

Heroic narratives, patriotic history and Namibian politics: The case of (Herman) Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo (1924–2017)

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Abstract

On 9 June 2017 Namibia became poorer. A moral beacon physically left behind the people, whose right to live in freedom and dignity was his core motivation throughout most of his 92 years. (Herman) Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo – Toivo is Finnish for hope – was active until the end. He had just returned from a trip with his close friend and fellow inmate on Robben Island Helao Shityuwe – another largely ignored and little recognized icon in Namibia's struggle for liberation. Hours later, at his home, Ya Toivo died in his sleep. The article combines a portrait of Ya Toivo and his legacy with the heroic narratives at play when the history of the liberation struggle is rewritten for political purposes.

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¹ He published his autobiography as Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf: Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter*, London, Kliptown, 1990. A biography of Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo was drafted in close cooperation with him during the last few years. Finalised by 2016, it has unfortunately not yet been endorsed for publication. Among several other published memoirs in the genre of struggle histories the most popular so far is (published in the prestigious African Writers Series) John Ya Otto, with Ole Gjerstad and Michael Mercer, *Battlefront Namibia. An Autobiography*, Westport, Lawrence Hill, 1981 (also London, Heinemann, 1982, with further English editions in Harare and Bulawayo 1982). For a detailed overview on such literature see Henning Melber, "The shifting grounds of emancipation: from the anti-colonial struggle to a critique of post-colonial society", in: Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale, (eds.), *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, Windhoek, UNAM Press, 2017 (in print).

Judging by the countrywide shock and mourning, which spanned generations and political differences, Namibians realized what a tremendous loss this was. Ya Toivo had been a torchbearer for freedom from foreign rule. He embodied a generation which was motivated by their commitment to self-determination and human rights. But many of that generation would abandon those values after Independence. Ya Toivo, however, remained loyal to what made him the personification of the desire to live in decency in an independent country governed by and for its people.

This article combines a portrait of Ya Toivo and his legacy with the heroic narratives at play when the history of the liberation struggle is rewritten for political purposes. The results tend to be more exclusive than inclusive, thereby suiting the gatekeepers who gained and remain in power and now define the politics of liberation and shape its national discourse accordingly.²

Ya Toivo's path to Robben Island

Born on 22 August 1924 in Omangundu village, Ya Toivo was brought up in the Northern Namibian region then called Ovamboland. Despite being a descendant of the royal family governing the Ondonga kingdom on his mother's side, he had anything but a privileged upbringing. Ya Toivo was trained as an artisan and volunteered to fight for South Africa in World War II. He subsequently became a contract farm labourer and was further educated at the mission school in Odibo. On contract from the early 1950s in Cape Town, he became politically aware through ANC activists and started to mobilize his fellow Namibian contract workers.

He founded the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) in 1957, the forerunner of the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) established in 1958. OPC like OPO demanded the abolition of contract labour and an end to South African administration of the occupied country.³ Clandestine political meetings were held in the backroom of a barbershop where strategies to bring the case of South West Africa to the attention of the outside world were discussed. In 1958 Ya Toivo managed to dispatch a tape-recorded petition to the United Nations and was subsequently deported back to Ovamboland. There he became involved in the formation of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO).⁴

² Parts of the text were also published as "Portrait of a Namibian patriot: the life of Andimba (Herman) Toivo ya Toivo (1924–2017)", *Journal of the Namibia Scientific Society*, 65, 2017: 57-66.

³ Several activists who later joined the first national anticolonial movement of the South West African National Union (SWANU) were involved in this early organized political resistance through OPC, which eventually resulted in SWAPO emerging as a national liberation movement, such as its president Fanuel Kozonguizi, or who fell out with SWAPO, such as Ottilie Schimming Abrahams and Kenneth Abrahams and later on Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima, who were victims of the purge in the mid-1970s. It is significant that President Hage Geingob mentioned their names and thereby afforded them some recognition in the eulogy at Ya Toivo's funeral.

⁴ For a kind of official patriotic historiography on these early stages of the formation of the national liberation movement see SWAPO of Namibia/Department of Information, *To Be Born a Nation. The Liberation*

Despite having reservations as regards the timing and success of military action, he assisted the first liberation fighters returning from training abroad in their preparations for the armed struggle. On 26 August 1966, after the discovery of a camp by the South African army, the first military encounter with the occupying Apartheid regime occurred. Ya Toivo and hundreds of others were subsequently arrested. Together with Eliaser Tuhadeleni (as accused no. 1) and 36 others he was tried in Pretoria. It was not until after their imprisonment that the notorious Terrorism Act was passed in the South African Parliament which was to be applied retroactively. In defiance, Ya Toivo spoke at the end of the trial. His speech from the dock of 1 February 1968 became a lasting document of Namibian aspirations for freedom:

We are Namibians and not South Africans. We do not now, and will not in the future, recognise your right to govern us, to make laws for us in which we have no say; to treat our country as if it were your property and us as if you were our masters. We have always regarded South Africa as an intruder in our country. This is how we have always felt and this is how we feel now, and it is on this basis that we have faced this trial.⁵

Thanks to international pressure, the accused were spared the death penalty. Ya Toivo and several others were sentenced on 9 February 1968 to 20 years imprisonment. Accused no. 1, Eliaser Tuhadeleni (dubbed Kaxumba kaNdola, “the organ of Endola”, for his melodic voice), was finally released a year after Ya Toivo as the longest serving Namibian political prisoner. Born 1918, Tuhadeleni died in isolation, impoverished and bitter in 1997. Only a later biography brought some historical recognition and secured him at least posthumously the deserved place in Namibia’s history of the liberation struggle.⁶ The biographic narrative also indirectly created further awareness of the lack of respect the SWAPO leadership - formed in exile and consolidated by the early 1970s - displayed towards some of the old cadres who sacrificed the best years of their lives for the struggle on the domestic front. For those returning during the transitional period 1989/90 after decades in exile to seize the positions in government at Independence, the heroism of this generation detracted from their own claims to be the one and only liberators. For them, their sacrifices were far greater and provided the legitimacy for the entitlements they claimed.⁷

Such selective and exclusive perspective could not be applied to Ya Toivo, who since his speech from the dock had become an icon in Namibia’s liberation struggle. On Robben

Struggle for Namibia, London, Zed Press, 1981. For a less partisan overview see chapter 8 (“Nationalism and Apartheid, 1946-70”) in Marion Wallace with John Kinahan, *A History of Namibia. From the Beginning to 1990*, London, Hurst, 2011, 243-271.

⁵ Ya Toivo’s speech from the dock is reproduced in full length in this volume, pp. 99-104.

⁶ Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, *Kaxumba kaNdola: Man and Myth. The Biography of a Barefoot Soldier*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2005.

⁷ To this day there is a disproportionate number of first (and increasingly second) generation activists who spent considerable time in exile within the higher ranks of SWAPO and government compared to those who risked their lives while organizing resistance at home; see inter alia: Henning Melber, Daniela Kromrey and Martin Welz, “Changing of the guard? An anatomy of power within SWAPO of Namibia”, *African Affairs*, 116 (463), 2017: 284-310.

Island, his continued defiance, stubbornness and resilience made him the most respected of the Namibian prisoners among their fellow inmates from the ANC. Andimba and Madiba had much in common and remained friends for the rest of their lives. As remembered by Denis Herbstein:

In prison Toivo was unbending, seizing every opportunity to show his disdain for his jailors. A fellow prisoner described the scene when Toiva [sic] responded to his treatment by a young warder: Andimba unleashed a hard open-hand smack on the young warder's cheek, sending [his] cap flying and [the warder] wailing (in Afrikaans), "The kaffir hit me". The inevitable spell of solitary confinement followed. When Toivo was released in March 1984, short of his full term, he refused to leave his fellow prisoners and had to be coaxed out of his cell.⁸

Into exile and Namibian Independence

After returning home, Ya Toivo refused to accept a South African initiated transitional government and left for exile. But by the time he returned into the active ranks of SWAPO in exile, the hierarchical structures abroad had long been consolidated. Vested interests of an authoritarian nature had long since begun to undermine inner-party democracy. Those involved as ordinary soldiers in the military operations who complained about the lack of support and neglect, and young activists of the party's Youth League who joined the exile in 1974/75 and demanded accountability and regular elections all faced ruthless prosecution.⁹ Ya Toivo was imprisoned at that time.

When he was released the SWAPO leadership positions were already firmly occupied. The party hierarchy did not allow for any meaningful institutionalized consultations to re-negotiate who should exercise influence in which function. SWAPO, unable or unwilling to find an existing higher-ranking position for Ya Toivo, created the post of Secretary-General for him as a niche, thus preventing him having any direct impact on policy by keeping him outside of the consolidated inner circle of power. He humbly accepted what was mainly a symbolic position to represent SWAPO internationally without influencing its policy. By doing so, Ya Toivo added considerable symbolic value to the organisation, thereby enhancing what could be termed 'social capital'. After all, since the Pretoria trial he had embodied more than any other Namibian alive the upright patriot, resilient and thirsting for freedom. Meanwhile, many others from the first generation of SWAPO political activists who were arrested in Namibia from the mid-1960s onwards and only released after many years of imprisonment in South Africa were even more marginalised

⁸ Denis Herbstein, "Adimba Toivo ya Toivo obituary", *The Guardian*, 27 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/27/andimba-toivo-ya-toivo-obituary?CMP=share_btn_tw> [accessed 29 June, 2017].

⁹ Accounts offering first-hand insights into the internal struggles of the mid-1970s, which led to the execution of fighters in the People's Liberation Army (PLAN) and the arrest of many others first in Zambia and then in Tanzania include Keshii Pelao Nathanael, *A Journey to Exile: The Story of a Namibian Freedom Fighter*, Aberystwyth, Sosome Press, 2002; Samson Ndeikwila, *The Agony of Truth*, Windhoek, Kuiseb 2014; Hans Beukes, *Long Road to Liberation. An Exiled Namibian Activist's Perspective*, Pavilion, Porcupine Press, 2014.

and were never allowed any meaningful role again in the organisation. They often received little or no recognition for their sacrifices.

While serving the goals of the anti-colonial struggle, Ya Toivo's greatest moral challenge may well have come when, during the UN-supervised transitional period in 1989, SWAPO tasked him with monitoring the release of several hundred so-called ex-detainees who had survived a purge in exile. During the 1980s thousands of members were tortured by a terror regime of 'securocrats', executed, or died as a result of the appalling neglect in the dungeons near the Southern Angolan town of Lubango.¹⁰ Ya Toivo's internationally recognised credibility and authority may well have been the reason for his appointment as the head of a high-calibre SWAPO delegation that travelled to the camps to supervise the encounter between journalists, officials and the surviving prisoners.¹¹ His moral dilemma might have been captured by the personal recollection of one of the released. She afterwards recalled:

It [was] a lady from France [...] [who] said, "Tell us, who are these?" She asked Ya Toivo. But Ya Toivo did not want to say it. He said, "No, you will hear from them." And she insisted saying that you are leading this delegation, you have to tell us who these people are. And that's when he started saying that "these are the spies." Then the lady [...] asked, "Did you also imprison children?" Then Ya Toivo just couldn't answer that. I remember he could not say anything. He just said, "You will hear from them."¹²

At least in public, Ya Toivo never condemned the injustice and violation of human rights committed by SWAPO. His loyalty to the organisation seemed in this, the only such case on record, stronger than his belief in ethical and moral values, justice and truth. But it must have been a sore point for him and may have weighed on his conscience.

Despite this exception he remained close to the people. On the evening of 20 March 1990, before the official Independence ceremony at midnight, the SWAPO leadership gathered for a banquet with local VIPs (including the white business elite), diplomats and other celebrities at the hall of the Sport Klub Windhoek (SKW) in the centre of the city. Not so Ya Toivo. He spent most of the time at a gathering of local activists and members of the international solidarity movement at the premises of the Roessing Foundation, a venue on the outskirts of the city in Khomasdal. There he was reunited with old companions such as Jack Simons (1907-1995) and Ray Alexander Simons

¹⁰ See on this dark chapter of SWAPO's history among others the accounts by Siegfried Groth, *Namibia: The Wall of Silence*, Wuppertal, Hammer, 1995; John S. Saul and Colin Leys, "Lubango and after: 'forgotten history' as politics in contemporary Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29 (1), 2003: 333-353. Some of the victims have also shared their stories in: Barbara Becker, *Speaking Out: Namibians Share Their Perspectives on Independence*, Windhoek, Out of Africa, 2005 and Colin Leys and Susan Brown, *Histories of Namibia: Living through the Liberation Struggle*, London, Merlin Press, 2005.

¹¹ The delegation included SWAPO's Administrative Secretary Moses Garoeb, Secretary of Defence Peter Mueshihange, and the Deputy Commander of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) Solomon "Jesus" Hawala (nicknamed "the butcher of Lubango"). Cf. Christian A. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa. A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015: 160-162.

¹² Ibid.: 160f.

(1913-2004). They had been close friends since their labour movement activities during his Cape Town days and had joined the festivities from their exile in Zambia.

Husband and father

The slogan 'the personal is political' (often also phrased as 'the private is political') was popularised by feminist and student movements in the late 1960s.¹³ What is known about the personality and character of Ya Toivo seems to confirm this. His personal convictions and his strong belief in certain fundamental values guided him in his public conduct and his understanding of what politics should be.

Soon after his release from prison he met the much younger Vicki/Vicky Erenstein.¹⁴ As a US-American labour lawyer in New York she was also a political activist in the solidarity movement supporting the ANC and SWAPO. Their first encounter took place at an event addressed by the Afro-American activist Angela Davis, which Ya Toivo attended while he was in town to speak to the General Assembly of the United Nations. They immediately 'hit it off'.¹⁵ However, theirs was a long-distance relationship until they married a week after Independence on 29 March 1990. In 1993 they became parents of the twin daughters Mutaleni and Nashikoto. They also adopted two of Ya Toivo's nephews.

Vicki Erenstein ya Toivo continued to work on labour law in the service of Namibian ministries. She represented her adopted country on numerous occasions often on official international matters relating to her expertise.¹⁶ Asked about what they had in common, she declared in the interview given in 2010:

Almost twenty-six years of shared experiences; shared beliefs in the importance of honesty and integrity; education and hard work; friends; family; especially our two daughters, who are still in secondary school; a passion for politics, for the ideal of socialism; for Cuba, for New York, for reading and the color red, enjoyment of travel, love of bagels (yes!).¹⁷

She described him as "(d)etermined, honest, brave, secure, respectful, friendly, modern, tolerant, wise, stubborn, candid, fit, and handsome" and declared: "If old age implies limitations rather than wisdom, then neither of us believes in being old. In our outlook on life, we are 'forever young.' We fight old age together."¹⁸ And on occasion of his 90th birthday she characterized him in the following way:

¹³ Linda Napikoski, "The personal is political", 2017, <<https://www.thoughtco.com/the-personal-is-political-slogan-origin-3528952/>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

¹⁴ Her first name is spelt Vicki and/or Vicky.

¹⁵ She talked about their romance in a long and detailed interview published as "Being Ms. Ya Toivo", *Prime Focus Magazine*, August 2010, <<http://primefocusmag.com/articles/77/BEING-MS--YA-TOIVO/>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

¹⁶ She was attending a meeting at the International Labour Organization in Geneva when she was informed that her husband had died.

¹⁷ "Being Ms. Ya Toivo".

¹⁸ Ibid.

My husband believes that elders can help to shape the character and values of the younger generations and he has therefore spent a lot of time advising the children and discussing with them the importance of respect towards others and of hard work. He will always tell the children that he does not like cheats, liars and lazy people. Our children have been brought up to be friendly, open, tolerant and humble.¹⁹

The children remember their father as youthful, “fun-loving, yet strict, attentive, playful and loving”. He raised them to be loyal to fundamental principles such as honesty and modesty: “He was simple, loyal, always grateful for everything, even for a plate of food we would give him, always positive and someone who never boasted.” He followed a strong conviction in being truthful: “Papa hated liars, thieves and lazy people. Once you lied to him, it was difficult to regain his trust.”²⁰ And his wife Vicki characterized him in the interview earlier on as

a human being with strengths and weaknesses like anyone else. But he is very much his own man. Some of his former Robben Island colleagues have asked me, jokingly how I could stand living with him, because he is so stubborn. Once he makes up his mind, it is very difficult to get him to change his mind (although our daughters and I have strategies).

[...]

When I first met Andimba, I asked him how he avoided becoming crazy in jail. Without skipping a beat, he said that it was simple: he knew that he was fighting for a noble cause. That is how Andimba is. He is secure in his beliefs and he does not fear possible rejection. He speaks his mind. He still does not say things just to please someone. He is democratic-minded and values tolerance. To him, having political differences is normal. He has friends who are also his political foes.²¹

Ya Toivo's loyalty to true liberation

After Independence, Ya Toivo served three terms in Cabinet as Minister of Mines and Energy (1990–1999), Minister for Labour (1999–2002) and Minister for Prison and Correctional Services (2002–2005). The declining relevance of his portfolios suggested that his political weight in party and government affairs was at best marginal. As before, he put the party's interest above his personal ambitions. Or rather, he acted in accordance with what he understood as being in the best interest of the country. Power politics were a strange thing for him. What mattered were the party and the people. But he realized that the two are not identical. Speaking for the last time in the National Assembly on 16 March 2005, he reminded his comrades:

¹⁹ “Vicki on Ya Toivo the family man”, *New Era*, 22 August 2014, <<https://www.newera.com.na/2014/08/22/vicki-on-ya-toivo-the-family-man/>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁰ Patience Smith, “Ya Toivo's children pay tribute to family giant”, *The Namibian*, 22 June 2017, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/55944/read/Ya-Toivos-children-pay-tribute-to-family-giant>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²¹ “Being Ms. Ya Toivo”.

Being a member of parliament or even a minister should not be seen as an opportunity to achieve status, to be addressed as 'honourables' and to acquire riches. If those are your goals, you would do better to pursue other careers.²²

He responded to violent clashes during the election campaign in 2008, when SWAPO supporters and members of the new opposition party RDP (Rally for Democracy and Progress) – established by disgruntled members of SWAPO after losing an internal power struggle – ended in physical scuffles, with an open appeal:

We are living in new times that require new ways of conducting political struggle. The formation of new parties and the exchange of differing opinions in the political arena is a normal occurrence in the life of a democracy. The flourishing of new ideas can only contribute to the vitality and development of our nation. The present should be a battle of ideas and not of swords, and the battle should be conducted with respect for our fellow human beings.²³

After retirement he withdrew increasingly from the political sphere and public life, but he remained active especially in the Namibia-Cuba Friendship Association. On his 90th birthday on 22 August 2014 *The Namibian* published a fitting tribute.²⁴

Ya Toivo remained critically observant of the limits to liberation. As late as 17 October 2014 he commented on the values of the Freedom Charter and the current ANC leadership. He quipped in a video recorded interview that the people did not support the struggle for them to just fill their pockets and to loot the country.²⁵ As former Prime Minister Nahas Angula reminded at a memorial service, using SWAPO for material gain amounted to a betrayal of what Ya Toivo stood for.²⁶ As Vicki ya Toivo pointed out in the interview mentioned above, her husband believed that “persons who aspire to positions of political leadership must be honest and committed to the well-being of the nation and should not seek such positions merely to acquire the benefits of a ‘good job’ and a title of ‘honourable’”.²⁷ Referring to Ya Toivo's example, a reader posted in *The Namibian*:

Namibian government leaders, you must honour Ya Toivo's memory by stopping corruption and exploiting your positions to get richer; eradicate poverty and

²² “Toivo's message to Namibia and the world”, *The Namibian*, 23 June 2017, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/56028/read/Toivos-message--to-Namibia--and-the-world#>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²³ Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, “Appeal for tolerance and respect in Namibian politics”, *New Era*, 21 November 2008; also published in *Die Republikein* at <<https://www.google.com/search?q=Andimba+Toivo+ya+Toivo%2C+Appeal+for+Tolerance+and+Respect+in+Namibian+Politics&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁴ *The Namibian*, *In Honour of a Legend*, 2014, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/public/uploads/documents/00ebfd6eb2f1/toivo.pdf>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁵ Toivo ya Toivo, “We did not struggle for you to loot”, 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j2xcFEJK9U>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁶ Marx Itamalo, “Ya Toivo abhorred tribalism, greed – speakers”, *The Namibian*, 19 June 2017 <<http://www.namibian.com.na/55801/read/Ya-Toivo-abhorred-tribalism-greed-%E2%80%93-speakers>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁷ “Being Ms. Ya Toivo”.

unemployment. Live humbly not in super luxury and make the best use of Namibia's rich resources to uplift the lives of the have-nots.²⁸

The true dimensions of Ya Toivo's enormous popularity among Namibia's people and their admiration for him became clear in the reactions to the news of his death. His modest lifestyle, his loyalty and his faithfulness to the values he embodied and maintained in politics and as a public figure made him a much-admired role model. A common definition of patriotism is "love for or devotion to one's country".²⁹ Engaging with the meaning of "true" patriotism, a descendant from Scottish emigrants quoted his ancestors. Their Declaration of Arbroath during their fight against the invading English ended in 1320 by stating: "It is not for honor or glory or wealth that we fight, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life."³⁰ While patriotism today often means something far more shallow than that of the Scottish nationalists almost 700 years ago, theirs would most likely resonate strongly with Andimba Toivo ya Toivo.

Patriotism and heroic narratives: Ya Toivo and Namibian politics

With the passing of Toivo Ya Toivo the world lost a true patriot whose life represents the positive sense of patriotism, at a time when the term is all too often abused for inventing heroic narratives by those holding political power and celebrating themselves. He left behind a lasting legacy to those Namibian people who share his belief in true liberation as emancipation from greed and social injustice and a life in dignity. After 26 years of Independence, there is a growing number of Namibians who articulate frustrations and disillusionment over what has been dubbed the "limits to liberation".³¹

Ya Toivo's death, which did not come unexpectedly given his advanced age, came nevertheless as a shock for many people. For them his departure marked the end of an era of moral integrity and commitment to true liberation and the service to the ordinary people. Ya Toivo's modest if not humble personality – though formed by traditional moral values not free of hierarchical components, as the upbringing of his children testifies to – was also characterised by steadfastness and a firm belief in genuine emancipation from a system of injustice. In such a view, learning from the past would mean not repeating the injustices, inequalities or disrespect for others under a new

²⁸ "SMS of the day", *The Namibian*, 28 June 2017, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/SMSes/0/2017-06-28>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

²⁹ Merriam-Webster, "Patriotism", <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriotism>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

³⁰ Lawrence W. Reed, "The true meaning of patriotism". Posted at the Foundation for Economic Education, 1 July 2016, <<https://fee.org/articles/the-true-meaning-of-patriotism>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

³¹ See among the early critical literature on this subject among others Henning Melber, (ed.), *Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa. The Unfinished Business of Democratic Consolidation*, Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2003; idem, (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia. Political Culture Since Independence*, Uppsala, The Nordic Africa Institute, 2003; idem, (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia. Which Changes for Whom?*, Uppsala, The Nordic Africa Institute, 2007.

regime. Such a strong moral compass would prevent erstwhile victims from turning into perpetrators. It would mean remaining loyal to the people.

Ya Toivo probably enjoyed the highest credibility among the first struggle generation who remained politically active since Independence, to which a genuine commitment to liberation was attributed. The effects of the news of his death on public life showed the extent to which Ya Toivo had been seen as a desirable and accepted face of the Namibian nation. It is impossible to assess how much of this was a projection, motivated by the protest against the newly established elite. What matters more is impact of the mourning which was a clear indication of the recognition of the values the deceased had personified.

The praise of Ya Toivo culminated in numerous references to him and his role as a 'founding father' of the Namibian nation. This could be seen as a deliberate or unintentional challenge to the official historiography, which had not set aside such label for Ya Toivo. A few days after Ya Toivo's funeral, Namibia's First Lady Monica Geingos publicly criticized such a label as "dishonest" and described it as an "undignified way" to behave. Ya Toivo, she stressed, "was a hero of mine. But the founding father of this nation is Sam Nujoma."³² This provoked a furious reaction:

IS it the First Lady's position to accord the title of the founding father of the nation to anyone or to cement the status to the first President or are her sentiments expressed entirely out of fear of the unknown? Every Namibian has the right to their opinion about who deserves to be the founding father, hence I stick with Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, the man deserved the title and rightfully so. So I regard her statement as her own opinion and her constitutional right and not that of the entire nation.

MADAM First Lady, please spare us the fake details you want to refresh our minds with about the founding father of the nation that we don't want. We know too well it's Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. Why don't you want the truth to be spoken? We don't want to make statements because you might be rewarded to say what you are saying. We know our hero, viva Ya Toivo! May his soul rest in eternal peace.

DEAR First Lady, please stay in your lane. Leave politics to the politicians. Or are you aspiring to become the Namibian Grace Mugabe?³³

The First Lady had indeed erred. The official titles awarded to President Sam Nujoma by the Namibian Parliament in April 2005 following his retirement are "Founding President of the Republic of Namibia" and "Father of the Namibian Nation". But this is of course only a matter of semantics, given that the two titles in their combination clearly embrace the notion of "Founding Father", which was now in parts of public opinion ascribed to Ya Toivo. The dispute indicated a rift over who deserved which kind of recognition and respect for their personal contribution to the formation of the independent Namibian

³² Ndanki Kahurika, "Nujoma is founding father – Geingos", *The Namibian*, 29 June 2017, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/166322/archive-read/Nujoma-is-founding-father-%E2%80%93-Geingos>> [accessed 9 October, 2017].

³³ "SMS of the day", *The Namibian*, 3 July 2017, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/SMSes/0/2017-07-03>> [accessed 28 July, 2017].

nation. Hence it was a significant pointer to issues relating to the official patriotic history and heroic narrative.

Notably, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo had never been pictured wearing a combat uniform, while being recognized as a true freedom fighter. In contrast, Sam Nujoma liked to pose as an armed patriot in army clothes on occasion. It is tempting to suggest that the soft-spoken but firm Ya Toivo in the end represented more determined militancy than most others in the fight for self-determination and liberation – understood as a personal and collective emancipation from discrimination and injustice in the spirit of solidarity guided by the slogan of the South African trade union movement COSATU that “an injury to one is an injury to all”. True patriotism of the Andimba Toivo ya Toivo kind does not need radical rhetoric and pseudo-revolutionary militancy. It gains recognition for its steadfast loyalty to fundamental values and principles of human and social equality. Values, which when lived, turn a person into a true role model for social transformation. To that extent, the countrywide mourning was testimony to the fact that the ordinary people were aware of the loss of a role model and true leader, whose patriotism deserved recognition beyond a heroic narrative constructed to legitimize continued execution of power over but hardly for the ordinary people.

In his eulogy at the memorial service at Independence Stadium, President Geingob declared Ya Toivo as “one of the spiritual Godfathers of SWAPO”. He pointed out that, “Andimba’s compass was calibrated to seek fairness and justice”. And he observed that,

we have lost a man who epitomizes the core ideals that make us the nation we are today [...] His durable principles and inexhaustible reservoir of compassion, forgiveness, patience and sense of justice allowed him to shun the murky waters of greed and factionalism. [...] May the passing of Ya Toivo be the moment we straighten our hearts and re-align our words and actions for the attainment of a Namibia that Ya Toivo would be proud of.³⁴

But among all the praise and sorrow articulated by his fellow comrades, it was Nahas Angula, member of Namibia’s Cabinet and Parliament from 1990 to 2015 and Prime Minister between 2005 and 2012, who commented on the loss in no uncertain political terms. He expressed regrets that Ya Toivo had passed away at a time when the party was facing severe challenges in living up to its vision, goals, ideals and values. Describing him as a true patriot, he stressed it was unfortunate

that the Swapo Party that endured a bitter struggle and drew its support and strength from the rural persons seemed to have drifted away from the workers and peasant bases. It is important, therefore, that to honour the legacy of comrade Herman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, we must return to our original

³⁴ Republic of Namibia, President Hage Geingob, *Eulogy at the Memorial Service of the Late Comrade Herman Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo: A Life of distinguished service*. June 23, 2017, Independence Stadium, Windhoek, <<http://www.gov.na/documents/10181/337569/President+Geingob+Eulogy+for+Late+Cde+Herman+Andimba+Toivo+Ya+Toivo++230617+-+Final+Final.pdf/37b642c7-b020-41c4-ac0e-a51e5dda5bc9>> [accessed 9 October, 2017].

mission of defending the dignity of workers and peasants, and the interests of the masses at large.³⁵

In November 2017 Nahas Angula announced his intention to return into active politics by competing with President Hage Geingob for the position of the party president at the forthcoming SWAPO congress.³⁶ At a time when Namibian politics revolve around the party leadership elections scheduled for the end of 2017, a poll which in turn is seen as the initial stage of the next parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2019, the legacy of Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo serves as a timely reminder of what the struggle was supposed to be all about.

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³⁵ Ndanki Kahiruika, "Swapo has lost purpose, vision – Angula", *The Namibian*, 14 June 2017, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/165755/archive-read/Swapo-has-lost-purpose-vision-%E2%80%93-Angula>> [accessed 9 October, 2017].

³⁶ Kelvin Chiringa, "Mbumba tipped for state VP's job ... as Nahas Angula takes on Geingob", *The Villager*, 9 October 2017, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/11722/mbumba-tipped-for-state-vps-job-as-nahas-angula-takes-on-geingob/>> [accessed 9 October, 2017]; Shinovene Immanuel, "Angula challenges Geingob", *The Namibian*, 9 October 2017, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/60191/read/Angula-challenges-Geingob>> [accessed 9 October, 2017].

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