

## **Living in Exile: Daily Life and International Relations at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp**

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From 1964, when it was granted by the Tanzanian government to OAU recognized liberation movements, Kongwa camp has been a key site in Southern Africa's exile history. First SWAPO and FRELIMO, and later the ANC, MPLA, ZAPU and other movements, inhabited neighboring sites near the town of Kongwa in central Tanzania, where they trained their respective members in guerrilla tactics and prepared to infiltrate their countries of origin. Some people passed through Kongwa only briefly as they moved between training courses and combat zones, but many also lived at Kongwa for years as they awaited instructions from their commanders and sought other opportunities abroad. There, Southern Africa's liberation movements, several of which are now ruling parties, governed their own citizens for the first time. And these nations in waiting were shaped by Kongwa's unique international community, consisting of local agro-pastoralists, Tanzanian officials, Southern African exiles, and the far-flung governments and organizations which supported and influenced them.

Such qualities of Kongwa camp – of the camp as an international, lived space – are barely reflected in historical literature. Most often, sources mention Kongwa as part of the history of one liberation movement's armed struggle. For example, Peter Katjavivi, SWAPO's former Secretary of Information and a professional historian, writes in his book, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, that SWAPO ran an “operational headquarters in Tanzania” from which it coordinated its “fighting units” in Namibia and where “the fighters were brought together... to harmonise and agree upon final operational procedures.”<sup>1</sup> There is no reference to the particular place where this camp is located or to the years when Namibians and other people lived together there. Other texts associate Kongwa with moments of conflict within a given liberation movement. Thus, in Namibian historiography, Kongwa is often

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1 Peter Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), pp. 60, 85. Histories of other liberation movements refer to Kongwa in very similar ways. See, for example, Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 1999), p. 50.

invoked as a crisis (“the Kongwa Crisis”), in which seven guerrillas (“the Seven Comrades” or “Chinamen”) based at Kongwa in 1968 openly criticized the SWAPO leadership and were detained by the Tanzanian authorities.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, widely cited studies of the ANC in exile refer to problems in the ANC’s “camps in Tanzania” during the 1960s although these problems are contextualized primarily in terms of the Rivonia Trials and the Wankie Campaign, rather than considering how these and other conditions were experienced in the camps themselves.<sup>3</sup> An article by historian Sifiso Ndlovu and a collection of interviews collected by the South African Education and Democracy Trust have drawn attention to what life was like for ANC members living in Tanzania at Kongwa and other sites.<sup>4</sup> While making important contributions to historical knowledge, these texts continue to frame Kongwa – and exile more generally – as part of a national history. In so doing, they obscure not only the people of other nationalities who lived in and around Kongwa, but also the international relations forged at the camp and their significance for shaping Southern Africa’s constituent nations.

In contrast, this essay examines how a community of Namibians, administered by the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO, lived among others at Kongwa.<sup>5</sup> Rather than place Kongwa primarily within a history of Namibia, I present an historical ethnography of how certain people were able to speak on behalf of Namibians and shape an emerging Namibian nation at a particular, transnational site. To this end, the essay presents a narrative of how Kongwa developed during the mid-1960s and a

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2 Lauren Dobell, *Swapo’s Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means* (Basel: P.Schlettwein Publishing, 1991, 2000), pp. 37-38; Collin Leys and John S. Saul, *Namibia’s Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey) pp. 43-44; Justine Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia: Umgang mit schweren Menschenrechtsverletzungen der Ära des bewaffneten Befreiungskampfes, 1966 bis 1989* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2008), pp. 77-80; Paul Trehwela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2009), pp. 143, 189. Trehwela’s work was previously published in 1990 in the journal *Searchlight South Africa*.

3 Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983), p. 300; Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London: James Currey, 1992); Stephen Ellis, “Mbokodo: Security in ANC Camps,” *African Affairs*, 93, 371 (Apr. 1994), p. 286.

4 Sifiso Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), pp. 411-478; *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories* (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2008). In addition to these texts there are also at least two memoirs written by former exiles which provide brief descriptions of what life was like at Kongwa. These are Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), pp. 99-101; Archie Sibeko (with J. Leeson), *Freedom in Our Lifetime* (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996), pp. 81-85.

5 The essay draws from my doctoral dissertation, titled “Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation” (University of Michigan, 2009). Therein, I also discuss Kongwa through the history of Kaufilwa Nepelilo, a man who lived in the SWAPO camp there from 1964 to 1971 (pp. 222-239).

thick description of everyday life as it formed in and around SWAPO's Kongwa camp. Finally, the essay focuses on a series of conflicts within SWAPO whose form and resolution were profoundly shaped by the international community at Kongwa. In so doing, it highlights how some Namibians managed to subdue others through their ability to influence representatives of national communities around the camp and several kinds of histories which remain submerged beneath Southern Africa's national narratives.

### **An Early History of Kongwa's Camps**

On 25 May, 1963 in Addis Ababa, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed. Among the groups established under the auspices of the OAU was the Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, which soon became known as the “OAU Liberation Committee.” Tasked to decolonize the territories in Africa which remained under colonial rule, the Liberation Committee was made responsible for co-ordinating aid given to liberation movements and for managing a liberation fund. Importantly, the Liberation Committee's headquarters were to be based in Dar es Salaam. There it would be close to those Southern Africa nations whose liberation movements were opposing colonial and apartheid regimes and would receive support from the Tanzanian (then Tanganyikan) government, led by Julius Nyerere.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-1960s the number of Southern African exiles in Tanzania was growing quickly. Some of these early exiles were political activists who had recently established offices in Dar es Salaam for their liberation movements or were seeking recognition from the Tanzanian government. Increasingly, however, there were other Southern Africans entering Tanzania and Dar es Salaam. In the case of SWAPO, the majority of exiles who entered Tanzania during the early 1960s were contract

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<sup>6</sup> Klaas van Walraven, *Dreams of Power: The Role of the Organization of African Unity in the Politics of Africa, 1963-1993* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, African Studies Centre Research Series 13/1999) p. 238.

workers recruited in Francistown, Bechuanaland.<sup>7</sup> In 1962 and 1963 SWAPO transferred some of these exiles from Tanzania to Egypt, the USSR and China where they participated in military training courses alongside exiles from other liberation movements.<sup>8</sup> Other exiles enrolled in schools, above all Kurasini International Educational Centre, a secondary school established by the African-American Institute in Dar es Salaam to prepare Southern Africans for tertiary studies.<sup>9</sup> Still others found themselves without any occupation or place to stay and moved into overcrowding refugee camps administered by humanitarian organizations on the outskirts of the city.<sup>10</sup>

It is in this context that the Tanzanian government, on behalf of the Liberation Committee, set aside a tract of land in central Tanzania for the liberation movements. The land was situated at the site of an abandoned school and railway station located less than two kilometers west of Kongwa village and 80 kilometers east of Dodoma.<sup>11</sup> According to Samora Machel, he and other FRELIMO cadres arrived at Kongwa and began to construct the camp on 4 April, 1964.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, John Otto Nankudhu, one of the first group of SWAPO guerrillas to inhabit Kongwa,<sup>13</sup> indicates that he and his Namibian

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- 7 In the Namibian literature only Tony Emmet draws attention to the importance of SWAPO's Francistown office for recruiting most of the early Namibian exiles (Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), pp. 331-332). All of my research participants who lived in exile during the 1960s emphasized the importance of the Francistown office. See, for example, Samson Ndeikwila, Interview 21.7.2007, p. 28; Nambinga Kati, Interview 11.8.2007, pp. 7-8; Helao Shityuwete, Interview 14.12.2010.
- 8 John Otto Nankudhu and Helao Shityuwete, Interview 2.6.2011, p. 1; Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered* (London: Panaf Books, 2001), pp. 158-159; Susan Brown, "Diplomacy by Other Means: SWAPO's Liberation War" in Colin Leys and John S. Saul, eds. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), p. 20; Leonard Phillemon "Castro" Nangolo, "My History," 1994, p. 2. In *Where Others Wavered*, SWAPO President Sam Nujoma refers also to Algeria, Ghana and North Korea as places where SWAPO members received military training by 1963, but John Otto Nankudhu and Helao Shityuwete, two of the first guerrillas trained by SWAPO, maintain that Namibians accessed military training in Algeria, Ghana and North Korea only later.
- 9 Kurasini opened its doors in December 1962 and became a full-fledged secondary school in 1965. By January 1967, 188 students were enrolled there, including 150 "refugee students" from Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, South Africa and South West Africa (ANC Morogoro Office, Box 11, Folder 96, "Kurasini International Education Centre," pp. 2-3).
- 10 See, for example, Silas Shikongo, Interview 26.7.2007, pp. 13-15; Kauflwa Nepelilo, Interview 3.8.2007, p. 6. One source suggests that the growing numbers of Southern African exiles living on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam may have been seen by the Tanzanian authorities as a security risk – especially after the January 1964 coup attempt against Nyerere's government (Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 18).
- 11 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011; Helao Shityuwete, Interviews 14.12.2010; 17.12.2010; Toivo Ashipala, Interview 16.3.2007, p. 21; Ndeikwila, 21.7.2007, p. 22; Ndlovu, "ANC in Exile," p. 463; "Kongwa: Berço da Revolução" *Tempos* (15 June, 1975), p. 19. Shityuwete maintains that the railway station was built during the German colonial period (Shityuwete 14.12.2010; 17.12.2010).
- 12 "Kongwa: Berço da Revolução," p. 19. Interestingly, Machel, and the *Tempos* article in which he is cited, make no reference to SWAPO – despite the fact that FRELIMO and SWAPO established the first camps there together.
- 13 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 1; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 24; Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, pp. 158-159.

comrades arrived at the site around April 1964 and, within two days, were joined by a larger group of Mozambicans led by Samora Machel.<sup>14</sup> Over the next several weeks, SWAPO and FRELIMO members renovated the dilapidated school building into soldiers' barracks, constructed new buildings to be used as offices and kitchens, and separated the two movements' camps with a barbed wire fence.<sup>15</sup> In all these activities, the liberation movements were aided by local Tanzanians, who, at the request of Tanzanian government officials, helped with the camps' construction and provided food and drink for the workers.<sup>16</sup> By May the Namibians and Mozambicans had moved out of their tents, which they had pitched in the bush near Kongwa, and into their respective camps.<sup>17</sup>

From the perspective of its first inhabitants and many others, the site allocated to the liberation movements at Kongwa<sup>18</sup> must have appeared a periphery. It was situated far from the borders of Tanzania and of exiles' countries of origin. It was also located nearly 500 kilometers from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's main urban center as well as the center of the liberation movements' respective communities in exile. Driving the rough, gravel road between Dar es Salaam and Kongwa was a full day's journey,<sup>19</sup> and although there was a railway stop located 15 kilometers northeast of the camp along the line running inland from Dar es Salaam to Lake Tanganyika, the liberation movements' access to the railway was restricted by the Tanzanian government.<sup>20</sup> The territory surrounding Kongwa

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14 Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2.6.2011, pp. 1-2. It should be noted that in *Where Others Wavered*, Sam Nujoma writes that “on 27 May 1963, [SWAPO] opened [its] military camp at Kongwa in Tanzania.” Although it is possible that Nujoma is referring to a formal ceremony at which land was allocated by the Tanzanian government to SWAPO, members of SWAPO and FRELIMO appear not to have moved to Kongwa until April 1964.

15 Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2.6.2011, pp. 2, 3-4; *Tempo* (15 June, 1975), pp. 19, 21. Interestingly, there is no reference in the *Tempo* article to the buildings which exiles found on site when they arrived at Kongwa, but Nankudhu is quite detailed in his description of the buildings that the liberation movements found at the camp and how they were divided between SWAPO and FRELIMO.

16 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, pp. 4-5.

17 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, pp. 4-5; *Tempo* (15 June, 1975), p. 20.

18 Henceforth, I will use “Kongwa” to refer to the site given to the liberation movements outside Kongwa village. If I wish to refer to the village or to a particular liberation movement's camp at Kongwa, I will specify accordingly.

19 Shityuwete 14.12.2010; Lawrence Phokanoka ('Peter Tladi') in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories*, (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust), p. 418.

20 No people or military equipment belonging to the liberation movements could travel via rail due to the threat which such travel entailed for the Tanzanian state (Shityuwete 14.12.2010). For more detail about how supplies moved to and from Kongwa, see the following section “International Relations and Camp Daily Life.”

was sparsely populated. The village of Kongwa was inhabited by no more than 1000 people.<sup>21</sup> Around it lay farmland and small, shifting settlements occupied by people who collectively referred to themselves as “*Wagogo*.”<sup>22</sup> Through a combination of agriculture, cattle raising and migration, the *Wagogo* subsisted in a region prone to extended droughts and killing famines.<sup>23</sup> During the late 1940s Kongwa briefly became a site in a massive British development project known as the “East African Groundnut Scheme” and, by the 1960s,<sup>24</sup> some *Wagogo* had entered Tanzania's migrant labor system and were selling groundnuts, or “*karanga*,” in a cash economy.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of the impact of these changes on *Gogo* communities,<sup>26</sup> they, and their new neighbors, lived at the distant margins of a world system.

Nevertheless, they all now lived at the center of a new international community forming around the liberation movements at Kongwa. In the beginning, FRELIMO's was the largest presence in this community. According to Samora Machel, by September 1964, Kongwa had already accommodated at least 250 FRELIMO guerrillas, who, following military training in the camp, infiltrated Mozambique and initiated the armed struggle.<sup>27</sup> From then until FRELIMO vacated Kongwa in 1966, hundreds of FRELIMO guerrillas were moving between the camp and locations in Mozambique where they were

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21 For estimates of Kongwa's population during the 1960s, see Helao Shityuwete, Interview 14.12.2010 and Samson Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, p. 22.

22 Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 14.12.2010. According to Peter Rigby, an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in the region from 1961 to 1963, Kongwa corresponds to the northeastern region of “Ugogo” (*Cattle and Kinship among the Gogo: A Semi-Pastoral Society in Central Tanzania*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 12).

23 Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, p. 20; Gregory Maddox, “Environment & Population Growth: In Ugogo Central Tanzania” in Gregory Maddox and James L. Giblin, eds. *Custodians of the Land* (London: James Currey, 1996), p. 43; Derek Peterson, “Morality Plays: Marriage, Church Courts, and Colonial Agency in Central Tanganyika, ca. 1876-1928” in *The American Historical Review*, 111, 4, pp. 988-990. Maddox emphasizes that the region is the most famine prone region in all of Tanzania with an average annual rainfall of about 500 ml per year, just surpassing the minimum for supporting agriculture.

24 For a discussion of the “The Groundnut Scheme” and its relationship to Kongwa, see Jan S. Hogendorn and K. M. Scott, “Very Large-Scale Agricultural Projects: The Lessons of the East African Groundnut Scheme,” in Robert I. Rotberg, ed. *Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger: East and Central Africa* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), pp. 167-198. It should further be noted that Archie Sibeko, a former ANC commander at Kongwa, suggests that the buildings which the ANC inhabited at Kongwa may previously have been used by officials implementing the Groundnut Scheme (Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, p. 81). None of my research participants, however, mentioned this connection.

25 Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, pp. 20, 22, 23; Maddox, “Environment & Population Growth,” pp. 54, 56-57.

26 In his text (*Cattle and Kinship*) Rigby emphasizes that migrant labor and cash crops had minimal impact on “*Gogo* culture,” the topic of his study, whereas Maddox's article (“Environment & Population Growth”) draws attention to changes in *Ugogo* over time.

27 “Kongwa: Berço da Revolução,” pp. 19-23.

involved in military operations and supplying those living in the liberated zones.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, the group of SWAPO guerrillas which established Kongwa in April 1964 consisted of only twelve to fifteen individuals.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, their numbers did increase rapidly. According to one source, by the latter part of 1964 there were roughly 100 Namibians living at Kongwa and, by the middle of 1965, there were nearly 300.<sup>30</sup> For the most part, these guerrillas remained inside the camp with only small groups departing from it to infiltrate Namibia in the latter part of 1965 and 1966.

Within a year or so of the first camps' openings, other liberation movements also established camps at Kongwa. In August 1964 the ANC founded its camp.<sup>31</sup> Located on the site of the old railway station about 50 meters outside the SWAPO and FRELIMO camps,<sup>32</sup> the ANC camp was first inhabited by Umkhoto weSizwe (MK) cadres returning from military training in Egypt and the USSR, followed by others who had recently traveled from South Africa to Tanzania.<sup>33</sup> Numbers increased very quickly such that by the end of 1964, there may have been 400 to 500 South Africans living in the camp, making it the second largest at Kongwa.<sup>34</sup> At least four of these first MK cadres at Kongwa were women, contrasting with the SWAPO and FRELIMO camps where there appear to have been even fewer women at this time.<sup>35</sup> In 1965 the MPLA and ZAPU also moved to Kongwa.<sup>36</sup> There these two

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28 "Kongwa: Berço da Revolução," pp. 19-23; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

29 Among the original group of Namibians at Kongwa were the following twelve individuals: Tobias Hainyeko, Leonard Phillemon "Castro" Nangolo, John Otto Nankudhu, Titus Muailpeni Shitilifa, Patrick Israel Iyambo, Peter Hambiya, Lazarus Sakaria, Peter "Shinyafa" Haitembu, Simeon Linkela Shixungileni, James Hamukuaja Angula, Messah Victory Namuandi and Nelson Kavela (Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 1; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 24). Interestingly, Nankudhu and other research participants sometimes refer to "the fifteen Namibians" who originally inhabited Kongwa, but when asked to list the names of these original inhabitants, Nankudhu and Shityuwete both identified the same twelve names.

30 Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), pp. 99-100; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 1-2. Shityuwete was responsible for keeping records in the camp office in 1965.

31 Ndlovu, "The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970," p. 457; Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, pp. 80-81; Isaac Makopo, in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories*, (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust), p. 210; Tladi, *Telling their Stories*, pp. 418. It should be noted that most of these authors give the impression that when the ANC entered Kongwa that there were no other liberation movements based there. Only Peter Tladi mentions that when the ANC arrived at Kongwa "we found that FRELIMO and SWAPO were more or less in the same camp."

32 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 22; Shityuwete 14.12.2010; Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 2.

33 Ndlovu, "The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970," pp. 458-460.

34 Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, p. 82; Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 14.12.2007.

35 Ruth Mompoti discusses the women in the ANC section of Kongwa in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories*, (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust), pp. 315-316. Only one woman lived in the SWAPO camp during the 1960s, Meme Mukwahepo. She lived in a separate flat with her partner, David Shilunga (Ndeikwila 9.2.2007,

liberation movements initially located themselves two to three kilometers from the SWAPO, FRELIMO and ANC camps.<sup>37</sup> Numbers fluctuated considerably in the MPLA camp as its leaders prepared to take advantage of Zambian independence in 1964 and Zambian government recognition in early 1965 by opening a new front along the Zambian-Angolan border.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, former exiles at Kongwa maintain that both the MPLA and ZAPU camps remained small during the mid-1960s relative to FRELIMO, the ANC and SWAPO.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the liberation movements which were officially inhabiting Kongwa,<sup>40</sup> there were also others which were not recognized by the OAU that were hiding within recognized liberation movements' camps. For example, in 1965 and 1966 at least eleven soldiers aligned with Jonas Savimbi and UNITA inhabited SWAPO's Kongwa camp. Savimbi had recruited these soldiers from the Angolan community living in the Zambian Copperbelt, and he drew from SWAPO's recognition at the OAU and his close personal relationships with several SWAPO and Tanzanian officials to smuggle them into China for training and then back to Zambia and Angola.<sup>41</sup> UNITA's "Chinese Eleven" lived among SWAPO members at Kongwa for months as the former awaited passage en route to their various

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p. 5; Shityuwete 14.12.2010). Research participants maintain that there were no women in the FRELIMO camp (Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 14.12.2010).

36 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 2; Shityuwete, 24.7.2007, pp. 21, 22; Shityuwete 14.12.2010; Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 5. It may be that ZANU also administered a camp at Kongwa for a period of time (e.g. Ndlovu, "The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970," p. 464; Helmuth 13.7.2007, p. 9; 10.8.2007, p. 11), but I have been unable to confirm the timing of ZANU's arrival or distinguish clearly between the activities of ZAPU and ZANU at Kongwa. Most of my (Namibian) research participants refer generally to "the Zimbabweans" at Kongwa. ZAPU is clearly referenced in several of the sources which I cite here; ZANU, however, is not.

37 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 21, 22; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

38 Samson Ndeikwila 16.2.2007, p. 10; Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, p. 23; Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1986), p. 70. Bridgland specifically refers to a group of "170 MPLA recruits" passing from Zambia through Kongwa en route to the Soviet Union in "summer 1965" and "another 90" which passed through the camp en route to Cuba. Previously MPLA guerrillas had been working primarily out of a base in Congo-Brazzaville near the border of Cabinda.

39 Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

40 In addition to the previously mentioned liberation movements, the PAC is also occasionally listed among liberation movements that once based themselves at Kongwa (e.g. Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, p. 159), but I have found no specific references to a PAC presence at Kongwa in my research, in Ndlovu's discussion of everyday life at Kongwa, or in Thami kaPlaatjie's article on the PAC in exile, "The PAC in Exile" in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1960-1970)* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007).

41 Bridgland, Jonas Savimbi, pp. 66, 69; Helmuth 13.7.2007, pp. 8, 9-10.



assignments.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, there were others within the SWAPO camp who prior to entering exile had belonged to the Caprivi African National Union (CANU), a liberation movement which claimed to represent Namibia's Caprivi region. Although CANU had officially merged with SWAPO in November 1964, some Caprivians sought to resurrect CANU as an independent movement even as they resided within the camp granted to SWAPO.<sup>43</sup> Thus, CANU too could be counted among the liberation movements based at Kongwa despite the fact that the territory which it claimed to represent was not widely accepted as a nation.

### **The International Relations of Camp Daily Life**

By 1965, then, Kongwa was home to an array of national liberation movements, including movements representing all of the Southern African nations then under white minority rule. Ostensibly, each of these movements acted as an autonomous unit, governing the daily lives of fellow nationals according to the routines set within its camp. In SWAPO's case,<sup>44</sup> the day usually began before dawn when camp inhabitants woke to participate in physical training, which included jogging and calisthenics. After returning to the barracks and eating breakfast, inhabitants assembled at the parade where they participated in the parade ceremony, registered their attendance and were assigned tasks for the day. Tasks included routine camp maintenance, such as cooking, cleaning and guard duty, as well as other activities more directly aimed at training "freedom fighters." For example, inhabitants took classes in which they learned how to use different kinds of firearms and explosives and studied tactics and philosophies of guerrilla warfare. Knowledge was tested and skills were honed in various ways.

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42 Bridgland, pp. 69-71; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 21-22; Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 20; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 11, 12; Shityuwete 14.12.2010. Shityuwete's testimony strongly suggests that UNITA's "Chinese Eleven" not only passed through Kongwa for several months in 1966 (as Bridgland narrates), but that they or others affiliated with Savimbi lived in SWAPO's Kongwa camp in 1965.

43 For more details about CANU-SWAPO relations at Kongwa see the section of this essay titled "The Kongwa Crisis."

44 In this instance, like other cases in which I make collective claims about the SWAPO camp in this paper, I draw from all of my interviews with inhabitants of this camp during the 1960s. They are: Ashipala 16.3.2007, 25.7.2007; Sylvester Hangula (pseudonym), Interview 18.6.2011; Helmuth 13.7.2007, 10.8.2007; Kati 11.8.2007, 8.12.2007; Frederick Matongo, Interview 18.6.2011; Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011; Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, 16.2.2007, 2.3.2007, 21.7.2007; Nepelilo 4.8.2007; Shityuwete 24.7.2007; 5.6.2008; 14.12.2010; 17.12.2010; Shikongo 16.3.2007, 26.7.2007.

Trainees made scheduled visits to the shooting range during which they would practice hitting the targets with the different weapons about which they had been taught. They also were sent on “the long march” during which they would engage in forms of mock warfare, which included laying ambushes for rival groups and locating items hidden in the bush.<sup>45</sup> During some evenings basic mathematics and literacy classes were also held, which, some argued, were critical for guerrillas making calculations with explosives and engaging in a freedom struggle.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, other liberation movements established daily routines similar to those within the SWAPO camp.<sup>47</sup> But each movement established and administered its routines separately from the others.

In addition to living according to a particular camp's routines, each camp's inhabitants were highly dependent on the hierarchy of officials administering the camp on behalf of a given liberation movement. Thus, in SWAPO's case, Namibians who had previously trained in North Africa or overseas were responsible for those arriving at Kongwa from Namibia. These trainers became known in the camp generally as “the commanders,” and the commanders who founded Kongwa in 1964 were granted seniority among them.<sup>48</sup> Together, the senior commanders and SWAPO's political leaders based in Dar es Salaam granted particular individuals further authority over spheres of camp life. Thus, the titles “First, Second and Third Chief-in-Command” were conferred on those responsible for the camp and the army as a whole, “First, Second and Third Secretary” on those responsible for logistical and administrative details in the camp, and “Political Commissar” and “Deputy Political Commissar” on those responsible for soldiers' political education and morale.<sup>49</sup> Together, this hierarchy of

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45 Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, p. 25; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 6). In some instances, the “long march” could last for days at a time. For example, Toivo Ashipala indicates that the Mozambicans (but not the Namibians) at Kongwa used to stay in the bush over consecutive days, practicing guerrilla warfare techniques (Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 7). A letter from the ANC regional commander at Morogoro on 23 July, 1975 also refers to a “long march” scheduled at Kongwa to take place over fifteen days for the purpose of practicing “a.) Sabotage, b.) Ambush, c.) Raids, d.) Crossing of roads, borders and boundaries, and also villages” (ANC Morogoro Office, Box 26, Folder 17).

46 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 6; Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, pp. 2-3.

47 See, for example, Ndlovu's description daily life in the ANC's camp at Kongwa (“The ANC in Exile: 1960-1970,” *Road to Democracy*, pp. 463-469) as well as in testimonies recorded in the *Telling their Stories*.

48 Shityuwete 24.7.2007; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 7, 8; Nashilongo 11.12.2010.

49 For a detailed discussion of these various positions and their significance at Kongwa in 1965 and 1966, see Shityuwete 24.7.2007. Peter Tladi also offers an account of how the camp command was organized in the ANC's Kongwa camp.

commanders was responsible for distributing food, monitoring movement and dispersing information among those who lived in the camp. And their jurisdiction over camp and nation was ritually reinforced through camp activities – especially during the parade when senior commanders officially set the terms of camp life and led inhabitants in drills and songs proclaiming the Namibian nation and praising SWAPO and its leaders.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the camp and its national boundaries, exiles at Kongwa were also part of international communities. Some of these communities formed around camp spaces which the national liberation movements shared. For example, initially SWAPO and FRELIMO shared a kitchen which required the two movements to coordinate the preparation and clean-up of meals.<sup>51</sup> SWAPO, FRELIMO and the ANC also shared an armory which these liberation movements were responsible for guarding in joint shifts of two persons each.<sup>52</sup> Eventually, some of the liberation movements opened clinics, which they opened to members of other liberation movements and surrounding communities.<sup>53</sup> The shooting range was also a shared space which not only required the organization of shifts between the liberation movements but also the notification of those walking on the road to Kongwa village that shooting practice would begin.<sup>54</sup> Sometimes liberation movements also organized events for which they invited members of other movements to visit their camps. For example, there were occasions when one movement invited members of another to attend a special parade in its camp, such as when someone was scheduled to speak about a topic related to all of the movements' liberation struggles.<sup>55</sup> SWAPO, FRELIMO and ANC members also established a social committee, which organized events, especially concerts and dramas, which were hosted on alternating weeks in the three movements' offices.<sup>56</sup>

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Although the titles and breakdown of responsibilities differ, Tladi emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and titles in the camp (Tladi, *Road to Democracy*, p. 419).

50 See especially Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 2, 7.

51 Nankudhu 2.6.2011, p. 4; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 12.

52 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 22; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

53 Shikongo 26.7.2007, p. 18; Ndlovu, "The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970," p. 465.

54 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 6-7.

55 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 3.

56 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 22; Shityuwete 24.7.2010; Ndlovu, "The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970," p. 464; Makopo, *Telling*

It should be noted that shared use of camp spaces was not always marked by cooperation between nations. For example, the entry of Angolans loyal to Jonas Savimbi into SWAPO's camp in 1965 initiated controversies between SWAPO and the OAU recognized liberation movements based at Kongwa.<sup>57</sup> According to one SWAPO camp commander, FRELIMO informed the MPLA, which had recently arrived at Kongwa and was more distanced from the SWAPO camp, that SWAPO was secretly harboring Savimbi's men. Thereafter, the MPLA made arrangements with FRELIMO to place some of its members in the FRELIMO camp and, from there, to spy on SWAPO even as SWAPO became suspicious and began spying on the MPLA.<sup>58</sup> Controversy erupted again the following year when Savimbi's men returned to the camp from training in China and the MPLA lodged an official complaint with the OAU Liberation Committee that SWAPO must hand over the Angolans in its camp. SWAPO denied the accusation, apparently on the premise that "the suspected Angolans" were, in fact, Namibians, who, like many in the camp, had grown up on both sides of the Namibian- Angolan border and therefore spoke Portuguese and African languages which crossed the artificial colonial boundary. Shortly after the complaint was lodged, SWAPO managed to smuggle the Angolans out of Tanzania with its guerrillas entering Zambia. There they reunited with Savimbi and entered Angola to become commanders of the newly launched liberation movement UNITA.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to relationships forming between the liberation movements within their camps, there were also relations forming around Kongwa at the margins of the liberation movements' control. On Sundays and some afternoons and evenings, camp commanders permitted rank-in-file soldiers to leave the camps. In these instances, and others when camp inhabitants left their camps without permission,

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*their Stories*, p. 210; Ndeikwila 17.6.2011.

57 Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 20; Helmuth 13.7.2007, pp. 8-10; Nashilongo 11.12.2007; Nepelilo 4.8.2010, pp. 11, 12; Shityuwete 24.7.2007; Shityuwete 14.12.2010; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, pp. 69-71. There were many reasons for the close relationship between SWAPO and UNITA over the next decade, including personal relationships between Savimbi, Nujoma and other SWAPO leaders and the strategic significance for SWAPO of co-operating closely with any liberation movement working in the parts of Angola through which SWAPO guerrillas infiltrated Namibia.

58 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 21; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

59 Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 70; Helmuth 13.7.2007, pp. 9-10. In addition to these incidents, referenced widely by Namibians living at Kongwa in the mid-1960s, there are other instances of intrigue, spying and conflict between liberation movements at Kongwa to which research participants referred, but about which they offered little corroborating detail.

they usually interfaced with people in the surrounding communities with whom they developed diverse relationships. For example, exiles participated in local church services.<sup>60</sup> They joined and created soccer teams which played in local leagues.<sup>61</sup> They frequented a clinic in Kongwa village before the liberation movements had established their own in their respective camps<sup>62</sup> and, even thereafter, exiles with serious ailments were referred to a local doctor who treated them for free.<sup>63</sup> They were reliant on the market in Kongwa village for buying and selling commodities although they often had little to bring to these exchanges due to a lack of pocket money and basic supplies in the camps.<sup>64</sup> It was not uncommon for exiles to barter their own clothing for cash, and some created their own gardens near the camps primarily so that they could sell their produce in the village.<sup>65</sup> Exiles also frequented the shabeens in Kongwa location where they drank and socialized with one another and local clients.<sup>66</sup>

According to former exile sources, relations between exiles and the communities surrounding Kongwa were generally good. Many refer now to “the Tanzanians” or “the Wagogo” with terms of praise, describing them variously as “kind,” “gentle” and “peaceful.” Clearly, they appreciated commodities, people and institutions which they could access at Kongwa village and which were not available inside their camps. Some suggest that local people appreciated the liberation movements for the supplies and knowledge which they brought to the area as well. For example, some Namibians note how they surprised and impressed the Tanzanians near Kongwa with their farming techniques, which yielded better crops of local staples like maize and beans than the locals could produce themselves.<sup>67</sup>

South African sources refer to an ANC farm, which received insecticides and seeds from the OAU, and

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60 Nashilongo 11.12.2010.

61 Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970,” p. 464; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

62 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 2.

63 Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

64 Kati 11.8.2007, pp. 1-2; Nepelilo 4.8.2007.

65 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 10-11; Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 7.

66 Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 7; Ndeikwila 16.2.2007, p. 11; Nepelilo 3.8.2007, pp. 9-10; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 10;

Nashilongo 11.12.2010. According to several research participants, people often bartered clothes for pocket money in order to obtain the cash necessary for buying beer at the shabeens.

67 Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 3.

yielded harvests which “astounded” the Tanzanians.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, sources maintain that the ANC's “well-equipped five-bed clinic... did much to cement relations between the ANC and the local population, who preferred the clinic to their own state hospital.”<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, it is such resources, and their association with a broader, modern world, that led locals to refer to the exiles collectively as “*mzungu*,” or “whites.”<sup>70</sup>

Regardless of how various Tanzanians around Kongwa saw the exiles who had moved into their environs, the former certainly shaped social relations among the latter. Importantly, many exiles became proficient in speaking Swahili. For Southern Africans living at Kongwa, Swahili not only enabled them to communicate with local people, but it also became a primary medium through which they communicated with one another. Within SWAPO, for example, exiles did not share a common language. Although the majority spoke Oshiwambo or closely related languages in Namibia's Kavango region, there was a sizable minority from the Caprivi region who spoke a different set of languages, and while most of the Caprivians spoke English, most of the Ovambos did not. In this context, Swahili became the primary form of communication across the main ethnic divide among exiled Namibians at Kongwa.<sup>71</sup> Swahili was also used to communicate across Kongwa's liberation movements whose members had been exposed to different colonial languages to different degrees. Thus, Swahili became a means of crossing the linguistic divide between the former subjects of British and Portuguese colonialism.<sup>72</sup>

Tanzanians at Kongwa also became a source of, and a medium for, conflicts among exiles.

Many of the most contentious issues involved sexual relationships between exiles, who were almost

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68 Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970,” p. 463; Isaac Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, p. 211. Isaac Makopo goes so far as to say that “the Tanzanians could not believe [the ANC farm], because it was the very first of its kind. They didn't know that people could till that arid piece of land” (Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, p. 211). The comment seems to overlook the arid land all around Kongwa which local people had been farming for generations, albeit with access to different technology.

69 Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970,” p. 465; Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, p. 210.

70 Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 14.12.2010; Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2.6.2011, p. 3.

71 Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, p. 25.

72 Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, p. 25; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 3, 11.

entirely men, and local women. For example, in the SWAPO camp certain commanders were repeatedly accused of spending the night in the Kongwa location where they were believed to be sleeping with local women.<sup>73</sup> Rank-in-file soldiers were also sometimes removed from the camps by the commanders due to sexual affairs, such as one instance in which a SWAPO cadre impregnated a married woman at Kongwa and was then threatened with violence by her husband.<sup>74</sup> In another case, a scandal developed in the ANC camp when men in the camp “formed relationships” with women who were using the camp's water supply during a period of drought.<sup>75</sup> Allegedly, a schism between members of the ANC and the MPLA during the mid-1960s also began with a fight over women in the Kongwa shabeens.<sup>76</sup>

Local women seem to have been a primary source of conflict among exiles at Kongwa for several reasons. Certainly, the ratio of men to women around Kongwa following the liberation movements' arrival was highly unequal and was likely to cause tension between the movements' single men and the factions which divided them. At the same time, guerrillas were officially discouraged from having sexual relationships with local women. As one former exile maintains, “it was... part of the training that... you should not be somebody who likes women... that if you were going for war, you should not sleep with a woman.”<sup>77</sup> Although a Namibian couple was permitted to live together in the SWAPO camp, “wives in the location” were clearly not acceptable, and it appears that none of the liberation movements legitimated such relationships or cared for their offspring at this time.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, exiles became sexually involved with women at Kongwa, including camp commanders, who were in the best position both to move freely outside the camp and to discipline others who broke

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73 Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, p. 99; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 3; 14.12.2010; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 10.

74 Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 23.

75 Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970,” p. 468.

76 Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 12.

77 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 5.

78 Shityuwete 14.12.2010. Nevertheless, later at Kongwa the ANC was clearly discussing the organization's responsibility to children which ANC cadres had born with local people. See “Meeting of the Region and the Camp Ad. - Kongwa 8/2/75” (Morogoro Papers, Box 5, Folder 47). SWAPO also began to discuss children and marriage in its camps during the mid-1970s after Namibian women began to enter exile in large numbers.

camp rules. Thus, local women became a common source of contention between commander and rank-in-file exiles – even as the women involved in relationships with exiles remain silent and without agency in former exiles' narratives.

Sometimes conflicts over women and other altercations prompted people and institutions outside the camps to enter camp space. Of these outside visitors the most apparent were Major Shongambebe and Lieutenant Muchongo. Based at an office in Kongwa village, Shongambebe and Muchongo were Tanzanian officials responsible for liaising between the liberation movements at Kongwa and the Tanzanian government. Although not involved in the camps' day to day administration, the two officers visited the camps regularly and played a crucial role in camp life. For example, whenever Tanzanians experienced a problem with members of the liberation movements, they were expected to report their problem to Shongambebe's office. Working together with the Tanzanian police, Shongambebe and his assistant would then detain anyone accused of breaking the law and report the incident to the relevant liberation movement camp office(s), working with officials there to resolve the matter.<sup>79</sup> In other cases, exiles requested that Shongambebe intervene in a conflict within one of the liberation movement's camps. In the SWAPO camp at least, such meetings were usually initiated by the camp commanders and held in the camp office, where both commanders and rank-in-file guerrillas would attend.<sup>80</sup> Shongambebe could also intervene directly in the liberation movements' affairs if he perceived the interests of the Tanzanian state to be at risk. Such risks ranged from the storage and use of weapons at the camps to the bill incurred by liberation movements using Tanzanian telephones installed in camp offices.<sup>81</sup>

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79 Shityuwete 14.12.2010. As SWAPO's Third Secretary-in-Command, Shityuwete participated in many such meetings with Shongambebe and often visited the Kongwa police station to release SWAPO members who had been detained there.

80 My interviews are full of such reported instances some of which I will discuss in the following section of this paper "The Kongwa Crisis." See, for example, Ashipala 25.7.2007, pp. 22-23, 27-28, 28-29; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 20-21, 25-26; Shikongo 16.3.2007, pp. 7-8; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 13-14, 23; Kati 11.8.2007, p. 6; Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 4; 21.7.2007, pp. 41-42.

81 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 8-10; ANC Morogoro Papers, Box 16, Folder 134, Letter from Eleazar Maboe to ANC Deputy President, 15.4.1967. According to the letter, the ANC and ZAPU incurred a bill of "about 2200/-... as compared



In addition to Shongambe's office, other offices were influencing activities at Kongwa from further afield. By the mid-1960s, the Southern African liberation movements were sustained materially through the support of a range of foreign governments. These included African states, which from 1963 made annual contributions to the OAU Liberation Committee's fund, which were dispersed to the OAU recognized liberation movements and their guerrilla armies.<sup>82</sup> Far more significant in financial terms were donations made by the Eastern bloc countries, especially the Soviet Union, which recognized the liberation movements whose armies were based at Kongwa. Soviet aid consisted of cash deposits as well as shipments of arms, tinned food and other commodities sent directly from the USSR.<sup>83</sup> The Chinese government also offered aid to Southern African liberation movements from the early 1960s although this aid dried up for at least some of the movements at Kongwa in 1965 following the Sino-Soviet Split.<sup>84</sup> In addition to sending material aid, some foreign governments also trained liberation movement guerrillas on their own soil. Thus, by the mid-1960s, Kongwa's inhabitants included soldiers who had trained in Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, China and North Korea.<sup>85</sup> During their military training courses, cadres often participated in political education classes as well. There and in other encounters, they were exposed to the ideas of social revolutionaries, such as Marx, Lenin, Mao and Castro, and African nationalists, such as Nasser, Nkrumah and Nyerere. Although these names were often uttered in liberation movement circles, for some exiles at least, training programs run by foreign governments offered a more thorough introduction to these persons' thought.<sup>86</sup>

Tanzanian and liberation movement officials were key intermediaries in all these relations developing between the guerrillas at Kongwa and their supporters abroad. With respect to material aid,

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to 300/- over the same period for MPLA and SWAPO and FRELIMO." According to Helao Shityuwete, there were no phones in the camps when he worked at the SWAPO office from mid-1965 to February 1966 (Shityuwete 14.12.2010).

82 Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, pp. 243-246; Shubin, *ANC*, pp. 51-52.

83 Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, pp. 244-245; Shubin, *ANC*, p. 52; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 9; 17.12.2010.

84 Shubin, *ANC*, p. 52.

85 This list is derived from interviews with Sam Nujoma (4.3.2008), Helao Shityuwete (17.12.2010) and references to training sites in SWAPO and ANC literature.

86 Ndeiwkila 9.2.2007, pp. 1, 5; Kati 4.8.2007, p. 4; Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Shityuwete 17.12.2010.

the Tanzanian government required that items intended for the liberation movements be sent to the OAU Liberation Committee's headquarters in Dar es Salaam, ear-marked for a particular movement.<sup>87</sup> There, aid was separated into the categories “military” and “humanitarian.” Military aid was to be handled strictly by the Tanzanian government, which transported arms to Kongwa by military convoy and handed them over to the liberation movements in the presence of Major Shongambe. In contrast, humanitarian aid was given directly to the liberation movements in Dar es Salaam, which were then responsible for transferring this material to Kongwa themselves. In the case of SWAPO, camp commanders sometimes traveled with this aid in SWAPO vehicles. In other instances, especially when transporting staples such as maize meal and biscuits in bulk, SWAPO sent these items via train and arranged for commanders to pick them up at the railhead 15 kilometers from Kongwa. Camp administrations established their own systems for recording information about humanitarian goods which entered the camps without oversight from Shongambe or any other Tanzanian officer after they were handled by the OAU Liberation Committee.<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, liberation movement and Tanzanian officials mediated knowledge entering the camps from outside. When cadres returned from their training abroad to Kongwa, they brought with them overlapping, but not identical, bodies of knowledge about guerrilla warfare and revolutionary struggle. For example, while all cadres learned how to drill as part of their training, the counts and steps for drilling differed depending on where cadres had been trained. In this and other instances, standard practices had to be established for the armies to function effectively.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, ideas about “the liberation struggle” and the nature of the enemy against which the liberation movements were struggling was far from identical across the countries which trained guerrillas and within the political leaderships of the movements themselves. Thus, an institution like Kurasini, the secondary school established by the African-American Institute in Dar es Salaam for Southern African exiles, could be

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87 Shubin, *ANC*, pp. 76-77.

88 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 8-10; Shityuwete 17.12.2010.

89 Shityuwete 17.12.2010; Joseph “Pereb” Stephanus and Michael Kahuika, Interview 20.9.2007, p. 4.

identified at Kongwa both as a site which could “liberate” the sub-continent and denounced as “imperialist” and a threat to the liberation struggle.<sup>90</sup> In responding to such discrepancies, camp officials frequently used their command of camp space, especially the parade, to articulate official knowledge. And they relied upon the support of Shongambe and other Tanzanian officials when their authority to produce this knowledge was publicly contested.

This position – located between Southern African nations living in exile and the global system of nation-states – granted officials administering Kongwa's camps considerable power. For example, it was rumored that Tanzanian officials in Dar es Salaam were redirecting arms intended for the liberation movements to Biafra, Nigeria, where the Tanzanian government supported the secession movement.<sup>91</sup> SWAPO's leaders in Dar es Salaam were accused of selling clothing intended for “Namibian refugees” in Tanzania.<sup>92</sup> Cash and commodities given by SWAPO leaders in Dar es Salaam to camp commanders were often never recorded in SWAPO's books at Kongwa, and rank-in-file soldiers suspected that their commanders were profiting from items which were intended for the rank-in-file.<sup>93</sup> Camp officials addressed these and other controversies in different ways, blaming them variously on “South Africa,” “the West,” “whites,” and “spies,” who had aligned themselves with such foreign agents. In so doing, they played to their own position of strength as elites with the power to represent a nation. And they obscured how they used this position to wield power over those at the margins of the international system living within their camps.

### **“The Kongwa Crisis”**

When seen from this international perspective, SWAPO's Kongwa camp and the social tensions within it appear quite different than they have in previous historiography. To date, published literature

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90 Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 1; 25.7.2007, p. 25; Shikongo 26.7.2007, pp. 19-20.

91 Shubin, *ANC*, pp. 76-77.

92 Shipanga 203.2007, p. 1.

93 Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, p. 99; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 3, 4, 10; Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 23; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 16.

and most oral histories which acknowledge SWAPO's internal conflicts during the 1960s refer to Kongwa not primarily as a camp for people displaced from a nation but rather as a national crisis. As sources indicate, “the crisis” occurred following the return of seven guerrillas from military training in China in 1968. After spending several months in Tanzania, these seven (referred to in the literature as “the Seven Comrades” or “Chinamen”) wrote a memorandum, followed by a resignation letter, in which they raised a variety of complaints, accusing SWAPO officials of corruption, poor military strategy, and, in the case of the then SWAPO military commander, Leonard “Castro” Nangoloh, of spying for South Africa. Thereafter, the seven were driven to Keko Prison in Dar es Salaam and imprisoned, making them among the first of many Namibians to be detained by SWAPO officials and front-line state governments over the next two decades.<sup>94</sup> In their discussion of this episode, scholars do make reference to the fact that it occurred at Kongwa in Tanzania, and Colin Leys and John Saul note that among the Comrades' grievances were “low level of organization,” “evidence of tribalism” and the use of “preventive detention” in the SWAPO camp.<sup>95</sup> Authors do not, however, examine how such conditions were shaped by the camp itself, with its unique international location and its previous layers of history.

I turn now to examine three such historical layers. Together, they provide context for SWAPO's specific “Kongwa Crisis” and suggest kinds of narrative which remain excluded from national historiographies of Kongwa and of exile more generally.

### “Going Abroad”

Well before Kongwa became a crisis for SWAPO in 1968, the liberation movement's camp was a site of discontent for many who lived there. To understand the sources of this discontent, it is

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94 Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, pp. 37-38; Leys and Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, pp. 43-44; Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia*, pp. 77-80; Trehwela, *Inside Quatro*, pp. 143, 189. In each of these texts, discussion of “the Kongwa crisis” is incorporated into a longer narrative of detentions and human rights abuses committed by SWAPO in exile.

95 Leys and Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 44.

important to consider the circumstances in which people found themselves living in the camp. As previously noted, the majority of Namibians who entered Tanzania in the early 1960s were contract workers recruited in Francistown, Bechuanaland. There SWAPO had established an office, under the direction of Maxton Joseph, which aimed to recruit workers traveling between northern Namibia and the South African rand.<sup>96</sup> Most of those recruited were passing through Francistown as part of the migration route which the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) co-ordinated for its mine workers originating outside South Africa.<sup>97</sup> Others were contract workers and students inside Namibia who registered with WENELA so that they could make their way to Francistown and join the liberation movement in Tanzania from there.<sup>98</sup> Apparently, SWAPO officials who recruited exiles highlighted opportunities that would be available to Namibians who joined the liberation movement “abroad.”<sup>99</sup> These included the opportunity to study internationally, to live in Tanzania and other independent countries, and to contribute to Namibia's liberation from colonial rule.<sup>100</sup> By presenting exile in this manner, recruiters appealed to a “tradition of mobility” through which Southern African men had, over generations, found ways to use the migrant labor system to access resources and opportunities otherwise denied to them.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, many of these early Namibian exiles, and probably many of the recruiters, had only a vague notion of what exiles would actually find in Tanzania. Apparently, some arrived in Dar es Salaam optimistic that they would be able to access

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96 In the Namibian literature only Tony Emmet draws attention to the importance of SWAPO's Francistown office for recruiting most of the early Namibian exiles (Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), pp. 331-332). All of my research participants who lived in exile during the 1960s emphasized the importance of the Francistown office. See, for example, Samson Ndeikwila, Interview 21.7.2007, p. 28; Nambinga Kati, Interview 11.8.2007, pp. 7-8; Helao Shityuwete, Interview 14.12.2010.

97 WENELA recruited workers from all over Southern Africa to work on the mines. Workers were registered in various WENELA offices and flown to Francistown from where they were transported by train to the South African rand. The WENELA office in Namibia was located in Rundu, and most of those registered at WENELA's Rundu office were Angolans, transported to Rundu from various locations inside Angola.

98 See, for example, Samson Ndeikwila, Interviews 9.2.2007, 2.3.2007; 21.7.2007; Silas Shikongo, Interview 16.3.2007; Kaufilwa Nepelilo, Interview 3.8.2007.

99 In my interviews with former exiles, they often used the English word “abroad” or expression “going abroad” regardless of the language in which the interview was conducted. See, for example, Nepelilo 4.8.2007.

100 Ashipala 16.3.2007; Hangula 18.6.2011; Kati 4.8.2007; Ndeikwila 9.2.2007; Nepelilo 4.8.2007; Shikongo 16.3.2007; Shityuwete 24.7.2007.

101 Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, p. 332.

scholarships regardless of the extent of their education prior to traveling abroad. Also, a considerable number were unaware of SWAPO's plans to organize for an armed struggle and that they might be enlisted as soldiers in a guerrilla army.<sup>102</sup>

It is, therefore, with surprise and reluctance that some Namibians found themselves at Kongwa. For many the encounter began upon their arrival in Dar es Salaam when they first met other Namibians living in the city. Among them were students at Kurasini who spoke with the newcomers about their impressions of life in exile. Apparently, students often discouraged newcomers from going to Kongwa and emphasized problems at the camp, such as poor living conditions and organization.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, few Namibians living in Tanzania had a choice in the matter. Those who had the basic qualifications and endorsements necessary to enroll at Kurasini and other educational institutions were able to take up studies. The others, who were in the majority and who were required to associate with a liberation movement in order to live legally in Tanzania, were sent by SWAPO to Kongwa.<sup>104</sup> There, exiles were compelled to undergo military training regardless of whether becoming a “freedom fighter” had been their intent or if they even supported the SWAPO leadership's decision to take up an armed struggle.

Conditions in and around Kongwa further heightened some exiles' sense of discontent. As sources emphasize, life at Kongwa could be harsh. Camp inhabitants often lived without basic commodities,<sup>105</sup> and their movements and speech were monitored and restricted. At the same time, camp inhabitants' access to resources entering the camp from outside were uneven even as the confined living space of the camp made such inequalities difficult to hide. For example, rank-in-file soldiers made requests for pocket money, but their requests were repeatedly denied – despite the fact that

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102 Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, p. 332; Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 3; Hangula 18.6.2011; Nepelilo 4.8.2007; Shikongo 16.3.2007.

103 Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 5,6; Kati 11.8.2007, pp. 16-17. Interestingly, Nepelilo maintains that Kurasini students discouraged him from going to Kongwa even as early as 1964 – well before some of the controversies in the camp.

104 This point is confirmed by all of my Kongwa research participants as well as Tony Emmett. As he writes, “It was essentially those for whom scholarships could not be obtained who formed the nucleus of the SWAPO guerrilla force” (Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, p. 332). And this guerrilla force was based at Kongwa.

105 See, for example, Kati 11.8.2007, pp. 1-2; Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 19.

commanders who denied them clearly had access to money which they were using to purchase items in Kongwa village.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, camp commanders warned soldiers against drinking excessively and having sexual relationships with women even as some repeatedly did not report to the parade and were not found in the camp after nights in the location.<sup>107</sup> SWAPO's senior camp commanders at Kongwa, it should be further noted, were contract workers with little or no formal education just like most of those whom they were commanding in the camp and the commanders and rank-in-file were also roughly the same age. In the eyes of some at Kongwa, commanders' authority over the camp was based solely on their having arrived in exile first and received positions by the SWAPO leaders – not on their legitimacy to govern those inhabiting the camp.<sup>108</sup>

Especially troubling for some newcomers at Kongwa were camp commanders' hostility towards SWAPO officials who seemed to support their aspirations to leave the camp to pursue further studies. For example, in 1964 SWAPO Secretary General Jacob Kuhangua visited Kongwa and informed the Namibians there about opportunities to study at Kurasini which might soon become available to the camp's younger inhabitants, regardless of their previous education.<sup>109</sup> Those who passed their studies at Kurasini, Kuhangua stressed, could receive scholarships to study in the United States of America. Apparently, Kuhangua's words were received by some camp inhabitants with great enthusiasm, but commanders took to referring to Kuhangua and the Kurasini students as “stooges” set on undermining the Namibian revolution.<sup>110</sup> While discussion of the ideological differences among the SWAPO leadership took place away from the camp parade ground, it was clear to many that their aspirations to study had become entangled in Cold War divisions which aligned the camp commanders with the Soviet bloc and against Kuhangua and some other SWAPO leaders.<sup>111</sup>

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106 Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 16.

107 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 5; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 3; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 10.

108 See, for example, Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 7, 9.

109 Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 1; 25.7.2007, p. 25; Shikongo 22.7.2007, pp. 19-20.

110 Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 25; Hangula 18.6.2011.

111 For a discussion of Cold War divisions within the SWAPO leadership and how they appeared to different people at the camp see Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 25; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 15-16; Hangula 18.6.2011.

It is in this international context, at once local and global, that some of the first Namibians began to resist the camp order and confront officials at Kongwa. Among these early dissidents was Silas Shikongo. Like others attending St. Mary's Mission School in Odibo during the early 1960s, Shikongo was recruited by Peter Nanyemba, then SWAPO's Representative for East Africa, to leave Namibia to seek further studies through the liberation movement in exile. By 1964 Shikongo was living in a camp for Southern African refugees on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam where he waited for SWAPO to arrange a scholarship for him. Sometime thereafter, possibly in response to the Tanzanian government's efforts to reduce the number of liberation movement members living around Dar es Salaam,<sup>112</sup> Shikongo was sent by SWAPO to Kongwa. As Shikongo emphasizes, SWAPO took him and about fifty other Namibians from the refugee camp at night without any prior notice that they were to be sent to Kongwa.<sup>113</sup> In response, Shikongo attempted to address camp officials in the hope that he, like some other young Namibians, would be permitted to leave the camp and further his studies. Repeatedly, however, he found his efforts thwarted. To account for his misfortune, Shikongo explains that after arriving at Kongwa, Tobias Hainyeko, the commander of the camp and of the South West African Liberation Army (SWALA), learned that Shikongo descended from a royal family that was closely associated with the South African government and its efforts to establish apartheid homelands in Namibia.<sup>114</sup> Hainyeko was, therefore, unwilling to support Shikongo's search for scholarships or allow him audience with SWAPO officials in Dar es Salaam on the premise that if he were granted a scholarship that he might "just fly from there... to see [his] father."<sup>115</sup> Shikongo, in turn, attempted to subvert the camp command by smuggling a letter to SWAPO President Sam Nujoma, who originates

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112 According to Helao Shityuwete (24.7.2007, p. 18) and Vladimir Shubin (ANC: A View from Moscow, p. 54), from 1964 the Tanzanian government limited the number of liberation movement members in Dar es Salaam to registered students and four or five representatives administering movement offices. All others had to be sent elsewhere. Shityuwete suggests that the impetus for this regulation was the January 1964 coup attempt against Nyerere's government.

113 Shikongo 16.3.2007, p. 4; 22.7.2007, p. 14.

114 Shikongo's father was a chief in Ongandjera and his father's youngest brother, Ushona Shiimi, became the first Chief Councillor of the Ovamboland Homeland from 1968-1972.

115 Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 5.



from a village neighboring Shikongo's in the Ongandjera region of Ovamboland and knew Shikongo personally. Nujoma eventually did come to the camp to announce that those who were interested in taking up further studies should register their names. But the response from the political leadership was slow and, according to Shikongo, he and others tired of waiting and began to express their discontent in new ways.<sup>116</sup>

Towards the end of 1965, Silas Shikongo decided to stop taking orders from the camp commanders: "I must not go to cook; I must not go for the morning marching or morning [parade]; I must not go to the camp gate at nighttime."<sup>117</sup> Although Shikongo emphasizes that his "strike" was a personal choice and lasted for about three months,<sup>118</sup> there were also clearly others who were not following the camp rules at this time, and some who had fled the camp at night and not returned.<sup>119</sup> In response, Tobias Hainyeko and Major Shongambebe decided to call a meeting of all Namibians at Kongwa in the SWAPO camp office in January 1966.<sup>120</sup> There, Shongambebe asked those assembled to explain the situation in the camp and express their concerns. Shikongo was among three rank-in-file soldiers who spoke and explained that their purpose for entering exile was to study, that they had been taken to Kongwa against their will, and that they felt they were being mistreated in the camp.<sup>121</sup> Related issues were also introduced such as Hainyeko's alleged prejudice against Shikongo, and Shikongo's work in the camp logistics office, from where he had distributed fresh milk and other items to those who claimed dietary needs that were not recognized by the commanders.<sup>122</sup> In making these statements at the meeting, Shikongo appealed to Shongambebe to intervene in injustices at the camp or

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116 Eventually, SWAPO did send a group of twenty Namibians, who had registered to study during Nujoma's visit at Kongwa, to Mbeya. There they were administered a test. Those who passed were sent to Kurasini to study while those who failed were sent back to Kongwa or detained at Keko Prison (Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 21; Nashilongo 11.12.2010; Hangula 18.6.2011). For a personal account of how the SWAPO leadership handled those who failed the test at Mbeya, see Hangula 18.6.2011.

117 Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 7.

118 Silas Shikongo, Interviews 6.6.2011, 8.6.2011.

119 Shikongo 22.7.2007, pp. 18-19; most of my Kongwa research participant who lived in the camp in 1966 discuss these events. Shikongo narrates them in relationship to his own strike (Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 7; pp. 18-19).

120 Shikongo 16.3.2007, p. 7; 22.7.2007, p. 18.

121 The other speakers were Lazarus Pohamba and Valentin Katumbe.

122 Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 18.

at least to bring them to the attention of other SWAPO officials, such as Peter Nanyemba and Jacob Kuhangua, whom many aspiring students saw as allies but who remained distant from Kongwa at SWAPO's Dar es Salaam offices. Instead, Tanzanian officials escorted Shikongo and his two outspoken comrades the same night to Dar es Salaam's Keko Prison where they spent the next six months in detention.<sup>123</sup>

Shikongo was among the first Namibians to be detained for openly criticizing camp officials at Kongwa,<sup>124</sup> but multiple confrontations and detentions followed in the camp over the next five years. Setbacks in Namibia's liberation struggle are clearly an important context for understanding many of these incidents. Although the first group of SWALA guerrillas (G1) managed to infiltrate Namibia from Kongwa in 1965, the second group (G2) was arrested by the South African Police in Namibia's Kavango Region in May 1966.<sup>125</sup> Thereafter, several groups which entered Namibia were captured<sup>126</sup> and, following the first skirmish between SWALA and the South African Police at Ongulumbashe on August 26, 1966, South Africa arrested thirty-seven leading SWAPO members, who were then tried under the Terrorism Act of 1967. These developments brought SWAPO's efforts to infiltrate guerrillas into Namibia and to recruit more Namibians for its liberation army to a standstill. By the late 1960s SWAPO's Kongwa camp had become an outpost for trained Namibians who were not actively involved in an armed struggle, and many began to avoid camp activities and fled from the camp.<sup>127</sup> The Seven Comrades were among those who challenged the status quo at Kongwa at this time, differentiating themselves from others by confronting SWAPO's camp leadership and Shongambe's office with a written memorandum aimed at addressing the problems in the camp.

Nevertheless, it is easy to overlook the fact that tensions between the rank-in-file and

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123 Shikongo 22.7.2007, p. 8.

124 Shikongo 16.3.2007; 22.7.2007; Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 31; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 15.

125 Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, pp. 59-60; Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, pp. 159-162, pp. 170-171; Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, pp. 101-130

126 The arrest of subsequent groups is confirmed by former Kongwa inhabitants interviews and by Sam Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, pp. 172-173).

127 It appears that order at Kongwa particularly dissolved in 1967. See, for example, Ashipala 25.7.2007, pp. 33-35.

commanders at SWAPO's Kongwa camp preceded SWAPO's military collapse and shaped the Seven Comrades' memorandum. From as early as 1964, some Namibians living at Kongwa were dissatisfied with their placement at a camp that constrained their access to opportunities which they had hoped to find in exile. Increasingly, they resented the commanders who were responsible for monitoring their lives inside the camp and who were better able to access a world outside of it. When Shikongo and others resisted their place in the camp order by disobeying rules and appealing to Major Shongambebe, they again discovered the vulnerability of their position – beholden to a Tanzanian official mediating relations between an exiled liberation movement and the government which supported it. Only later, when rank-in-file Namibians managed to forge their own social networks with people outside the camp, were some able to access the study opportunities which had enticed many of them to travel “abroad.” As one former camp inhabitant recalls, during the mid-1960s Jackson Kambode, a SWAPO official living in Dar es Salaam, left the liberation movement and traveled to Nairobi, Kenya where he began to study with a scholarship accessed through the United Nations. Eventually, word of Kambode's scholarship reached Kongwa and the first Namibians there began to make their way to Kenya.<sup>128</sup> To encourage their comrades to join them and facilitate their travel, Namibia's first Kenya exiles corresponded with those still at Kongwa through a Tanzanian whom they had befriended in Kongwa village and who helped smuggle letters in and out of the camp on their behalves.<sup>129</sup> By the early 1970s there were more than fifty Namibians living in Nairobi.<sup>130</sup> Most of them had once lived at Kongwa, including Silas Shikongo who, following his release from Keko Prison, eventually made his way to Kenya and secured a scholarship.<sup>131</sup>

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128 Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 35.

129 Ashipala 25.7.2006, p. 35.

130 For more details on the Namibian exile community in Kenya see Ashipala 16.3.2007, pp. 1-2, 25.7.2007, p. 35; Ndeikwila 21.7.2007, pp. 38-40; 13.5.2011. It should be noted that Namibians at Kongwa also migrated from Tanzania to other countries including Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia (Ashipala 16.3.2007, p. 2; Kati 11.8.2007, pp. 12, 15; Ndeikwila 2.9.2007, Ndeikwila 13.5.2011).

131 Shikongo was released from Keko Prison in July 1966. After learning that SWAPO might send him again to Kongwa, he made his way to Mbeya where he passed an examination, qualifying him to attend Kurasini. In 1970, Shikongo moved on to Nairobi, where he joined other Namibians already studying there (Shikongo 16.3.2007, pp. 10-11;

## CANU

In addition to those whom SWAPO officials recruited to join the liberation movement in Tanzania during the 1960s, some Namibians traveled abroad under the auspices of other organizations. Among these organizations was the Caprivi African National Union, or CANU. Founded by school teachers in Namibia's Caprivi Region in September 1962, CANU managed to mobilize support among a range of teachers, students and traditional leaders in the Caprivi over the next two years.<sup>132</sup> Following a student strike at Catholic Mission School in Katima Mulilo and the arrest of CANU President Brendan Simbwaye in 1964, as many as seventy CANU members fled across the Zambezi River into Zambia.<sup>133</sup> Several months later, in Lusaka, leaders from CANU and SWAPO agreed to merge the two organizations and Brendan Simbwaye and Mishake Muyongo were appointed SWAPO Vice President and SWAPO Representative to Zambia, respectively.<sup>134</sup> In December 1964 and January 1965 SWAPO made arrangements to transport the exiled Caprivians, most of whom had congregated in refugee camps in southwestern Zambia and had not participated in the negotiations which merged CANU with SWAPO, to Tanzania.<sup>135</sup> There, in the southwestern Tanzanian town of Mbeya, the Caprivians were divided into two groups, with a smaller group sent to Dar es Salaam for further schooling and a larger

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Shikongo 8.6.2011).

132 Albert Zechariah Ndopu, Interview with Beauty Matongo 27.2.2011, pp. 7-13. Ndopu's detailed narrative of the formation of CANU corrects Peter Katjavivi's assertion that CANU was established in 1963 (*A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 51).

133 Ndopu 27.2.2011, pp. 9-13; Frederick Matongo, Interview with Beauty Matongo 13.3.2011, pp. 19-20; Frederick Matongo, Interview with the author 18.6.2011, pp. 1-2; Ellen Musialela, Interview 24.7.2008; Samson Ndeikwila, Interview 2.3.2007, pp. 13, 15. As Matongo, one of the students involved in the strike, indicates, people crossed into Zambia in small groups, and many of the students arrived there before Simbwaye's arrest in July 1964.

134 Ndopu 27.2.2011, pp. 13-15; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 51. By the time of the official merger Simbwaye had been detained by South African Security Forces. He is believed to have died in detention. During the 1970s Muyongo became the Acting Vice President of SWAPO before he was expelled from the organization in 1980.

135 Ndopu 27.2.2011, pp. 13-15; F. Matongo 13.3.2011, pp. 19-20; 18.6.2011, pp. 3-4. Moreover, Ndopu, who during the early 1960s was CANU's Public Secretary, maintains that the CANU delegation sent to Lusaka in July 1964 was not sent by the exiled CANU leadership to meet with SWAPO. Rather, their mission was to update members of UNIP and the United Nations on developments in the Caprivi. He and other members of the CANU leadership waiting in the camp for the delegation's return were, therefore, "amazed" and "irritated" when they learned that SWAPO and CANU had merged (Ndopu 27.2.2011, p. 14).

group sent to Kongwa for military training.<sup>136</sup>

The arrival of the Caprivians at Kongwa changed the social dynamics within SWAPO's camp significantly. The great majority of the 100 to 200 Namibians who had previously inhabited Kongwa were Oshiwambo speakers from north-central Namibia and others who shared similar languages and cultural practices from Namibia's Kavango Region.<sup>137</sup> Thus, upon their arrival in the camp, the Caprivians became a large ethnic minority. Not only did the newcomers speak languages which were unintelligible to those previously residing in the camp, but they shared relatively little common history with their new neighbors. Although they lived within the same colonial boundaries, Caprivians had not been incorporated into the German and South African colonial economies through the contract labor system as had people from the Ovambo and Kavango Regions, and many had schooled and worked in southwestern Zambia alongside Zambians with whom they shared overlapping pasts and cultural affinities. Moreover, the idea of creating CANU had been generated not through exchanges with Namibian nationalists, but rather with Zambian nationalists – particularly the United National Independence Party (UNIP) whose leaders Caprivians met regularly during the early 1960s and on whose model CANU drafted its Constitution.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the social backgrounds of the particular groups from Caprivi and Ovambo/Kavango sent to Kongwa differed considerably. Many of the Caprivians had been educated in mission schools and spoke English whereas most others in the camp, including the established camp commanders, did not.<sup>139</sup> Thus, initially, the Caprivians shared no common language with their new neighbors, and they were accommodated in separate tents, further reinforcing the sense that the camp was composed of two distinct ethnic/political groups.<sup>140</sup>

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136 Ndopu 27.2.2011, p. 15; F. Matongo 13.3.2011, p. 20; 18.6.2011, p. 2.

137 Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), pp. 99-100; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 1-2. In addition, camp inhabitants included a few Otjiherero speakers who had been recruited from the Herero community in Bechuanaland and from sometime in the middle of 1965 the Angolans recruited by Jonas Savimbi.

138 Ndopu 27.2.2011.

139 F. Matongo 13.3.2011, p. 20; 18.6.2011, p. 2; Ndeikwila 2.3.2007, p. 15; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

140 Shityuwete 14.12.2010. In 1965 rank-in-file guerrillas at Kongwa were accommodated in tents, with concrete structures reserved for the commanders (Hangula 18.6.2011). By 1967 all the Namibians at Kongwa were accommodated in concrete barracks although the barracks of the Caprivians and other Namibians at Kongwa remained separate

It is in this context that a conflict began to unfold between “CANU” and “SWAPO” at Kongwa.<sup>141</sup> According to Frederick Matongo, one of the first cohort of Caprivian exiles, tensions emerged just before their arrival at the camp when a SWAPO representative came to collect Caprivians assigned to Kongwa at the Dodoma train station:

When we hear[d] the name Kongwa, we were puzzled because at that time there was a war... in Congo Kinshasa... For us the two names 'Kongwa' and 'Congo' [sounded] the same... [Before] that time in our lives we had never before [been] mixed with other Namibians such as Ovambo[s]... We could not speak Oshiwambo and Afrikaans; the Ovambos could not speak Subia and English... The people who came to collect us arrived in the morning but we were just refusing to go until at around 4 [pm]. Then Green[well Matongo]<sup>142</sup> said, “Let's just go. Once we reach the border we shall see words on the board, telling us that we are now entering this country... If we see it is Congo, we shall not cross the border.”<sup>143</sup>

Eventually Matongo's group arrived at Kongwa (not Congo) and took up training in the camp, but their relationship with their Oshiwambo speaking commanders continued to be dogged by language divides and related issues. Sources suggest that the SWAPO commanders did little to make the newcomers from Caprivi feel welcome in the camp and that some of the Caprivians questioned the credentials of their new commanders, whom they thought, as representatives of a nationalist movement, should be able to speak English.<sup>144</sup> Commanders, on the other hand, seem to have mistrusted the intentions of some Caprivian leaders, whom they suspected were not committed to SWAPO but had only merged with SWAPO so that they could resurrect CANU in Tanzania.<sup>145</sup> For some months these tensions appear to have remained outside Kongwa's public discourse, but events in the middle of 1965

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(Ndeikwila 2.3.2007, p. 19; 21.7.2007, p. 25; 17.6.2011).

141 As noted, CANU did not officially exist as a separate organization from SWAPO in 1965. Nevertheless, the terms “CANU” and “SWAPO,” and the related ethnic/regional labels “Caprivian” and “Ovambo,” were used by those involved in the conflict.

142 Greenwell Matongo, nephew to Frederick Matongo, later became the Chief Political Commissar of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia and one of the best known SWAPO guerrilla commanders. He died in 1979 when his car drove over a land-mine.

143 Matongo 13.3.2011, p. 20.

144 Ndeikwila 13.5.2011; F. Matongo 13.3.2011, pp. 20-21; 18.6.2011, p. 2. It should be noted that, in Matongo's account, the language barrier between Caprivians and Ovambos became less divisive after the Caprivians spent time with their new comrades in the camp. In contrast, Ndeikwila and several other former Kongwa inhabitants maintain that language was an on-going source of division among Namibians at Kongwa.

145 Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

brought them to the surface. According to some accounts, Mishake Muyongo traveled from his office to Kongwa where he organized a special meeting with other Caprivians, hatching his plans to revive CANU and sowing the seeds for an open rebellion.<sup>146</sup> Camp minutes, while not dismissing Muyongo's role as instigator, offer another narrative of how the conflict erupted, grounded in the circumstances of daily life.<sup>147</sup> As Titus Muailpeni, one of the camp commanders, narrates: "One night some of [the Caprivian] comrades arrived from the village under liquor influence, [sic] they were insulting, swearing, cursing and saying all bad languages... [about] the SWAPO leaders." In response, some of the camp commanders threatened to fight these "comrades" and, as one Caprivian reports, entered one of the Caprivians' tents with sticks in their hands and with "the intention to do us harm."<sup>148</sup>

By September 1965, many of the Caprivians at Kongwa had gone "on strike" by disobeying the commanders and disregarding all organized camp activities.<sup>149</sup> On September 21, high-ranking SWAPO leaders, including President Sam Nujoma, gathered at Kongwa to speak with the camp commanders about "the problem of the Caprivians."<sup>150</sup> As the meeting minutes demonstrate, "the problem" posed SWAPO officials with several dilemmas. Although Major Shongambe had offered to deport the Caprivians on the premise that they were only allowed to remain in Tanzania if they cooperated with SWAPO, a recognized liberation movement,<sup>151</sup> deportation was fraught with risks. It could poison SWAPO's reputation in the Caprivi Region and result in deportees revealing information

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146 F. Matongo 18.6.2011, p. 4; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 13.

147 University of Namibia, Katjavivi Collection, Series B1, Category 5, File No. 9, "The National Executive Committee of SWAPO held 21/9/65 at 8.10 A.M. Under the Chairmanship of Leonard Pillemon First D.D.C Chief Under Secretary of Josep Shitwete," pp. 5-6. It should be noted that these minutes are the only ones available from Kongwa in the Katjavivi Collection or any of the other major archives of SWAPO material which I have been able to access. According to Helao Shityuwete, who took the minutes himself, he was one of the first literate commanders at Kongwa and initiated the practice of keeping camp minutes after arriving in the camp and being appointed "Third Secretary" in the middle of 1965. He maintains that this meeting is the only one at Kongwa involving the top SWAPO leadership while he lived in the camp and indicates that he wrote the minutes by hand and then gave them to Sam Nujoma's personal secretary, Ewald Katjivena, who probably typed them (Helao Shityuwete, Interview 5.6.2008).

148 Minutes 21/9/65, pp. 5-6.

149 Minutes 21/9/65, p. 5, 8. The camp minutes and other sources refer uniformly to the strike of "the Caprivians," but some of the Caprivians at Kongwa did not participate in it. As Frederick Matongo emphasizes, after the meeting with Muyongo, he and some other Caprivians who attended actually reported the meeting's content to the Tanzanian authorities and never went on strike (Matongo 18.6.2011).

150 Minutes 21/9/65, p. 1. Interestingly, Shityuwete points to another conflict within the camp which he believes was the main purpose of Nujoma's visit. See the section of this paper titled "Castro" below.

151 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 13-14, 23; 14.12.2010.

about Kongwa and other military secrets to “the Boers.”<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, if SWAPO officials tried to enlist the support of Caprivians who were by then representing SWAPO in its offices abroad, there was no guarantee that they would cooperate or that the Caprivians at Kongwa would listen to them. This mistrust of the Caprivians manifested itself at the meeting when Mishake Muyongo, who was in attendance but remained outside the office while the Ovambo commanders discussed “the problem of the Caprivians,” was asked to enter and profess his loyalty to SWAPO. Although Muyongo claimed that he would cooperate with SWAPO and inform his fellow Caprivians “to obey all orders given... by SWAPO officials or the Tanzanian Government,” some SWAPO officials maintained that Muyongo's words were disingenuous and that he had ulterior motives. As Nujoma and others alleged, Muyongo had been doing little to contribute to SWAPO's work at the Lusaka office, but he had used the office to distribute letters to the OAU Liberation Committee, the Zambian government and UNIP complaining about how the SWAPO leadership was treating Caprivians.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, neither Muyongo nor the other Caprivians at the camp were forthcoming about the location of George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo, the supposed ringleaders of the strike, who had disappeared from the camp sometime before the meeting. Some speculated that Muyongo had only traveled to Tanzania for the meeting so that he could meet secretly with Mutwah and Tongo and plan CANU's next move.<sup>154</sup>

Despite these dilemmas, SWAPO's international recognition, and the instruments which this recognition gave the liberation movement to control Namibians at Kongwa, granted SWAPO officials considerable power over the CANU dissidents in its camp. Whereas CANU was not officially recognized by the organizations to which Mishake Muyongo wrote, SWAPO was recognized by all of them and by the Tanzanian government as well. And SWAPO drew from these support networks and the instruments which they allowed SWAPO to exercise at Kongwa to “resolve” the CANU issue. Sometime after the camp meeting George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo were arrested by Tanzanian

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152 Minutes 21/9/65, pp. 2-3.

153 Minutes, 21/9/65, p. 7; Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

154 Minutes 21/9/65, pp. 7-9.



officials in Dar es Salaam and detained at Keko Prison.<sup>155</sup> At roughly the same time, Caprivians who remained committed to the strike refused to eat and moved their tents outside the physical space of the camp.<sup>156</sup> In turn, SWAPO officials used their control over camp resources to coax those on the outside to return inside, allegedly promising them food and protection from the more “radical” Caprivians<sup>157</sup> while threatening those who refused to cooperate with sjamboks.<sup>158</sup> Within a few weeks, most or all the Caprivians living outside the camp had returned inside with their tents. As for Mishake Muyongo, he returned to Zambia where he continued to represent SWAPO at the Lusaka Office.

Despite the outward appearance of a resolution, some Namibians who lived at Kongwa during the late 1960s maintain that the CANU issue in the camp was never resolved. According to Samson Ndeikwila, an ethnic Ovambo who arrived at Kongwa in 1967, the Caprivians he came to know while living at the camp felt that they were unwelcome within SWAPO and that their group leaders had been imprisoned unjustly.<sup>159</sup> Certainly, their barracks were set up in a different section of the camp and they tended to socialize separately from the other Namibians.<sup>160</sup> Thus, when Ndeikwila and the other “Comrades” who arrived in 1968 wrote their memorandum, they drew attention to “evidence of tribalism” at Kongwa and the fates of George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo – before the Comrades too were arrested.

### *“Castro”*

On September 21, 1965, the date when SWAPO officials met at Kongwa, “the problem of the

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155 Hangula 18.6.2011; Nashilongo 11.12.2010. Hangula and Nashilongo were also detained at Keko and offer perspectives on Mutwah and Tongo's arrest based, allegedly, on conversations that they had while they were all imprisoned together. According to Hangula, Mutwah and Tongo escaped from Kongwa and traveled to the SWAPO office in Dar es Salaam to present their grievances – only to be arrested when the SWAPO leaders who received them there called on the Tanzanian police for assistance. Testimony in the camp minutes appears to corroborate Hangula's point (Minutes 21/9/65, p. 7).

156 Inhabitants at Kongwa in 1965 often refer to the Caprivians' strike as a “hunger strike,” but Shityuwete maintains that the Caprivians did not refuse to eat until after the September 21 meeting (14.12.2010).

157 Shityuwete 14.12.2010.

158 Hangula 18.6.2011.

159 Ndeikwila 2.9.2007, p. 5; 2.3.2007, p. 19, 21.

160 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 5; Shikongo 26.7.2007, p. 20; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 13.

Caprivians” was not the only issue on their agenda. Although the camp minutes report exclusively on the Caprivi conflict, the author of those minutes, Helao Shityuwete, maintains that there was another issue in the camp which had compelled the leaders to travel from Dar es Salaam. At the center of this issue was the then Second-in-Command of SWALA and senior camp commander, Leonard Philemon “Castro” Nangolo.<sup>161</sup>

A member of the group which established SWAPO's forerunner in Cape Town during the late 1950s,<sup>162</sup> Castro traveled to Tanzania in 1962 and from there was sent by SWAPO to Egypt to receive training as one of the first seven SWALA guerrillas. After finishing another training course in the Soviet Union, Castro returned to Tanzania to found the SWAPO camp at Kongwa.<sup>163</sup> For those Namibians who were not satisfied with their lives at Kongwa, Castro soon became a focal point of criticism, blamed for abusing the power which he wielded over Namibians living in the camp. For example, Castro was associated with a regime of discipline and deference to authority in the camp which treated camp inhabitants like “permanent soldiers” rather than as “comrades” in a liberation struggle.<sup>164</sup> Castro set the rules of when camp inhabitants were required to be inside the camp and report to the parade and yet he often absconded from the parade and spent nights in the location, where some believed he was sleeping with local women.<sup>165</sup> Castro was also blamed for some commanders' practice of diverting aid to the camp and selling it to the people living around Kongwa for self-enrichment.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, Castro was among the camp commanders who did not speak English and whom some Caprivians at Kongwa saw as antagonistic towards them.

Sources suggest that some Namibians at Kongwa were dissatisfied with Castro from the camp's early days and that rank-file guerrillas had tried to raise their concerns with Major Shongambe at a

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161 Shityuwete 5.6.2008; 14.12.2010.

162 The name of this forerunner was the Ovamboland People's Congress before becoming the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO) in 1959 and, finally, SWAPO in 1960.

163 Leonard Philemon “Castro” Nangolo, “My History,” 1994 (a gift to the author); Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, pp. 158-159; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 24.

164 Ashipala 25.7.2007, p. 23; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 2, 5; *Never Follow the Wolf*, p. 99.

165 Nepelilo 4.8.2007, p. 10; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 3; 14.12.2010; *Never Follow the Wolf*, p. 99.

166 Ashipala 25.7.2007, pp. 23, 28-29; Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 3, 4, 10; *Never Follow the Wolf*, p. 99.

camp meeting before September 1965.<sup>167</sup> The September 1965 meeting, however, reflected a significant, new conjuncture of events. In May of that year, three new groups of guerrillas returned from military training in Algeria, Egypt and Ghana to Kongwa. Upon their return, the leaders of these groups, including Dimo Hamaambo, Caleb Tjipahura and Helao Shityuwete,<sup>168</sup> became responsible for training newcomers in the camp and, in the process, began challenging the status quo. New activities were organized, attendance at the parade was carefully recorded, and soldiers were encouraged to drop salutes and other formal practices which reinforced the hierarchy within the camp.<sup>169</sup> In response, Castro contacted the SWAPO head office in Dar es Salaam and a meeting was scheduled with SWAPO leaders which would address the tension between the camp commanders as well as the Caprivi issue.<sup>170</sup> According to Helao Shityuwete, President Nujoma opened the meeting by asking Castro to speak about the problems at the camp and with Castro insinuating that the newcomers were instigating the rank-in-file “to rebel against Philemon [Castro] and his other commanders.” In response, Hamaambo, Tjipahura and Shityuwete explained their dissatisfaction with the conditions they found at the camp – points that were strengthened, apparently, when Peter Hambiya, the SWAPO Secretary based in the Dar es Salaam, checked the camp books against his own, discovering that there were items intended for Kongwa inhabitants which had not been registered in the books. Thereafter, Hamaambo, Tjipahura and Shityuwete were each appointed to formal positions in the camp command alongside Castro, who retained the position of senior camp commander.<sup>171</sup>

The September 1965 meeting may have temporarily addressed the Castro issue at Kongwa, but it soon emerged again – albeit in an expanded context. In February 1966 Castro was selected as a

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167 Ashipala 25.7.2007, pp. 23-24, 27-28, 28-29.

168 Dimo Hamaambo was the leader of the group trained in Algeria and went on to become the Commander of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia, the successor to SWALA.

169 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, p. 2; Ashipala 25.7.2007, pp. 27-28.

170 Shityuwete maintains that the main issue on the agenda for the meeting was, in fact, the disagreement between the commanders and that the commanders themselves might have resolved the Caprivi issue on their own, with the help of the Tanzanian government, if Castro had not contacted the head office to draw attention to the conflict between the commanders (Shityuwete 5.6.2008).

171 Shityuwete 24.7.2007, pp. 3-4; 5.6.2008.

member of Group 2 (G2), the second group of SWALA guerrillas which departed from Kongwa to infiltrate Namibia. Three months later, Castro's group was arrested by the South African Police in Namibia's Kavango Region as were the members of several subsequent groups which traveled from Kongwa to Namibia.<sup>172</sup> As Kongwa inhabitants learned about these arrests, rumors spread that they were being led unwittingly to their capture through the work of a South African agent or agents. Suspicions focused on Castro, who had somehow managed to return to Tanzania after the G2 group was captured and been involved in planning the movements of the subsequent groups which had traveled from Kongwa to Namibia. Although Castro maintained that he escaped his captors after his arrest, others suspected that he had negotiated his release and was responsible for the capture of guerrillas and for other major setbacks which SWAPO experienced in late 1966 and 1967.<sup>173</sup> A turning point in Kongwa inhabitants' perception of Castro appears to have been a meeting at the SWAPO parade in 1967 when members of SWAPO and the ANC gathered to hear Castro speak about Omgulumbashe and SWAPO's other military operations inside Namibia. According to one source, guerrillas questioned the truthfulness of Castro's story because, when he delivered it, he omitted important details and was “shivering” as if he were panicked to speak on this topic.<sup>174</sup>

Thus, by the time the Seven Comrades entered Kongwa in 1968, rumors were circulating that Castro was a spy and the Comrades' memorandum discusses Castro exclusively in relation to these rumors. In so doing, however, it and other literature on “the Kongwa Crisis” overlook the more mundane aspects of camp life which were initially the focus of criticisms of Castro and which enabled him to wield power over Namibians in similar ways across the 1960s. By controlling the camp's boundaries and breaking his own rules, by siphoning aid from foreign donors, and, perhaps, by

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172 For information about G2, see the accounts of G2 member Helao Shityuwete (*Never Follow the Wolf*, pp. 101-130) and Sam Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, pp. 170-171). The arrest of subsequent groups is confirmed by former Kongwa inhabitants interviewed and by Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, pp. 172-173).

173 Among the events widely attributed to Castro are the arrest of OPC/OPO founder Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo in 1966 and his later imprisonment on Robben Island and the death of SWALA Commander Tobias Hainyeko, who was killed in a shoot out along the Zambezi River outside Katima Mulilo on May 18, 1967.

174 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, p. 3; 21.7.2007, pp. 34, 35.

becoming a double agent for South Africa, Castro abused his privileged access to the international community supporting Kongwa camp. When rank-in-file Namibians tried to initiate a discussion about Castro beyond the camp, they were faced with their own marginal status in this community. Although the Seven Comrades requested an audience with their leaders in Dar es Salaam, when they presented their memorandum to SWAPO commanders and Tanzanian officials at Kongwa, the Tanzanian police drove them directly to the Dar es Salaam Police Station, where they were detained for six months before being sent to Keko for an additional nine months of imprisonment.<sup>175</sup> In early 1969, Castro himself was imprisoned at Keko, where he remained for the next seventeen years, leading some former exiles to speculate that the Comrades' memorandum prompted an investigation, proving Castro's spying activities.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, for Namibians then living at Kongwa, the Castro issue remained unresolved since the reasons for Castro's arrest, the information which he revealed to the South African government, and the people who assisted him in his work were still unclear. Apparently, rumors about Castro and his collaboration with other SWAPO leaders were a central issue in 1971, when a riot broke out in the SWAPO camp and all the Namibians there were removed from the site.<sup>177</sup> Only in 1974, when a new generation with no prior experience of Castro or of Kongwa joined SWAPO in exile, did the liberation movement re-open its Kongwa camp.

## **Conclusion**

As these histories demonstrate, Kongwa is a significant site for analyzing the past of SWAPO and the conflicts which developed within the Namibian liberation movement in exile. There, at the first camp granted to SWAPO to build a united liberation army, tensions emerged which divided inhabitants and precipitated multiple defections and imprisonments. “The Kongwa Crisis” was one culmination of

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175 Ndeikwila 9.2.2007, pp. 3-4; 21.7.2007, pp. 41-42; 17.6.2011; Kati 11.8.2007, pp. 5-6; 16.6.2011. After their release from Keko, the Seven Comrades were sent to a refugee settlement in rural northern Tanzania known as Ndebaro from where they escaped in early 1970 and made their way to Kenya.

176 Kati 11.8.2007, p. 9; Ndeikwila 9.2.2007; Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 20-24.

177 Nepelilo 4.8.2007, pp. 25-26, 29-30; Williams, “Exile History,” pp. 230-231, 233-234.

these tensions among those living in the camp, and the development and resolution of “the Crisis” bear similarity to other, more widely reported events which occurred in and around SWAPO's camps in later years. For example, in 1976, following “the exodus” of a new generation of Namibians into Zambia, the liberation movement detained more than 1000 SWAPO guerrillas and eleven leaders, who had openly criticized some of the liberation movement's leadership and called for a party Congress to discuss these issues. In 1980 a group of prominent Caprivians, including Mishake Muyongo, were expelled from SWAPO for allegedly trying to revive CANU. Later, during the mid and late 1980s, members of SWAPO's security apparatus exploited conditions in the Angolan camps – including class and ethnic tensions and suspicions of spies within the liberation movement – to detain and eliminate Namibians whom they mistrusted. Even in post-colonial Namibia, histories of Kongwa illuminate and shape the lives of Namibians, who often appeal to happenings in exile when seeking recognition and discrediting rivals in a national community.<sup>178</sup>

Despite the significance of histories of Kongwa for Namibia, “the Kongwa Crisis” was more than a Namibian event; it was a series of events at SWAPO's Kongwa camp shaped by the international community which surrounded and constituted Namibians there. To focus exclusively on such happenings within the history of SWAPO or another national liberation movement is to lose site of the boundaries set between nations at sites like Kongwa and the stakes in how different people managed to cross them. As emphasized above, the ability of Namibians to access the recognition of international organizations, the aid of foreign donors and the attention of Tanzanian women at Kongwa was highly unequal. Through their privileged access to such resources outside the camp, the commanders and the political leaders who supported them wielded considerable power over those living inside even as the abuse of this power generated strikes, critical memorandums and other initiatives aimed at challenging

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178 I discuss these developments within SWAPO in exile and the politics of their representation in Namibia in my doctoral dissertation (“Exile History”) as well as in two articles forthcoming in 2011: “Ordering the Nation: SWAPO in Zambia, 1974-1976,” *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (4) and “‘The Spy’ and the Camp: SWAPO Camps in Lubango, Angola, 1980-1989’, in W. Dooling, H. Sapire and C. Saunders (eds), *The Struggle for Southern Africa: New Local and International Perspectives* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2011).

camp officials' authority. These social relations, inherent to the structure of the camp, are overlooked in the previous Namibian literature on Kongwa which focuses on people like Castro or events like “the Crisis” rather than on the social context in which people at Kongwa lived. And these relations have shaped the way in which Kongwa's history has been told – as narratives about the heroes and villains of a particular national struggle rather than about a camp located in rural, central Tanzania during the early days of Southern Africa's guerrilla armies and at the height of the Cold War.

Camps have a unique potential to elucidate social contexts which have shaped Southern Africa's past and present. Although frequently reduced to events and people in a national narrative, camps may disrupt the circuits of national knowledge production when their study draws attention to the sites where exiles lived. To this end, scholars of Southern Africa have the opportunity to draw from a growing literature on “the camp,” highlighting the highly unequal power relations and national subjectivities which have repeatedly formed in this kind of social space across contexts.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, Southern African studies may make a significant contribution to this literature. For the places where exiles from the region lived were not mere reproductions of “the camp.” They were sites shaped by particular histories, some of which are shared by Southern Africa as a region and other of which are unique to the specific camps concerned. Such histories may be lost in the existing camp literature which tends to render “the camp” an abstract, apolitical space. But they are precisely the histories to which scholars of Southern Africa's recent past should be attentive – if we look beyond the dominant representations of exile, with their uncritical acceptance of the nation as the object of history, and examine the lived spaces in which the region's national communities formed abroad.

Kongwa is one such lived space with special significance for Southern Africa and for the study of its liberation movements' camps. As the first site granted to Southern Africa's OAU recognized

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179 Formative and widely cited texts in this literature include: Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1951), 267-302; Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

liberation movements to govern their fellow nationals abroad, Kongwa is likely to have been formative not only for SWAPO and the communities it administered in exile, but also for many of the region's movements. At the same time, Kongwa hosted an entirely unique collection of camps, shaped by contexts which differed from the far-flung sites in which exiles lived across the front-line states during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Both perspectives on Kongwa are obscured by national historiographies, and yet, as I suggest here, both are critical to examining camps and their legacies for Southern Africa.