse of 32 Battalion, via Skype, 26 September 2016.

million.[67] Yet others claimed they signed their resignation documents without knowing how much money they would receive, and only did so because they believed the severance package was a literal package of cash.[68] Many further explained that they feared an uncertain future in the SANDF after the ANC had won South Africa's general elections on 27 April 1994.[69]

For many soldiers, their limited education and language skills – the legacy of 32 Battalion's transnational history and military culture – were a significant issue, as one interviewee explained:

> At the beginning of [South Africa's] independence, there was controversy and politics. They used people to mobilise against us, to take us out of the military. Others said: 'You can't write in English, you can't write in Afrikaans. The new army is only for people who studied. It's better if you guys take the package'. When we thought about it, we said: 'It's better not to lose everything and sign the package'.[70]

Similarly, another former soldier recounted:

> The leaders we were working with said: 'This [ANC] government is going to take over. We are no longer taking care of you. You are not going to like it. You should take the package'. … We had to take that package because if we didn't, we would have been chased away and our service would have been for nothing, we wouldn't have been paid.[71]

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Simon Mann, a former British Army officer who had led the group accused of the coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea in 2004, claimed that 'a large number' of mercenaries hired from the former SADF had been told that their pensions were 'being torn up' because the ANC was coming

[67] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[68] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 4 August 2016.
[69] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016; interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 7 July 2016.
[70] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[71] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 25 May 2016.

to power.[72]

The soldiers' fears of not being paid anything and their perception of not truly belonging in South Africa were further heightened by rumours that the ANC had been negotiating with the Angolan government to repatriate all Angolan members of 32 Battalion back to Angola after the elections.[73] Nortje asserts that the repatriation plans were 'most probably not a rumour' citing a 1992 interview with Major General Antonio Dos Santos of the Angolan military in the *O Século* newspaper in which he said that 'the integration of 32 Battalion is consistent with the creation of Angola's new national army', and that 'the Luanda government is pressing ahead with negotiations with South Africa for the demobilization and return of Battalion 32 members'.[74]

In December 1996, the SANDF announced that the 2 SAI Battalion would be relocated to Zeerust, 300km east of Pomfret, where there was no housing for soldiers' families. When the battalion began to relocate in 1999, about 450 soldiers took the severance package and resigned from the SANDF so as to be able to stay in Pomfret.[75] One interviewee explained:

> The ones who stayed in Pomfret are in a very difficult situation now. In 1999, [the last commander to stay] gave us a warning: 'The whites are going to leave this place. The troops are going to move to Zeerust. … When the money from the military is finished, Pomfret is going to be suffering'. … There was a moment when the troops left and the money was finished the government turned his back and switched off the lights.[76]

Following the revelations that former 32 Battalion members from Pomfret had been involved in the alleged coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea in March 2004,

[72] D. Smith, 'South Africa's ageing white mercenaries who helped turn tide on Boko Haram', *The Guardian*, 14 April 2015.
[73] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1173-4.
[74] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1142. It is unclear why the Angolan government allegedly sought to integrate 32 Battalion into the state's new armed forces.
[75] Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1178-9.
[76] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

the community at Pomfret came under scrutiny by the South African government. In early 2005, SANDF General, Bobo Moerani, informed the community that they would be removed and the town demolished, citing safety reasons because of contamination from the nearby asbestos mine.[77] According to the town's inhabitants, the government had other motives. Domingos Kapanga, a former 32 Battalion member and local councillor, argued that 'it is not asbestos that is stopping us from staying here. … They say the people are highly militarily trained and they become a problem for security'.[78]

At the same time, it was reported that the South African government was again negotiating with Angolan officials about the repatriation of former 32 Battalion members and their families to Angola, this time on a voluntary basis.[79] Since 2005, the government has repeatedly threatened to evict and move the Pomfret community to social housing in Zeerust and the provincial capital, Mafikeng. In 2014, the local municipality went even further when it cut off Pomfret's electricity, and soon after only started to supply water via trucks once a week.[80] To my interviewees, the government's intent to remove them was obvious, as one former soldier explained:

> What the government wants to do is [to move us] by force, by taking the electricity. The water comes once in week in a truck, sometimes they do not

[77] J. Pearce, 'Future of "mercenary town" threatened', *BBC News Website*, 16 May 2005; A. McIntyre, 'Questions and Concerns about the Planned Relocation of the Citizens of Pomfret, North West Province: Forced Removal?', 2, available at https://sa-soldier.com/data/09-SADF-links/UsedPDFs/SOSinPomfret.pdf, retrieved 14 November 2017; Nortje, *The Terrible Ones*, 1178-9, 1192.
[78] Pearce, 'Future of "mercenary town" threatened'.
[79] 'Fighters on wrong side of history', *BBC News Website*, 16 May 2005; Pearce, 'Future of "mercenary town" threatened'
[80] Claassen, *'The Fathers of the Revolution'*, 96-101; Y. Omar and T. Taylor, 'Forgotten and alone in Pomfret', *Sunday Independent*, 27 September 2011; S. Masondo, 'Pomfret: The sins of the fathers', *City Press*, 15 January 2017; 'Angolan apartheid troops battle to survive in SA', *eNCA*, 22 May 2017.

> come and give us water once in two weeks. Do you know why they do this? It is to demoralise us and to make us move. It's their politics.[81]

In the eyes of the South African government, the former soldiers appear to have remained a foreign threat with little to no claims of belonging to South Africa. The former soldiers, like their counterparts in Koevoet, have often lacked the practical skills of literacy and language necessary to be soldiers and citizens in post-apartheid South Africa.

In the following section, I discuss the move of several hundred former Koevoet members and their families to South Africa in 1990. Unlike 32 Battalion, they were not officially relocated but their post-war trajectory resembles that of the community at Pomfret.

'SWAPO Will Win': Koevoet Members' Move to South Africa

In late October 1989, the last Koevoet teams were officially disbanded and its members discharged. Before Koevoet was demobilised, the SAP had promised to relocate all Namibian members, estimated between 2,500 and 3,000 in number, to the South African town of Van Zylsrus at the border with Botswana.[82] Just weeks later on 11 November 1989, their former enemy, SWAPO, won Namibia's first general elections. Both before and during the elections, Koevoet had engaged in widespread intimidation and violence against SWAPO supporters,

[81] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016.
[82] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016; Stiff, The *Covert War*, 479-80; Kamongo and Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sands*, 28; C. Kotze, 'Koevoet "won't be left in the lurch"', *The Star*, 4 January 1990.

and, according to Peter Stiff, many of the unit's members were 'stunned' by the party's overwhelming victory.[83]

To some of my interviewees, SWAPO's victory came as a surprise, if not a shock.[84] Others, such as one man, said they knew SWAPO would win.[85] One interviewee vividly recalled a briefing right before the elections:

> this certain white man who was my colleague … called us one morning. He told us that, 'Brothers, you can see that now is the time for elections. There will be elections in this country but SWAPO will win. As for us white people, we are going back to South Africa. We don't know if the people from SWAPO will kill you'. So we got very scared and frightened [and] our former white colleagues and leaders went back to South Africa. And back then, we didn't know where South Africa was. Then we just stayed home and waited for what SWAPO would do to us after the elections.[86]

In the aftermath of the elections, as he continued to recall, the future of the former soldiers remained uncertain:

> After SWAPO won the elections, they started telling us about their laws. … They also told the people, 'We have forgiven one another. We used to fight. Now the war is over and we are in power. There is no inhabitant or former SWAPO soldier who will kill or beat or do any violence to an ex-Koevoet soldier. We will stay in this country because we are all in our country. But the point is: the ex-Koevoets will never be employed'.[87]

Other interviewees also recounted being told that they would never find another job in Namibia because they had fought in Koevoet and had 'worked together with the white people'.[88] Others spoke of more direct intimidation and threats of reprisal by SWAPO members. According to one interviewee, returning SWAPO exiles threatened that they would yoke former Koevoet members and use them

[83] Stiff, *The Covert War*, 481. On the election violence, see, for example, Cliffe, et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, 94-107.
[84] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[85] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016.
[86] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[87] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[88] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 1994; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016.

to plough the fields.[89] Another interviewee said that 'people were teasing us [that] we would be killed'.[90] A former soldier of 101 Battalion pointed out that not only former Koevoet members were threatened:

> I remember very well that in 1989, one of the ministers by the name of Kaukungwa [referring to Simon Hafeni Kaukungwa, a prominent SWAPO politician and PLAN veteran] … spoke on the radio: '*Omakakunya* [a derogatory term for black troops, meaning 'bone pickers', 'blood suckers', or 'scavengers'], go and follow your white people. We will never employ you. If you are fooling yourselves and do not follow your white people, we will cut off your balls'.[91]

Another interviewee asserted that SWAPO never threatened to 'throw out the Koevoet members' but that 'ever since [they] took control, we were no longer together anymore [and became] afraid of being killed by SWAPO'.[92] Similarly, one man recounted that 'when we separated after the war, everyone went back to their families … to where they came from'. After his return, he said that his parents told him, 'Son, you are suffering here. Just pack your things and follow your government to South Africa'.[93]

In early January 1990, the former Commissioner of SWAPOL, General Dolf Douws, declared that the promised relocation of former Koevoet members to South Africa would no longer take place.[94] According to the Commissioner of the SAP, General Johan van der Merwe, the South African government's earlier promises had been broken on orders from the highest authority. He argued that the SAP and the government still had a moral obligation towards the former Koevoet members, and explained that 'seen in this light, the situation in Namibia

[89] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[90] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[91] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016. I have not been able to determine the origin of the term *omakakunya*.
[92] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016.
[93] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.
[94] 'Koevoet men may have to live in SA', *The Citizen*, 4 January 1990; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 483.

is being constantly monitored and the police will not allow these people to fall into an untenable situation'.[95] South African newspapers reported black former Koevoet members as saying that they feared becoming 'involved in a "blood bath" if they were left behind in the territory', and felt 'angry and bitter about being "stabbed in the back" by South Africa [and] that they had been abandoned to their fate in northern Namibia'.[96]

Despite the broken promises by the South African government, about 600 black former Koevoet members and their family members left Namibia for South Africa over the course of the following months.[97] According to my interviewees, the majority of them came from SWAPO's strongholds in northern Namibia, namely Ovamboland, were 'turned' SWAPO guerrillas, or were originally from Angola.[98] These groups had the least capacity to make claims of citizenship and belonging in post-independence Namibia, and most feared reprisals from the new ruling party for having fought as 'apartheid collaborators' and '(foreign) mercenaries'.

By early 1990, many former soldiers had little to no money left as several months had passed since they received their last salary and they were hoping to find new employment in South Africa.[99] They were joined by a much smaller but unknown number of former SWATF soldiers, particularly of 101 Battalion, and

[95] C. Kotze, 'Koevoet "won't be left in the lurch"', *The Star*, 4 January 1990.
[96] 'Koevoet men may have to live in SA', *The Citizen*, 4 January 1990; B. Seery, 'Ex-Koevoet men angry at "betrayal"', *The Star*, 13 January 1990.
[97] An unknown number reportedly instead left to Angola to join UNITA: Stiff, *The Covert War*, 484; G. Lister, 'Nujoma Gets The Water', *The Namibian*, 24 January 1990; 'Angola concerned over "Koevoet", Unita alliance', *The Namibian*, 8 February 1990; G. Lister, 'Coup Plot Uncovered', *The Namibian*, 30 July 1990.
[98] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016; interview with former soldier, 28 April 2016; Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 249; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 484.
[99] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 and 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016. See also D. Lush, 'Soldiers in Money Run', *The Namibian*, 15 May 1990.

their dependants. One interviewee said he sold half of his house in order to pay for the journey to South Africa. He said that other former soldiers also wanted to move but could not afford to do so:

> We were only left with our last payment of R700. How many months will you survive with these R700? … Some people had very small houses. So they could not cut them in half [sell half of it]. So all I can say is that they had no money for transport.[100]

He further explained that many of his colleagues opted to stay in Namibia, despite the continued uncertainty and potential danger, because they did not trust the South African government, which they felt had forsaken them:

> If a person was working for the government and the government has forsaken them, that particular person will think deep down in his heart: 'Why should I follow these white people? They will treat me the same as they did before.' … Some will think, 'Why did we work for these people? We worked for them but then they have forsaken us like this? It is better for me to suffer'. Some people still have these thoughts until today.[101]

The majority of former soldiers and their families left Namibia by train from Windhoek to Upington.[102] One woman, who left the country with her husband, a former soldier, alleged that immigration officials stopped them at the border telling them that 'the country is free' and 'you cannot leave'. David said her family refused to turn around, and walked for two days from the border to Upington.[103]

Under the supervision of Colonel Hans Dreyer and Colonel Willem Fouché, the last operational commander of Koevoet, local members of the SAP in Upington provided accommodation for the arriving former soldiers and their families.

[100] Interview with Bernardo Kafidi, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[101] Interview with Bernardo Kafidi, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[102] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[103] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.

After a couple of days, they were bussed to a temporary tented camp at Moordkop (literally 'murder hill' in Afrikaans), a police-owned farm near Rustenburg.[104] One interviewee recalled his journey:

> We first arrived in Upington. I did not know where South Africa was but we only knew we were following our white leaders so that we can get better lives. As we arrived in Upington, the white men welcomed us. They even prepared us a place where we could stay in Upington. They bought us food and again our leader, Fouché, who stayed in Pretoria, told us … that he will send buses to come and fetch us. … He did send buses that took us to Rustenburg. That is when we reached Moordkop.[105]

Dreyer and Fouché sought to organise the resettlement from Upington to Moordkop in secrecy but the camp's existence soon came to light after the former Security Branch Captain, Dirk Coetzee, gave evidence to the Harms Commission in early May 1990.[106]

According to a white former Koevoet commander who was responsible for the resettlement, the South African government could not (legally) treat the former soldiers and their families as refugees 'for diplomatic reasons' because it had officially recognised the newly elected Namibian government.[107] The latter, in turn, considered the former soldiers who moved to South Africa a direct threat to the security of Namibia. In February 1990, the then Minister of Home Affairs, Hifikepunye Pohamba, claimed that there was an increase in 'border incursions' by people,

> who served in both SWATF and Koevoet before they were disbanded, and we are aware that they are now deliberately organised by some former commanders in the [South African] war institutions, whose intention is to

[104] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; Stiff, *The Covert War*, 484.
[105] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[106] C. Whitfield, 'Secret Koevoet units are based near Rustenburg, says Coetzee', *The Sunday Star*, 6 May 1990; P. Buiger, 'Koevoet men, wives languish on isolated farm', *The Sunday Star*, 13 May 1990.
[107] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016.

> create confusion, fear, insecurity among our people, and if not properly dealt with, will lead to destabilisation of our republic to be born.[108]

In an interview with *The Namibian* newspaper in August 1990, the Namibian Deputy Minister for Security, Peter Tsheehama, alleged that the former soldiers had moved to South Africa in order 'to prepare themselves for destabilisation [of] the [Namibian] government'. He further added that the former soldiers posed a threat 'because they always criss-cross the border [likely referring to off-duty men visiting their families]. The situation is so complicated. When they come, they have their identification documents. It is not easy to arrest them'.[109] After 1990, suspected former Koevoet members were repeatedly refused entry into Namibia.[110]

'The ANC Is Going to Win': Discharge of Koevoet Members from the SAP

At Moordkop, the former soldiers and their families lived in tents provided by the SAP for the next two and a half years.[111] Dreyer soon requested the SAP to have them transferred to another location as the camp was only an 'emergency measure'. As in the case of 32 Battalion's relocation to Pomfret, the search for an isolated location was deliberate. So as not to attract further public attention, he recommended that the relocation of the camp's inhabitants to a place where 'they can find their feet outside the limelight and without interference by other

[108] 'Pohamba on the new pioneers', *The Namibian*, 20 Feburary 2016.
[109] R. Munamava, 'Tsheehama on security, destabilisation and the old establishment', *The Namibian*, 10 August 1990.
[110] T. Namutewa, 'Joy among ex-Koevoets at being home', *The Namibian*, 25 August 1994.
[111] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.

population groups [my translation from Afrikaans]'. In addition, Dreyer proposed that the men be employed as 'special members' and 'support elements' in the SAP's Operational Research Branch citing 'the current shortage of manpower within the South African Police and the demands made by the new and frantic conditions in the Republic [my translation from Afrikaans]'.[112]

In May and June 1990, through arrangements with senior government ministers, Dreyer also organised for the South African Department of Home Affairs to come to Moordkop to register the residents and grant them South African citizenship.[113] In exchange for South African citizenship, the former soldiers and their families were asked to give up their Namibian citizenship. One interviewee explained that 'our leaders were the ones who decided that we must give them our Namibian citizenships [because] they said it is impossible to have two citizenships'.[114] Some of the people, however, denied having any Namibian identity documents and were still granted South African citizenship, thus effectively becoming dual citizens.[115] Others who handed in their identity document, such as the widow of a former soldier, felt that the process had been imposed on them and that their Namibian citizenship was 'taken away'.[116] Those people who gave up their Namibian identity documents later often experienced difficulties when wanting to return to Namibia, as one man explained: 'we want

[112] H. Dreyer, 'Die Indiesneming En Doeltreffende Aanwending Van Swart Ou-Koevoetlede As Spesiale Lede In Die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie', available at HPRA, A3079, K.2.5.
[113] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; G. Hosken, 'First harboured, now thrown to the wolves', *Pretoria News*, 6 September 2010.
[114] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[115] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[116] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.

to go and visit our families in Namibia but we do not have the money to go and they have destroyed our ID cards'.[117]

The former soldiers were first recruited in teams of 30-40 men, and supported small and understaffed police stations across South Africa in various operations, such as border control, stock theft prevention, illegal firearms recovery, and *dagga* (marijuana) plant destruction.[118] After approval by the SAP's head office in Pretoria in July 1990, the men were officially employed as 'general workers' (*arbeider* in Afrikaans) in the Criminal Investigation Support Unit.[119] For the next four years, they worked primarily as trackers recovering stolen farm animals across South Africa.[120]

After disagreements within the unit's leadership over whether and where to move the community next, the 600 families consisting of about 2,500 people were transported to an abandoned mining complex outside Rooiberg between late 1991 to mid-1992. At Rooiberg, some 130km north of Moordkop, the majority of them lived in former hostels once inhabited by black miners while others continued to live in tents.[121] The white officers who accompanied them stayed in the houses that had been used by the white mine workers.[122]

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[117] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[118] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[119] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[120] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April, 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016. See also Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 249; and Kamongo and Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand*, 217-20.
[121] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; Hooper, *Koevoet!*, 249.
[122] S. Godsell, 'Rooiberg: The Little Town that Lived', *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 1 (2011), 66-7.

Soon after their move to Rooiberg, it was reported that former Koevoet members had allegedly been involved in the killing of 45 people in the pro-ANC township of Boipatong, south of Johannesburg, on 17 June 1992.[123] A week later, the Goldstone Commission discovered a team of 40 former Koevoet members at a mining hostel near Witbank after ANC officials informed it of 'suspicious people' housed there. ANC sources alleged that these people were armed, carried radios, spoke a foreign language, and were kept apart from mine workers.[124] In response to the raid, the counsel of the SAP, Phillip Hattingh, acknowledged that the men were former Koevoet members but denied that they had been involved in the Boipatong massacre. He explained that the group was from Rooiberg and only temporarily based at the mine to control stock theft in the area.

ANC officials, however, claimed to have obtained evidence that members of the unit had been involved in third force attacks, including the one in Boipatong.[125] Already in October 1991, Nelson Mandela had accused the South African government of 'importing the death squads that have been killing our brothers in Namibia. They have brought them here. They are operating here'.[126] While the Goldstone Commission ultimately found 'no evidence' that supported allegations linking the former Koevoet members to the Boipatong massacre, it wrote:

> Whether or not groups of former Koevoet members employed by the South African Police are involved in incidents of violence, the infamous reputation of Koevoet is such that the very existence of such a group in South Africa in 1992

[123] TRC, *Volume 2*, 604; TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report – Volume 3* (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), 683; Ellis, 'The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force', 289; J.G.R. Simpson, 'Boipatong: The Politics of a Massacre and the South African Transition', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 3 (2012), 623-47.
[124] 'Koevoet link to massacre', *The Star*, 26 June 1992. Goldfields, the company that owned the building, also owned the ones at Rooiberg: Godsell, 'Rooiberg', 62.
[125] 'Secret Koevoet base linked to Boipatong', *Weekly Mail*, 26 June 1992; 'The "return of Koevoet...', *The Namibian*, 26 June 1992; 'Why cops are losing credibility', *Sowetan*, 29 June 1992.
[126] 'Koevoet are alive and well in SA', *The Namibian*, 25 October 1991.

> is calculated to cause yet further distrust and suspicion of the security forces. The wisdom of employing such a group or groups must be open to serious question.[127]

The 'infamous reputation' of the former Koevoet members had followed them and their families to South Africa. As the country's elections approached, they yet again came to face with an uncertain future. Similarly to their counterparts in 32 Battalion, their limited education and language skills represented a significant reintegration issue, as one interviewee recounted:

> Our leaders told us that because we were not educated and did not know how to read or write, that 'When the elections come, I can see that again that the ANC is going to win. And if they win, we don't know whether the ANC will fire you from your job. We can just write down that you are on leave until the elections are over. So when the elections are over, that is when we will see what the new government will be like'. There was a problem again because we knew what had happened in Namibia after the elections.[128]

Among my interviewees, there was considerable confusion and disagreement over whether they had retired or had been put on leave from the SAP in April 1994. One white former Koevoet officer, for instance, asserted that the former Koevoet members were given the option to either stay in the SAP or to resign by taking a voluntary retirement package ranging from R20,000-40,000. He said he tried to convince the men not to take the severance package as that meant they would have no longer access to the SAP's pension and medical funds. According to him, 90 per cent of them resigned after white former Koevoet members had made them promises of lucrative employment in a new private security

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[127] Republic of South Africa, *Statement Read by Mr Justice RJ Goldstone at the Commission's Preliminary Hearing Into the Boipatong Massacre Held at Pretoria on Monday 6 July 1992* (Pretoria: Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation / Goldstone Commission, 6 July 1992), 6-7. For further discussion of the allegations against Koevoet, see J.G.R. Simpson, 'The Boipatong Massacre and South Africa's Democratic Transition' (Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2011), 56-8.

[128] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 1994.

company, which ultimately never materialised.[129] One man explained that they had voluntarily resigned because they could not speak nor write in any of the local languages, other than Afrikaans, that would be spoken in a new and integrated police force:

> We decided to resign from the SAP. We were police but we could not write the language that is spoken in this country. It was very difficult to be a policeman in a country that is not yours and when you do not speak the country's language. Most of the time we used Afrikaans and a little bit of English.[130]

Most of my interviewees disagreed with the above accounts, and claimed they had been dismissed. Some of them argued that their white commanders told them that they had been put on indefinite leave until after the elections.[131] According to one man, their leaders had started to leave Rooiberg one by one as the elections approached, and when Fouché gave them their packages in April 1994, he allegedly told them that they were on leave and should return to Namibia.[132] Other interviewees claimed that the SAP no longer wanted them 'because we were from outside', and recounted that they had to hand in both their police IDs and medical aid cards after being given their packages.[133] One interviewee categorically stated, 'We didn't resign, we were fired!'[134] Some of the disagreement and confusion among the former members also stemmed from the contradictory wording of the severance package documents, which read:

> This statement shows the cash worth of 100 days of *vacation leave* against the full salary which at *date of retirement* is owed to the above stated person. The

[129] Interview with white former Koevoet officer, Rustenburg, 13 June 2016.
[130] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[131] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[132] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[133] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[134] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.

> date of retirement according to documentation is 94/04/30 [my translation from Afrikaans; emphasis added].

The documents issued on 22 April 1994 listed the 'package' as including leave gratification, a bonus, one month's salary, and a retirement package.[135] In short, the package process was a sort of black box that effectively left the former members without any recourse.

In addition, the communication of the unit's disbandment and the termination of its members' employment with the SAP was likely not clear. One interviewee claimed that their leaders had told them that 'there are too many of you [and] not enough jobs'.[136] In contrast, another one maintained that, 'When we went to the police [after 30 April 1994], we were told we didn't work there anymore. We didn't know what happened. We didn't know and understand why [because] we weren't given any information'.[137] To many interviewees, the events painfully reminded them of Koevoet's disbandment in Namibia less than five years earlier: '[Our leaders] betrayed us in Namibia and again they betrayed us in South Africa'.[138]

Shortly after the South African elections, the situation of the community at Rooiberg became even more precarious when officers of the SAP informed them that they had to vacate the property, according to differing accounts, within 24 hours or seven days.[139] To add further insult, those families living in tents

[135] Available at HPRA, A3079, K.2.5.
[136] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[137] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016.
[138] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[139] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.

claimed they had to either pay for them or had them taken away.[140] After a frantic search for new homes, the community eventually found a remote farm near Bela-Bela, called Vingerkraal, for which they paid a total of R400,200, with each household contributing between R1,500 and R3,000.[141] However, no one ever signed a sale agreement or received a title deed for the property.

My interviewees' accounts remained vague about the details of the transaction. Most of them recounted that their former commander, Hans Dreyer, had personally met with the owner and told him that 'these are my children'. And the owner in turn allegedly told them that 'you bought this place for your children' and 'this farm belongs to [them]'.[142] The widow of a former soldier claimed that the 'fathers' received payslips for their contribution but made the mistake of not asking for proof of ownership because 'they trusted white people very much'.[143]

In 2006, the community found out that the legal owner of the farm had sold the land to the municipality of Bela-Bela for another R600,000 in April 2003.[144] The former soldiers and their families had been betrayed yet again. Since then, the community and the municipality have been in conflict over various issues, most importantly the municipalities' plans to relocate people away from Vingerkraal. To my interviewees, it was evident that the municipality had bought

[140] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 22 April 2016.
[141] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016; and interview with Kobus van der Merwe, Bela-Bela, 23 April 2016.
[142] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April, 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April, 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April, 2016.
[143] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.
[144] Under South African legislation, the community would have potentially obtained legal ownership of the farm due their once-off payment and ten-year lease just a year later: interview with Kobus van der Merwe, Bela-Bela, 23 April 2016.

the farm and wanted them to move 'because we are Koevoets, because we are not South Africans'.[145]

After the last people were evicted from Rooiberg on 31 July 1994, several hundred of them decided to return to Namibia. Many of them, as the widow of a former soldier recounted, had gotten 'scared of the new government' and feared reprisals after the ANC won the general elections.[146] Before discussing the fate of those who decided to stay in South Africa, I will turn to those who wanted to go back and the heated debates that their attempted return sparked. In light of the general elections scheduled for December 1994 and given Koevoet's violence during the previous elections in 1989, the SWAPO-led government was far from enthusiastic about their intentions. To them, the former Koevoet members remained *personae non gratae*.

'Bona Fide Namibian Citizens'?: Former Soldiers' (Attempted) Return to Namibia

In March 1994, Namibia's High Commissioner in South Africa, Joshua Hoëbeb, told media that he had met with a committee claiming to represent 610 former members of apartheid South Africa's security forces, most of them former Koevoet members, and about 1,100 of their dependants to discuss their possible repatriation to Namibia before the end of April 1994. The former soldiers told

[145] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[146] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.

Hoëbeb that they feared for their lives alleging that there were people in South Africa who were 'out to destroy them'.[147] Speaking to *The Namibian* newspaper, Hoëbeb explained that a high-level meeting between Namibia and South Africa was necessary to discuss the former soldiers' return, which was 'a very sensitive issue' and could pose 'a security risk to Namibia'.[148] In South Africa, the ANC seems to have welcomed the return of the former Koevoet members given their alleged involvement in third force activities.[149] In Namibia, however, government officials were anxious about the return of people whom they still considered a potential threat to the country.

Central to the ensuing debates in Namibia was the question of whether or not the former soldiers were 'genuine' citizens who belonged to the Namibian nation. In the ruling party's view, they were not full citizens as they had collaborated with the apartheid regime and had thus betrayed their nation and its people embodied by SWAPO. The notion of treason is crucial here because, as Thiranagama and Kelly argue, it is central to understanding how political regimes and categories of belonging are made and unmade.[150] Repeatedly, SWAPO officials resorted to various bureaucratic and legal means, including the Constitution, as well as high-level negotiations to prevent or at least hinder the return of their (former) enemies. The former soldiers and their supporters in turn responded by seeking legal recourse, and appealing to other forms of belonging.

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[147] M. Slatter, 'The Terrorists Return', *Africa Report*, 1 July 1994.
[148] G. Hopwood, 'Koevoets want to come home', *The Namibian*, 29 March 1994; 'Former Koevoet men "keen to leave SA"', *The Cape Times*, 31 March 1994.
[149] 'Ex-Koevoet men can return from SA – Namibia', *The Citizen*, 9 June 1994.
[150] Thiranagama and Kelly, 'Introduction', 2.

In mid-April 1994, Alois Gende, former major in SWATF's 202 Battalion and representative of the DTA, asked the Namibian government about the progress of negotiations with its South African counterpart, and when the former soldiers would be able to return to Namibia. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab of SWAPO, replied that the soldiers had rejected the government's request to remain in Namibia after independence, and voluntarily decided to go to South Africa instead:

> They fled this country because they feared they would be harmed. Now that a new government is expected in South Africa, they want to flee back again. Let them stay there so that the new South African Government can deal with them.[151]

He further asserted that the Namibian Constitution prohibited Namibian citizens from fighting in a foreign army and that the former soldiers therefore had given up their citizenship and their rights to seek protection under the Constitution.[152] He advised to 'let them stay there, let them rot and let the future South African government deal with it'.[153] In his argument, Gurirab referred to the Namibian constitution that states:

> Nothing in this Constitution shall preclude Parliament from enacting legislation providing for the loss of Namibian citizenship by persons who, after the date of Independence: … have served or volunteered to serve in the armed or security forces of any other country without the written permission of the Namibian Government.

[151] T. Namutewa, 'Koevoet in NA battle', *The Namibian*, 12 April 1994.
[152] Hoëbeb also claimed that the former soldiers 'may lose their citizenship': 'Ex-Koevoet men deported', *The Cape Times*, 5 August 1994.
[153] 'Emotions Fly High', *New Era*, 20 April 1994; Slatter, 'The Terrorists Return'.

In confusing contradiction, the same sub-article also states that 'no person who is a citizen of Namibia by birth or descent may be deprived of Namibian citizenship by such legislation'.[154]

By mid-May, Hoëbeb had received a list of 550 men who wanted to return to Namibia with about 1,100 of their dependants. Hoëbeb said that the people were to be evicted from their homes at the end of the month, and that this was 'a matter which should not drag on for long [and] must get high-level attention'.[155] At the same time, the Namibian Attorney General, Hartmut Ruppel, explained that the returnees would have to prove their Namibian citizenship before they could be repatriated because Angolans and Zambians had also served in South Africa's former security forces. He added that the former soldiers could potentially be prosecuted for mercenary activities, and therefore had to provide their full name, proof of citizenship, and details about what they had done in South Africa.[156]

On 7 June 1994, the Namibian Cabinet issued a statement officially authorising the return of former soldiers and their families: 'Cabinet resolved that former … members currently in South Africa who are Namibian citizens could come back home through normal channels'.[157] It is possible that the Cabinet's decision was partly influenced by pressure from the DTA and other opposition parties, and from some traditional leaders. In late 1993, SWANU, which historically comprised a largely Herero membership, had advocated that

[154] Republic of Namibia, *Constitution of the Republic of Namibia* (n.d.). See also A.R. Kaukunga, 'Law Justifies Ex-Koevoets' Return', *New Era*, 22 June 1994.
[155] T. Minney, 'Koevoets desperate to return to Namibia', *The Namibian*, 19 May 1994; 'Ex-Koevoet, SWATF men want to "go home"', *The Citizen*, 19 May 1994.
[156] T. Minney, 'Koevoets desperate to return to Namibia', *The Namibian*, 19 May 1994.
[157] 'Ex-Koevoet men can return from SA – Namibia', *The Citizen*, 9 June 1994; A.R. Kaukunga, 'Law Justifies Ex-Koevoets' Return', *New Era*, 22 June 1994.

the Namibian government should consult with its South African counterpart to organise the return of former SWATF and Koevoet members. In a press statement, party officials argued that 'we must try our best to integrate them back into our society … That will be ultimate test for our policy of national reconciliation'.[158] Later in 1994, Ovaherero Paramount Chief and MP of the DTA, Kuaima Riruako, demanded that Herero members of Koevoet should be allowed to return.[159] Riruako seems to have attempted to frame SWAPO's reluctance as an instance of ethnic and regional discrimination by the ruling party, a widespread perception among ethnic minorities in Namibia, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 6.

Unsurprisingly, the Cabinet's decision to authorise the former soldiers' return was met with considerable resistance from within SWAPO and various government ministries. In the National Council, Michael Hishikushitja of SWAPO urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to stop negotiations with the South African government, arguing that popular sentiment among Namibians was against the repatriation of the former soldiers. Hishikushitja warned that the former soldiers might attempt to destabilise the country and disrupt the general elections in December 1994 like they had done in 1989. He argued that, if at all, they should only be allowed to return after the elections.[160]

The Ministry of Home Affairs, tasked with the return process, moved slowly in dealing with the repatriation forms sent from the Namibian embassy in South Africa. The Minister of Home Affairs, Hifikepunye Pohamba, was reported as saying that the majority of names on the forms he had seen were not Namibian

[158] A. Shigwedha, 'Swanu worried about second repatriation', *The Namibian*, 9 December 1993.
[159] Slatter, 'The Terrorists Return'.
[160] F. Mwilima, 'Koevoets' Return Dominates Debate', *New Era*, 15 June 1994.

and that the return of the former soldiers was not a government priority.[161] The Ministry later again claimed that the majority of applicants were not Namibian and therefore not its responsibility.[162]

After more than two months of waiting, some of the former soldiers and their families had become anxious to leave South Africa. On 31 July 1994, the people at Rooiberg were evicted from their homes, and the next morning the first families started to arrive at the border post at Ariamsvlei. They carried with them South African passports indicating Namibia as their country of birth, old South West African identity documents, and Namibian birth certificates.[163] On instructions from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Namibian immigration officials refused to verify their documents and prohibited them from entering the country.[164] One interviewee, who stayed behind in South Africa, recalled that 'some of our people wanted to go back to Namibia but then they were blocked at the border. … We nearly followed them but when we heard that they were caught, we decided to stay'.[165]

On the night of 1 August, a group of 93 men, women and children illegally crossed the lightly policed border post by car. In response, government officials spoke of an 'invasion' while the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation covered the incident by showing archival footage of Koevoet during the war.[166] Immigration officials eventually stopped and arrested the group in Mariental about 550km

[161] C. Maletsky, 'Ex-Koevoets end up in "no man's land"…', *The Namibian*, 22 July 1994.
[162] T. Minney, 'Koevoets force way into Namibia', *The Namibian*, 2 August 1994.
[163] 'History of an "invasion"', *The Namibian*, 11 August 1994.
[164] T. Minney, '"Koevoets" take Govt to court', *The Namibian*, 12 August 1994; 'Court rules on Koevoet men', *The Cape Times*, 19 August 1994.
[165] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[166] 'History of an "invasion"', *The Namibian*, 11 August 1994.

into Namibia.[167] Two days later, they had to leave behind their cars and possessions, and were deported back to South Africa.[168] They were reportedly told that they would be transported back in order to complete their documentation process but instead they were unloaded in the desert at Nakop on the South African side of the border.[169]

According to the DTA spokesperson, Nico Smit, many people in the group soon began to fall ill, and were supported through donations of food, medicine, and money from people in Namibia and members of the SAP. Contrary to apparent claims by the Namibian government, the South African government did not provide any aid to the deported.[170] At a meeting with the South African Minister of Safety and Security, Pohamba asserted that there was a 'substantial number' of foreigners, mainly Angolans, among the group, and explained that 'once we have devised a system to deal with the matter, Namibia and South Africa will jointly drive the process leading to orderly repatriation'.[171]

At a joint press conference with South African President Nelson Mandela on 10 August, President Sam Nujoma said that 'we are co-operating with the new South African Government to identify who are bona fide Namibian citizens'. He added that the former soldiers and their families needed special papers from the Namibian High Commission in Pretoria.[172] Two days later, a group of 29 former soldiers and dependants who had been deported to South Africa took legal action

[167] T. Minney, 'Koevoets force way into Namibia', *The Namibian*, 2 August 1994; 'Namibia expels 93 – reports', *Business Day*, 5 August 1994.
[168] 'Namibia expels 93 – reports', *Business Day*, 5 August 1994; 'Ex-Koevoet men deported', *The Cape Times*, 5 August 1994.
[169] T. Minney, 'Ex-Koevoets dumped in "no man's land"', *The Namibian*, 5 August 1994; 'Koevoet men can return to Namibia', *The Star*, 19 August 1994.
[170] 'Confusion reigns of ex-Koevoets', *The Namibian*, 23 August 1994; 'Conditions worsen for Koevoet exiles in SA', *The Cape Times*, 23 August 1994.
[171] 'Ex-Koevoet members may go back: Namibia', *The Citizen*, 6 August 1994.
[172] T. Minney, 'Namibia and SA working together on "ex-Koevoets"', The Namibian, 11 August 1994.

against the Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, and Justice, and the Attorney General. At the High Court in Windhoek, they asked to be provided provisional entry papers, and to be allowed back into Namibia.[173] In response, Pohamba repeated that while the government was not against the return of 'genuine Namibians', all returning former soldiers had to go through a careful screening process because the apartheid administration had been known for issuing Namibian identity documents to non-Namibians.[174] A week later, the High Court ordered the return of the 29 people. According to Judge President Justice Johan Strydom, the instructions of the Ministry of Home Affairs to refuse entry to them and their deportation to South Africa had been 'unconstitutional and unlawful'. The former soldiers and their dependants were allowed to return to Mariental, and the Namibian government was ordered to provide transport for them.[175]

The government's response to the High Court's ruling was marred by confusion and contradiction. Government spokesperson and Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Ben Amathila, told media that 400 former soldiers and their relatives, whose names had been verified as Namibians, were free to return to the country at any time.[176] Minister of Home Affairs Pohamba later reduced that number to 200.[177] Attorney General Ruppel explained that the former soldiers and their relatives were free to return like all other Namibians travelling back from South Africa if they had a Namibian travel document. According to Ruppel, the temporary travel documents were processed at Namibia's High Commission in Pretoria, and the former soldiers' lawyers were

[173] T. Minney, '"Koevoets" take Govt to court', *The Namibian*, 12 August 1994.
[174] 'Koevoet Headache Simmers', *New Era*, 17 August 1994.
[175] 'Koevoet men can return to Namibia', *The Star*, 19 August 1994; 'Court rules on Koevoet men', *The Cape Times*, 19 August 1994.
[176] 'Confusion reigns of ex-Koevoets', *The Namibian*, 23 August 1994.
[177] F. Kavari and T. Namutewa, 'Koevoet or smugglers?', *The Namibian*, 9 September 1994.

responsible for bringing the travel documents to the border. At the same time, he advised the potential returnees to renounce their South African citizenship and hand in their South African passports at the High Commission before travelling. He further said that the 'Government is not blocking anybody to return to Namibia, but they must follow the right channels'.[178]

However, it remained unclear what the right channels were. Namibia's High Commissioner, Hoëbeb, referred inquiries about the process to the Ministry of Home Affairs saying 'we [are] only waiting for their instructions'. A spokesperson at the Ministry, in turn, explained that the government was waiting for the outcome of its appeal of the High Court's ruling, which was only to be heard the next year.[179] The Director of Immigration and Population Services, Patrick Nandago, said that his office had received about 400 applications for repatriation of which 130 were still being processed due to unspecified problems with the information provided. In early September 1994, Hoëbeb told media that he could not estimate how many former soldiers were still in South Africa and likely to return to Namibia, explaining that he was not working with them directly but with the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs and police.[180]

In short, the SWAPO-led government not only sought to prevent the return of former Koevoet members but to question and deny their Namibian citizenship by means of political narrative, the constitution, high-level diplomacy, documentary requirements, and direct intimidation. How many former soldiers

[178] 'Confusion reigns of ex-Koevoets', *The Namibian*, 23 August 1994.
[179] J. Motinga, 'Govt challenges Koevoet ruling', *The Namibian*, 19 August 1994; 'Confusion reigns of ex-Koevoets', *The Namibian*, 23 August 1994.
[180] F. Kavari and T. Namutewa, 'Koevoet or smugglers?', *The Namibian*, 9 September 1994.

and family members were eventually able to return to Namibia is unknown. The future of those who stayed in South Africa remained in limbo.

'We Are Lost People': Experiences of Life in Post-Apartheid South Africa

After their discharge from the police and the military, many former soldiers and their families soon experienced financial difficulties. Those who were evicted from Rooiberg or moved away from Pomfret had to use a substantial part of their severance package in order to buy a new house. Those who remained in remote places like Pomfret, which is 200km from the nearest city, often bought cars. Perhaps most importantly, most people lacked experience in dealing with financial matters. During their military service, the former soldiers had received relatively small salaries but they and their families had been provided with free food, accommodation, and healthcare. Now they had to financially fend for themselves again, many of them for the first time after up to 20 years of military service.[181] The vast majority of former soldiers have since sought employment in the private security and military industry, both in South Africa and abroad. One interviewee explained that 'the money we got [from the severance package] did not even last three months. No one has got any more money today. That's why they all started going into security'.[182]

[181] Interview with Kobus van der Merwe, Bela-Bela, 23 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016; interview with white nurse of 32 Battalion, via Skype, 26 September 2016.
[182] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 10 August 2016. See also Nortje, *The Terrible Ones,* 1191, and M. Waldner, 'Koevoet outcasts easy pickings for coup plotters', *City Press*, 21 March 2004.

From the early 1990s, the private military company, Executive Outcomes, was one of the biggest and most-well known employers of former members of South Africa's apartheid-era security forces. Approximately 70 per cent of the company's personnel were black veterans of South Africa's former security forces.[183] Executive Outcomes initially attracted many of them away from the military with salaries between R6,000 and R21,000 a month.[184] As Pech writes, like many other private security and military companies operating in South Africa, the origins of Executive Outcomes are 'to be found in the complex and still shielded web of civilianised front companies set up by the former SADF'.[185] The co-founder and chairman of Executive Outcomes, Eeben Barlow, had been second-in-command of 32 Battalion in the early 1980s, and later became a senior official in the so-called Civil Cooperation Bureau, a covert group established by the South African Special Forces.[186] In 2006, Barlow founded a new company, STTEP, that was hired by the Nigerian government in 2015 in its fight against Boko Haram.[187] Another co-founder of Executive Outcomes was Simon Mann, the leader of an alleged coup plot in Equatorial Guinea. According to one interviewee, most former 32 Battalion soldiers who were arrested together with Mann had decided to join the operation after the money from their severance package had run out.[188]

In 1993, in a strange twist of fate, the MPLA government in Angola contracted Executive Outcomes to recapture its oil installations in the coastal town of Soyo

[183] Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, 103
[184] E. Rubin, 'An Army of One's Own', *Harper's*, 1 February 1997; Howe, 'Private Security Forces and African Stability', 311.
[185] K. Pech, 'Executive Outcomes', 84.
[186] Howe, 'Private Security Forces and African Stability', 310.
[187] C. Freeman, 'South African mercenaries' secret war on Boko Haram', *The Telegraph*, 10 May 2015.
[188] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016. See also B. Phillips, 'South Africa's "mercenary" village', *BBC News Website*, 12 May 2004.

from UNITA on behalf of the Angolan army. For the next two years, the former SADF soldiers in Executive Outcomes provided training and tactical advice to their former enemy, the Angolan military, and played an active role in front-line operations against UNITA, their former ally.[189] Barlow's explanation for hiring Angolan mercenaries echoed the apartheid-era security forces' reasoning for recruiting them during the wars in Angola and Namibia, namely their transnational ties: 'A lot of Angolans were in Koevoet [and 32 Battalion], and they are good because they speak the language and have family back in Angola'.[190]

In 1995, many of the former soldiers were airlifted straight out of Angola and flown to Sierra Leone, where the military junta had hired Executive Outcomes in its fight against the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).[191] As in the relocation of 32 Battalion from Namibia to South Africa, 'no passports were stamped, no customs procedures needed'.[192] The former soldiers' citizenship seems to have been of little to no importance as they once again were radically deracinated. Similarly to the SADF's formation of locally-recruited units in Namibia and Angola, Executive Outcomes also trained and armed ethnic-based militias of 'traditional hunters', the *Kamajors*, who 'knew the terrain, enjoyed

[189] Pech, 'Executive Outcomes', 85-6; Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, 109-10.
[190] K. Maier, 'Savimbi's former allies now march to Luanda's drum: Pretoria-based company recruits veterans of Namibia war to bolster Angolan army in its struggle with Unita', *Independent*, 31 December 1993.
[191] For Executive Outcomes' involvement in Sierra Leone, see, for example, Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, 132-9; D.J. Francis, 'Mercenary Intervention in Sierra Leone: Providing National Security or International Exploitation?', *Third World Quarterly*, 20, 2 (1999), 319-38; C. Dokubo, '"An Army For Rent", Private Military Corporations and Civil Conflicts in Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone', *Civil Wars*, 3, 2 (2000), 51-64; Singer, *Corporate Warriors,* 110-15.
[192] E. Rubin, 'An Army of One's Own', *Harper's*, 1 February 1997.

excellent relations with the paramount chiefs, and resented RUF's intrusions' in Sierra Leone.[193]

As 'citizens' of anywhere and nowhere, many of my interviewees had worked for Executive Outcomes and other private security and military companies across the globe. One interviewee, a former Koevoet member, for example, worked for Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone for nine months in 1995.[194] Another former Koevoet member worked for various companies in Iraq from 2004 until 2011.[195] A former 32 Battalion soldier who resigned from the SANDF in 1998 had worked in a number of different contexts. From 2001 until 2007, he worked for different companies, such as Omega Support Systems, in Iraq. In 2004, he was among a second group of mercenaries that was hired by Executive Outcomes in the alleged coup plot in Equatorial Guinea but, after the first group was arrested in Zimbabwe, did not leave South Africa. After his last contract in Iraq ended, he did short stints of work, for example, in the DRC for four months. In August 2014, he retired after he sustained a serious head injury during a robbery while working as a security guard in Johannesburg.[196] Like him, other interviewees also spoke of the uncertainty and danger of working in the private security sector, particularly in South Africa.[197] One interviewee, for instance, worked for various security companies for 15 years until he decided to retire

[193] Howe, 'Private Security Forces and African Stability', 316; Francis, 'Mercenary intervention in Sierra Leone', 327-9. On the *Kamajors,* see also A.B. Zack-Williams, 'Kamajors, "Sober" & the Militariat: Civil Society & the Return of the Military in Sierra Leonean Politics', *Review of African Political Economy*, 24, 73 (1997), 373-80; M.C. Ferme and D. Hoffman, 'Hunter Militias and the International Human Rights Discourse in Sierra Leone and Beyond', *Africa Today*, 50, 4 (2004), 73-95.
[194] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016.
[195] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.
[196] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[197] Interview with former soldier, Masakhane, 24 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 27 June 2016.

after what he described as a murder attempt on him while working as a security guard.[198]

My interviewees' sense of being lost and stranded between post-apartheid South Africa and independent Angola and Namibia came through in questions about home. One man explained that 'we can't go back to Angola because we fought for a different country [and] in South Africa, we are also seen as criminals because we fought for the apartheid regime'.[199] In a similar vein, another one said:

> If we go to Angola, they say we killed them. [In South Africa], they say ... we killed them as well but that is not true. We did not kill them. … Our family is here, our children don't know where their father was born. Far away in Angola they say the war is over but in their hearts there is still war. We have no path to go on. We are lost people.[200]

After having lived and worked in South Africa for more than 20 years, the majority of former soldiers, most of them nearing retirement age, and their family members said they thought about returning to Namibia or Angola. In the words of one interviewee, 'you cannot forget the country where you were born, where your grandparents, your mother, and your father were born, even when you are in another country'.[201] While some interviewees explained that South Africa was their home because they were South African citizens or because they had stayed there for a long time, most said that they did not feel at home in the

[198] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[199] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[200] Interview with former soldier, Pomfret, 11 August 2016.
[201] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.

country.[202] They instead felt like 'strangers', 'foreigners', and 'refugees', like 'we don't belong to this country'.[203]

During the early and mid-1990s, my interviewees' sense of Angolan national identity (rather than a South African one) was sustained by their relative social isolation at Pomfret. Since the late 2000s, this sense has been further reinforced by a context of widespread xenophobia in South Africa. In their accounts, my interviewees framed their experiences of discrimination not as the backlash against their operations during the transition from apartheid but rather as the result of wider intolerance and violence against foreigners. They asserted that they were discriminated against because of their place of birth, and referred to incidents of xenophobic violence, particularly in 2008, where 'people lose their lives'.[204] The daughter of an ex-32 Battalion member expressed her anger saying: 'Our fathers fought for this country [and] now they kill us and burn us'.[205]

When former soldiers acknowledged the hostile sentiments of many South Africans towards them as a reaction to their apartheid-era operations, they often expressed incomprehension arguing that they had fought in Namibia and Angola, not in South Africa. One former soldier pleaded:

> If you go to the [Bela-Bela] hospital, they will go like, 'Where do you come from? Are you a Koevoet? No, we are afraid of you, go away!' The former Koevoet members are suffering in South Africa. The government does not want to care about us. They are saying that we killed their people but we never killed any South Africans. We only killed in Namibia. We killed our people in Namibia not South Africans.[206]

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[202] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[203] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 24 May 2016.
[204] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016. See also F.B. Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 2006).
[205] Conversation, Lethlabile, 28 June 2016.
[206] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.

To him, the unfair treatment of him and his former Koevoet colleagues – despite them 'not having killed any South Africans' – demonstrated that they were discriminated against because of their foreign origin rather than the violence they committed.

Like their Namibian counterparts, the South African government and immigration officials have not regarded the concerns of former Koevoet and 32 Battalion members as a priority. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the South African government has repeatedly engaged in negotiations with Angolan officials about the repatriation of former 32 Battalion members and their families to Angola, on both a voluntary and non-voluntary basis. One interviewee asserted:

> We are foreigners here. … When we have a problem at [the Department of] Home Affairs, [with our] IDs, and they see [we are from] Angola, they say, 'the Angolans damaged our country, come later'. We are always put aside.[207]

He, similarly to his colleagues mentioned above, also again blamed his experiences of discrimination on his Angolan origin rather than his involvement in the violence perpetrated by apartheid South Africa's security forces – despite them being clearly linked, as we have seen.

Like him, many former soldiers said they had experienced various problems with bureaucratic process, often related to their identity documents.[208] These bureaucratic processes have directly shaped and restricted their options of health care and travel to visit family abroad, in particular. A first issue stems from the fact that South African passports list the holder's country of origin. In places where the local presence of former soldiers is well known, this listing, in combination with their date of birth and foreign name, easily identifies them as

[207] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[208] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

former Koevoet or 32 Battalion members, for instance, when they need to seek treatment at a local hospital or go to the Department of Home Affairs.

In the case of lost or damaged identity documents or when applying for a Namibian passport, interviewees claimed to have been asked to provide various additional documents that are difficult to obtain, such as the birth certificates of both their parents, in order to ascertain their identity and citizenship status. To many former soldiers who had not been in contact with their parents for years – if they even knew whether they were still alive – such requests not only appeared to be unreasonable but as deliberate harassment.[209] For those with family in Namibia and Angola, such as one interviewee, these issues have made it difficult to visit them:

> My father passed away [in Angola]. My mother and brothers stayed in Namibia. … The thing is that if I want to go to Namibia, I have to change documents. It's the same if I want to go from here to Angola.[210]

According to another man:

> We are Angolans, but we are in the hands of the South African government. Pomfret has people with no IDs. And people with no ID, they are not going to be able to pass the borders.[211]

Even when former soldiers possessed valid IDs to travel, another major reason for why they have decided to stay in South Africa was their children. The widow of a 32 Battalion member explained that her children and grandchildren, who

[209] Group conversation with 14 former Koevoet members, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.
[210] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 7 July 2016. In Vingerkraal, the representatives of the Angolan Embassy in South Africa regularly visit the community to distribute free hats and t-shirts, and to assist people with their passport and visa applications to Angola. I have repeatedly tried to contact the Embassy and enquire about their work in Vingerkraal but have not received any answers.
[211] Interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.

were all born in South Africa, could not go back to Angola because they did not have Angolan passports.[212] Similarly, one man said:

> I want to stay here because of my children who I live with and who were born here in South Africa. They do not have the citizenship of Namibia. I live here for the sake of my children. If I decide that they are now old, I may leave if I want.[213]

Not only have most children been born in South Africa and lived there all their life but the legacy of near exclusive employment in the (private) security and military sector has been passed on to them as they are 'following their fathers' footsteps'. [214] Many children of former 32 Battalion soldiers have become members of the SANDF.[215] Most others followed their fathers in working for the same private security companies, such as Bidvest Protea Coin and Fidelity in South Africa, or have founded their own companies. This trend has been particularly pronounced in communities such as Vingerkraal, which have been characterised by high secondary school dropout rates and geographical remoteness but long- and well-established recruitment networks. In such contexts, work in the security industry has represented the most viable and often only available form of employment for many young men.

One woman, for instance, explained that her oldest son went to work as a security guard right out of high school after his father, a former 32 Battalion and Koevoet member, had passed away.[216] A teacher at the secondary school in Vingerkraal, whose father was a member of Koevoet, estimated that 85-90 per cent of his male peers were employed in private security companies across South

[212] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.
[213] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[214] Group conversation with 14 former Koevoet members, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016; Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, 73.
[215] McIntyre, 'Questions and Concerns about the Planned Relocation of the Citizens of Pomfret', 1; interview with former soldier, Dingleton, 27 May 2016.
[216] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 21 April 2016.

Africa.[217] Some interviewees said that many companies recruited both former soldiers and their sons because they are 'hard workers' and 'faithful'.[218] According to one former 32 Battalion member:

> There wasn't much else for children to do after matric, where were they going to go? Go back into military service. Not much contact with outside, everything happened within the unit. … It's a pity, it's sad that the Angolan people can't stop being troops, because each father, each family, the name continues, so everyone knows, that one is the son of so-and-so.[219]

Some former soldiers, who were in contact with friends and family in Namibia, painted a less grim picture, rightly arguing that the job market and economic situation in Namibia were in fact much worse than in South Africa. One interviewee, for example, claimed that:

> Each and every year, many boys come to South Africa in search of better jobs. And when they arrive here, they only work as security guards or as drivers. The situation in Namibia is very bad. There are no jobs in Namibia.[220]

Another man said he moved to Vingerkraal in 1994 because 'in Namibia, there were no [security] companies'.[221] The account of another former soldier echoed this assessment and, in a sense, described the continuity of a very old model of migrant labour in a new militarised form:

> The situation we are living in today, I believe, [is] better than the situation in Namibia. You know what? Each and every person here sends money to their family in Namibia. The money that we earn here you cannot compare it to the salaries in Namibia. So we are here only for work. … Our families in Namibia do not help us, they do not send us money. … You will never find a security guard in Namibia earning more than R6,000. That is why we are here. I want you to understand that we are not in poverty.[222]

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[217] Conversation with a local secondary school teacher, Vingerkraal, April 2016.
[218] Interview with former soldier, Mafikeng, 1 June 2016; and interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 28 April 2016.
[219] Interview with Victor Chiulu, Pretoria, June 2005 available at HPRA, A3079, B.1.40.
[220] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 20 April 2016.
[221] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.
[222] Interview with former soldier, Vingerkraal, 26 April 2016.

According to former 32 Battalion members, the economic and political situation in Angola, following the devastating civil war that lasted from 1975 until 2002, was even worse.[223] One former soldier, for instance, recounted that he had previously visited his family in Angola, where he was told about the dangers of landmines and saw the poor public health infrastructure first-hand.[224] Similarly, another interviewee claimed that there were no hospitals and no schools where his family lived. When he visited Angola after his father passed away in January 2016, his family told him to 'just come to visit and then go back' because the 'situation isn't good'.[225] One woman said that returning to Angola after more than 40 years would be a 'new chapter' and simply 'too difficult'.[226] According to Tshisukila Tukayula De Abreu,

> I went back to Angola in 1994. I went there just to see and I wanted to move back. But I was still part of the army in South Africa at this stage. They said I had to leave the South African army if I wanted to move back. It was sad there though. Nothing had changed. I hadn't seen my family for 34 years. Then I came back, I couldn't be there [because] it wasn't my home anymore. … Since 1976 I have never had a happy day in my life. I have always felt like a monkey on a chain living here in South Africa because of those times. Today I can never go back to my country. I am not where I am meant to be.[227]

Similarly, another former soldier explained that 'I have no future [in Angola and] I am not an Angolan citizen anymore'. He further added that people would ask him, 'when we were fighting for our country, where were you?', and said 'I do not want to be a stranger in my country'.[228] Like many of his former colleagues in Koevoet and 32 Battalion, he had become lost everywhere.

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[223] Interview with widow of former soldier, Vingerkraal, 19 April 2016.
[224] Interview with former soldier, Rustenburg, 2 July 2016.
[225] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 12 July 2016.
[226] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 26 May 2016.
[227] Quoted in Heywood, *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, 73-4.
[228] Interview with former soldier, Olifantshoek, 28 May 2016.

Conclusion

In the early and mid-1990s, the former Koevoet and 32 Battalion members in South Africa became stranded as nationalist liberation movements, their former enemies, (re)assumed power of the state in southern Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. Many former soldiers and their families felt they no longer belonged anywhere. In Angola, they were seen as traitors, even foreigners, after having left the country up to 20 years prior. In Namibia, they were considered unwelcome collaborators who, out of their own will, had followed their white leaders to South Africa. When groups of former soldiers and their families wanted to return to Namibia in 1994, government officials first tried to prevent and then actively hindered their attempt to come back. In South Africa, they were cast as foreign mercenaries who had been part of a third force trying to undermine the country's transition from apartheid.

The ruling parties in South Africa and Namibia have since sought to question and deny the citizenship of these soldiers – branded as 'collaborators' and 'mercenaries' – through various means ranging from high-level diplomacy to complicated documentary requirements to direct intimidation. After years, if not decades, of having fought in transnational wars and having been part of distinct military cultures, the former soldiers have often lacked the practical education and language skills necessary not only to remain soldiers and policemen but to claim citizenship and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.

After the former soldiers resigned or were discharged from the police and military, they became almost entirely dependent on their wartime skills and connections in search for work. Many of their white former leaders, now

working in newly established private security and military companies, readily hired them as mercenaries and security personnel. However, the military culture that the former soldiers have come to rely on has also limited them. Nearing retirement age, the former soldiers could hardly be described as 'still hungry for combat'. Rather, they had few other job options given their social and economic isolation in the post-apartheid landscape. As the borders back to their countries of origin had become difficult to cross, new faraway ones opened for them – to Iraq, the DRC, and Nigeria – but only as non-citizen soldiers.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

In this study, I have provided a history of black former soldiers who fought in apartheid South Africa's security forces in Namibia and Angola. I did so based on their own accounts – a new methodological approach to the study of African soldiers of colonial and settler armies. The transnational history of these former soldiers sits uncomfortably with dominant narratives of unified national liberation struggles against colonial occupation, or indeed of repression by a bounded colonial nation-state. At many points, it is a difficult history to recount and explain, even for the former soldiers themselves. Reflecting on his decision to join the FNLA in Zaire in 1974 and the extraordinary consequences that followed, one former soldier said, almost with a sense of disbelief: 'I wanted to better my life but ended up here in South Africa'.[1]

In this concluding chapter, I want to highlight several broader points and questions, which advance the debates discussed in the introduction: collaboration, trans- and un-national dynamics, military culture, and post-liberation politics of citizenship and belonging.

Collaboration

Throughout this study, I have sought to critique mainstream understandings of collaboration during both colonial conquest and decolonisation. From the 1880s until 1989, people in today's Namibia and southern Angola 'collaborated' with

[1] Interview with former soldier, Lethlabile, 26 June 2016.

the German and later South African colonial regime for different reasons and with different objectives, which often changed over time and space. Similarly, my interviewees' accounts revealed complex motivations for both joining and remaining in the South African security forces in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the search for protection against guerrilla violence. Their accounts therefore not only question the common focus of previous studies on economic factors like poverty and unemployment but, more significantly, challenge their popular portrayal as self-interested sell-outs.[2]

Central to this point – although it might be a disconcerting one – is that so-called collaborators such as my interviewees can rarely, if ever, be reduced to one-dimensional caricatures like apartheid stooges or greedy mercenaries. As I have argued, it is essential to treat them as human beings who speak with different identities, of which ascribed ones such as 'collaborator' or 'perpetrator' are just one.[3] My interviewees were not only perpetrators but also witnesses and survivors of violence during Angola's and Namibia's war of independence. They were civilians before they became soldiers, and witnessed and experienced violence as such. They were the brothers, sons, and nephews of people who were suspected as sell-outs and killed by guerrillas. SWAPO and its allies accused those who joined SWATF and Koevoet of collaborating with the enemy. However, in the context of a guerrilla war, it often appeared far from clear who the (more immediate) enemy really was – the security forces or the guerrillas? This was especially the case in areas where SWAPO either had not succeeded in creating a civilian support base or it had but then lost it again, in other words, where

[2] The following three paragraphs have been revised from Bolliger, 'Chiefs, Terror, and Propaganda', 151.
[3] See also Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 211.

conflict dynamics were shaped by a longer history of ethnic, political, and economic difference. There, my interviewees often perceived the violence by PLAN guerrillas as foreign and illegitimate, and the conflict as an un-national, inter-ethnic conflict rather than a national liberation struggle.

Among my interviewees were also individuals who explained that they supported SWAPO's aims and even considered joining the movement in exile but did not or could not for different reasons. Some did not agree with SWAPO's turn to armed struggle in order to achieve national independence while others, whose older siblings had already gone into exile, felt obligated to stay behind and look after their family. In other words, their actions and loyalties did not necessarily reflect their personal ideological convictions.[4] Their enlistment must therefore be understood in the context of a transnational war in which civilians found themselves caught between the security forces and the guerrillas, and obligated by personal and other factors beyond politics.

To be clear, my point here is not to morally equate the violence committed by both sides nor to somehow justify the brutality and human rights abuses that many black soldiers, including my interviewees, were undoubtedly involved in. Instead, I want to underline that their stories upset the narrative of a glorious struggle past as well as the idea that they fought for white supremacy, by detailing the strife within families and communities caused by decades of war and experienced by many Namibians and Angolans.

[4] See also Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 92-4, 100; White and Larmer, 'Introduction', 1274.

Trans- and Un-National Dynamics

By tracing the trans- and un-national history of military recruitment during Namibia's war of independence, I have called attention to the continuity of an older model of transnational migrant labour in new militarised form. Traditional authorities, who had historically played a central role in the cross-border recruitment of both migrant labourers and soldiers during German and South African colonial conquest, were again crucial in the formation of SWATF and Koevoet in the late 1970s. At the same time, the SADF's 32 Battalion recruited Angolan migrant labourers who had left South Africa but became stranded in northern Namibia because of the post-independence civil war in Angola – again underlining the influence of historical contingency.

My interviewees' accounts of their transnational trajectories demonstrated not only how porous national borders were during the war but blurred the boundaries between nationalist liberation movements and colonial and settler armies – both at the individual and collective level. In the run-up to Angolan independence, for instance, the rival nationalist liberation movements absorbed thousands of African colonial troops in order to bolster their military strength. However, very little is known about the factors that influenced these troops' decision to join a particular organisation or to what extent it was actually possible not to do so, questions that warrant further comparative research.

Among these African ex-colonial troops were also soldiers who later joined 32 Battalion, a unit that evades any easy categorisation, particularly in its early days. Initially, the battalion was a highly unconventional unit, which consisted primarily of black guerrillas-turned-refugees and was formed to 'out-guerrilla

the guerrillas' but was also part of a larger, conventional, and predominantly white military, the SADF. The transnational history of 32 Battalion and its Angolan members upsets the binaries of guerrillas/heroes and collaborators/ traitors, and challenges the distinction between 'conventional' colonial and settler armies and 'unconventional' liberation movement armies. Thus, it shows the need to further explore the latters' exchanges and overlaps, taking into account the influence of trans- and un-national dynamics of liberation struggles.

Military Culture

Through the accounts of former soldiers, I have offered a critique of two central assumptions and approaches underlying the conception of military culture in the fields of military history and sociology, notably the military as a nation united in arms, and the top-down focus on officers. My interviewees' stories did not reveal unified military cultures concerned with ceremonies and etiquette but highly heterogeneous and divided ones, often characterised by extreme brutality and violence, of which my interviewees were again both targets and perpetrators.

The military cultures of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet differed with regard to the training and enforcement of discipline among troops, the relationship between black troops and their white officers, and the troops' understanding of their unit's military and political mission. By tracing the genealogy of these three units, I have emphasised the need to consider their origins and the impact of those origins on the formation of their particular military cultures. For instance, the development of 32 Battalion's distinct

military culture, especially the brutal enforcement of discipline, was rooted in the Angolan origins of its ex-FNLA recruits, and the attitudes of white SADF officers, who were tasked with forming them into a competent fighting force. In other words, the unit's military culture was shaped by the past experiences of its members as well as the existing organisational structure of the SADF.

In addition, I have highlighted the mythological aspects of military culture. While previous studies have focused on inter-unit rivalry and competition, I have argued that differences between units are both real and imagined. They are imagined in the sense that soldiers conceived and portrayed their unit in contrast to other rival units, for instance as 'disciplined' in the case of SWATF's 101 Battalion or 'elite' in the case of Koevoet. The former soldiers emphasised these differences in order to create a particular reputation for themselves and their unit. These myths influenced how the units operated during the war, and affected their members' different post-war trajectories. My methodological approach of oral history has therefore provided new insight, beyond Western and colonial armies, into how military cultures develop as well as how ordinary soldiers experience and understand them.

Post-Liberation Politics of Citizenship and Belonging

As the first study that focuses on the post-war trajectories of black soldiers of the colonial and settler armies in southern Africa, this study has also shed new light on the impact of transnational wars and military cultures on the making of citizenship and belonging in post-liberation contexts. With regard to the ruling

parties in South Africa and Namibia, I have shown how they have not only branded their former enemies as 'traitors' and 'collaborators' in official history, but have sought to deny them both formal and substantive citizenship status. They have done so through various economic, bureaucratic, and legal means, ranging from high-level diplomatic negotiations to obtuse documentary requirements to verbal and physical intimidation.

Former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia, in turn, have sought to contest the ruling party's conception of citizenship and its associated benefits. Since independence, associations of former soldiers have politically mobilised to demand benefits and recognition from the SWAPO-led government – making Namibia's post-liberation politics a unique case in and beyond southern Africa. As I have argued, the former soldiers have been able to do so due to significant support from beyond their ranks, in particular by opposition parties and organisations of SWAPO dissidents and ex-detainees. All groups have framed the former soldiers' post-war marginalisation in broader terms of regional and ethnic discrimination by SWAPO – a common perception shared among wider segments of Namibia's minority groups and a divisive legacy of the trans- and un-national dynamics of the liberation struggle.

In contrast, the former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members in South Africa have often lacked the necessary documentation, and education and language skills to claim citizenship and belonging – yet another bitter legacy of their decades-long military service across various boundaries of geography and military units. As a result, many of them have relied on the post-war continuity of military organisation and culture in order to find employment in the private security and military industry across the globe. Thus, their accounts highlight the

need to understand such recruitment as yet another continuity of an old model of transnational migrant labour in a new globalised form.

Beyond Military Collaboration

The former soldiers' accounts also probe the nature of the post-apartheid political settlements in Namibia and South Africa. In stark contrast to their erstwhile military and political leaders, the majority of black former soldiers have found themselves socially and economically marginalised. Since the formal end of apartheid, their white former commanders have not only enjoyed greater wealth and opportunities but have often continued to be in charge of them and their families as the owners of private security companies that recruit black former soldiers and their children. Despite also having been on the 'wrong side', many of their black former leaders in Namibia – military commanders, politicians, and traditional authorities – have retained their political and economic power as a result of SWAPO's transition pact with the old apartheid-era elites. The post-war marginalisation of the black former rank-and-file of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet therefore points to a broader silence on the history of non-military collaboration, both in Namibia and South Africa.[5]

To many Namibians, South Africans and Angolans, the black former members of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet understandably represent the ultimate collaborator: willing to kill their own people and to risk their own lives in loyalty to the enemy. However, these former soldiers not only formed the sharp end of

[5] See also Dlamini, 'Apartheid Confessions', 774.

the security forces but of the wider colonial and apartheid systems that depended on various other forms of collaboration. This transnational history and its legacies – arguably even more complex and disconcerting – remain to be uncovered.

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